

# Religion

## Interdenominational universities kill academic freedom

Rumours of a possible interdenominational university at Edmonton have re-kindled the ancient debate—religious dogma vs. academic freedom.

John Green, arts 3, an English major and staff reporter for *The Gateway*, has some definite views about the place of religion in the university community.

By JOHN GREEN

The provincial government may be trying to blast out the last pockets of academic freedom in Alberta.

That reads like a rather drastic statement, but it is really?

It has become apparent this fall that the Social Credit government of Alberta is planning to build a fourth university in the province. The new campus will be located on the north side of Edmonton, and work is expected to begin next year.

Oh joy! Relief is in sight for our crowded campus. No longer will we have to fear the thundering herds of freshmen students who threaten to make our campus unmanageably crowded.

Yet, all is not as bright and cheery as it might seem.

The fourth university in Alberta may be interdenominational. What does that mean? Nobody seems to know for sure, and the government certainly is not making its intentions clear to the taxpayers.

One thing is certain, however. University of Alberta chaplains are opposed to the principle of the establishment of an interdenominational university in the province. This was made clear in an article in *The Gateway*, Nov. 10.

The chaplains' objections to the proposed university are based on their experiences in the academic community. Common to all was the opinion that the secular campus is a legitimate place to study religion in the context of man's other pursuits. The chaplains suggest a department of religious studies on a secular campus would accomplish this aim.

One argument in favour of a 'religious university' is put forth by Rev. Bernard Schalm of the Christian Training Institute, in *The Journal for Dissent*, Nov. 14.

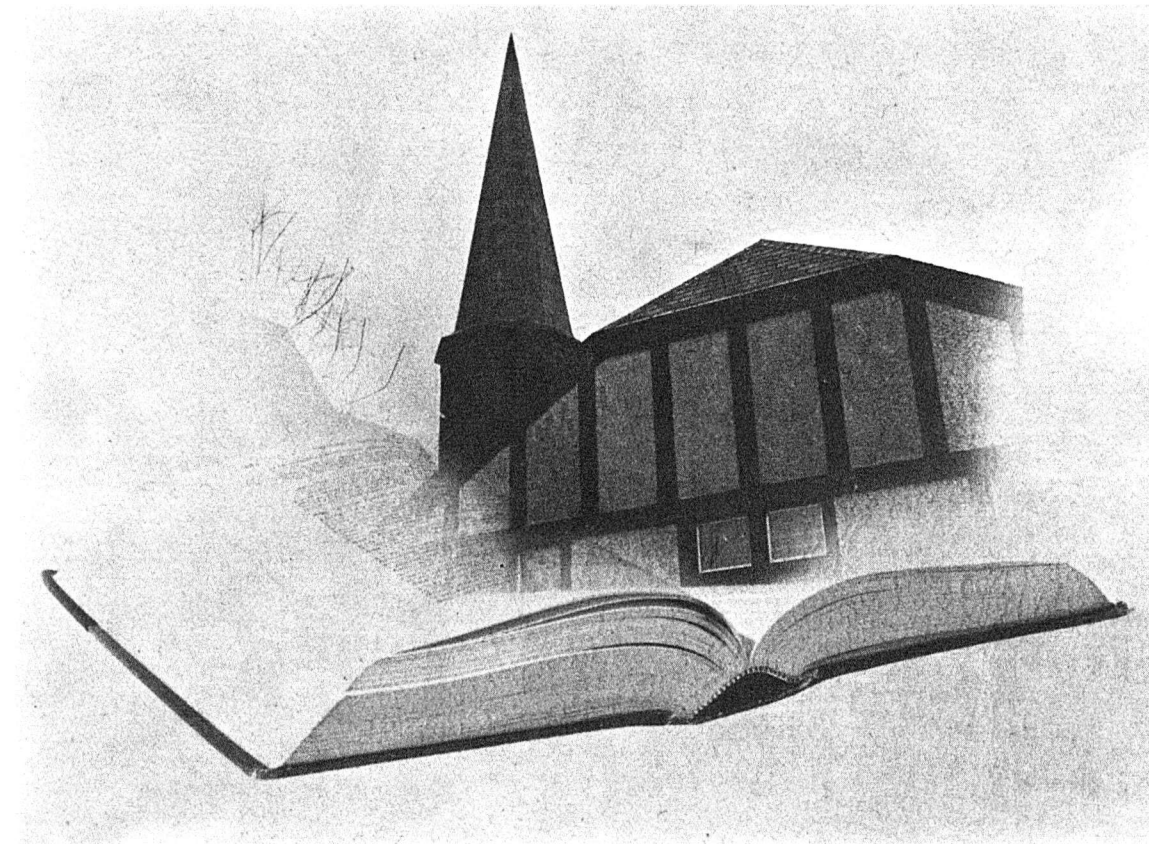
### SCHIZOPHRENICS

He contends, because the 'secular' university has omitted religious knowledge from the curriculum, students have become 'religious schizophrenics'. He feels secular and religious knowledge should be integrated but this "is seldom achieved in the amoral climate of a typical secular university."

Is this true of the University of Alberta? The epithet he applies to the 'typical secular university' does seem unfair or at least uninformed. On this campus there are religious organizations for most denominations and chaplains representing several religions. There is also ample opportunity for religious expression in the university chapels.

A student has every opportunity to integrate his secular and religious knowledge on the secular campus, and he is free to participate if he so desires.

Rev. Schalm says, "The government and our provincial universities should recognize the validity of the church's claim to participation in the field of higher learning".



—Allan Fries photo

Universities in North America have grown out of church schools, and it is probably true that the church still has a valid contribution to make to post-secondary education. It must be realized, however, that church schools were established primarily as theological institutes, and it was from these schools that the universities developed.

Canada has several good universities whose origins lie in church established colleges. Some of these are McMaster—the Baptist Church, University of Windsor—the Roman Catholic Church, and the two universities of Western Ontario and Toronto which grew from a nucleus of affiliated religious colleges.

As the commitments of these institutions expanded outside the realm of religion, the churches were quite happy to turn over the administration to the secular authorities (usually provincial governments) who now control them.

This same situation is present in Alberta. Alberta College, Edmonton and Mount Royal College, Calgary have been, until recently, owned and operated by the United Church. In order that these institutions will continue to have high standards the Church has relinquished control to secular authorities.

### NEED MORE

With in the past ten years more than a dozen universities have been established in Canada.

They have been needed, and with the greater emphasis on education in this decade many more colleges and universities will be needed to fill our demands.

It is interesting to note that only a few of these new universities are church controlled, private institutions.

Notre Dame, Nelson, B.C., is one such campus operated by the Catholic Church. In order for the Church to maintain Notre Dame it must depend on revenue from

tuition and room and board (both of which are exorbitant) from the students, and private donations.

For the university to be economically feasible, all students must live in residence—four students to a room. Each student pays a fee comparable to the fee for a single room in U of A's residences.

Every student at Notre Dame is required to take Theology or Philosophy courses, a certain number of which must be presented to qualify for a degree. The courses consist largely of studies in religion and ethics.

### VALID DISCIPLINES

These are, of course, valid disciplines, but the administration of this religious university feels it must make them compulsory subjects. Consequently, there is a loss of academic freedom.

If the provincial government were to establish a religious university in Alberta, would academic freedom be limited in a similar way?

Another problem raised by the suggestion of a religious university is that of administration. Would it be self-contained or subject to external control from church authorities?

The result of external control by the church involved is illustrated at Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

In requiring that all members of the faculty be Christians, this university lost many valuable professors and lecturers as well as students, because they could not or would not comply with the administration's demands. This obvious deprivation of religious and academic freedom at Acadia has damaged the reputation of that institution and standards cannot help but suffer.

### SAME HERE?

If Alberta's fourth university is to be a religious or interdenominational institution, would it be endangered by the same circumstances that existed at Acadia? We

cannot afford to have bigotry in our universities if they are to make a worthwhile contribution to our society.

The question will be raised, "Are Christian professors second rate scholars?" Of course not, but a professor does not have to be a Christian to teach the universal concepts of physics and economics.

Some of the best professors in this university are not Christians, yet they make a significant contribution to the academic community.

To whom would professors be responsible in an interdenominational university?

In the secular institute the administration sets policies and the professor is subject to the hierarchy. If control were to come from an external source such as the government or religious groups, the university teacher would have no freedom at all. Yet his teaching ability is based on his freedom.

### MONKEY TRIALS

What would be reaction be to the study of evolutionary theory in biology, especially among the more fundamentalist religious groups? We might find monkey trials and witch hunts are not as obsolete as we would like to think.

At the University of Western Ontario last year, a sociologist, who is also an Anglican minister, was asked to make a survey of the sexual attitudes among the students of the university.

Sociology is a relatively new discipline and as such it was under suspicion, especially in staid old London, Ontario.

Some people took exception to the type of questions asked on the questionnaire, and it was made clear to the professor that he was not welcome to stay at the university. (The survey, incidentally, did not prove that Western students are especially libidinous.)

More recently, a lecturer at the University of North Carolina has been removed from his teaching post through external pressure.

Prudish people who objected to his method of teaching Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress"—interfered with his academic freedom.

It has been apparent from the comments of some of our provincial cabinet members that they think this university is a hotbed of atheists and purveyors of immorality. Who can forget the condemnation of "Edge" as 'filth and trash'? Perhaps they support the idea of an interdenominational university so that the young innocents will be protected from the corruption of a secular campus.

Let us consider the position of the student in the 'religious' university. Ideally his reason for coming to university is to get an education, to expand his horizons, and to make a contribution to his society.

If these ideals are to be realized, he must have academic freedom. If he is obliged to study religion, as he probably would be in a religious university, where is his freedom?

A university will not produce religious students if it resorts to 'force feeding' any more than compulsory English courses in the first year will produce English scholars. It is naive to expect that it will.

### INDIVIDUAL IMPORTANT

It is equally naive to suggest the student will have a greater opportunity to integrate his academic knowledge with his religious convictions in a religious university.

Such a synthesis is largely subjective and the institution can do little or nothing to prevent the 'religious schizophrenia' referred to above.

The individual must build his own system, integrate the areas of his knowledge, and fit things together so they are coherent in his mind.

The student at a religious university may suffer one further disadvantage. He may feel he is caught in a ghetto—set apart from the rest of the university community in the province and consequently deprived of that necessary, communication.

He might never have his religious views challenged while at university, and may never have a chance to adjust his beliefs in the light of the challenge.

A freshman's first encounter with an atheist or an anti-religious person can be the most enlightening incident of his university career, for he suddenly realizes that his is not the only way of life.

### PROTECTIVE PARENTS

Too many students would be sent to an interdenominational university by Alberta parents anxious to protect their children from the dangers lurking in the minds of the anti-religious professors they might meet on a secular campus. If religion is so important to such people, they should not want to hide it or be afraid to defend it. Surely they realize religion can and should be studied objectively even in a religious university. Students would profit little by attending a school to be protected.

It has been suggested that a religious university in Alberta could force this campus to take an anti-religious or at least a completely non-religious stand. Then we would truly be in an 'amoral climate' as Rev. Schalm implies. This would be unfortunate for the