



LECTURER WILLIAMSON
... opposed to bigotry

I would suggest, because of certain claims which seem to some people at least, to be undeniably true. The claims involved fall into two categories: the first concerning the nature of God; the second concerning the nature of man. Let me give examples. God's mind is infinite. God does not make mistakes. The opinions of God are not subject to error. The propositions believed by God possess far greater certainty than anything attained by men, since God is infallible and omniscient, his truths are absolute. Only God really knows. The propositions asserted by God are absolute truths, eternal verities or something of the kind.

Man's mind, by contrast, is finite, limited and fallible. The propositions asserted by man are relative, variable, subject to error and so on. Let me summarize these two inter-related claims as follows. God's mind is infinite and his truths are absolute. Man's mind is finite and his truths are relative. Of course, most philosophers would argue that these claims are certainly incoherent and probably nonsensical.

But that is not an issue which I wish to discuss now. What I want to point out is that even if the claims mentioned are completely correct, the position advocated by the man of inspiration is still difficult to comprehend. Both claims, it must be stressed, are essential to the inspirationalist position. God's infallibility is vital, for this is what confers authority on the opinions of the inspired man. And it is equally vital that man's mind is finite, for this is what makes rival opinions dubious and unreliable.

But it is surely obvious that you cannot have it both ways. You cannot both maintain that the human mind is finite and that your opinions are eternal verities. The fact that God is infallible has nothing to do with it. For if the human mind is finite and subject to error, even your conviction that the opinions that you express are identical with God's, is subject to error. Nor is any conversion process relevant, for if the human mind is finite, and you are human, even your conviction that you have really gone through such a process is subject to error.

Let me summarize the argument so far. It is not worth disputing that God, if he exists, is infinite and infallible, and that man's mind, by contrast, is finite and fallible. The inspired man appeals now to one claim, now to the other, according to the one which he finds convenient. God's infallibility is introduced in order to justify the authority with which the inspired man speaks. Man's fallibility is introduced in order to dismiss the views of others. That the views of God himself are eternal verities is undeniable, but any man's claim to know what these eternal verities are, is as dubious as anything else. Such claims, it may be added, are unwarranted attempts to confer divine authority on views which might otherwise pass as ordinary and probably foolish opinions.

Let me now apply what I've said about inspiration to the problem at hand, the relationship between education and inspiration.

It is important that we have some grasp of what education is, and perhaps the best way of beginning is by asking what distinguishes education from indoctrination. It is not as some suppose that the teacher or professor is uncommitted and has no definite position. Nor is it that although the educator has a position, he refrains from advocating it in the classroom. By his very selection, arrangement, and interpretation of the facts to be discussed, the educator adopts a particular position. Everyone is committed in that sense.

What distinguishes the educator from the indoctrinator is not that one has a definite position and the other does not, but that the educator should be what is often called open-minded. Insofar as the professor or schoolteacher does not indoctrinate, and many do, it is because he always allows for the possibility of argument and disagreement.

It is not the Hertzogs of this world presenting alternative views for argument and discussion who indoctrinate. It is those who present their own views as the only conceivable ones and indeed, as though they were not really views at all. This too is where we find the essence of a university.

Of course, some people, and they are to be found even in high places in universities, confuse the accidents of a university with its essence, the buildings with the brains. The real role of a university, if it is worth anything at all, is this: a university is a place where professors and students come together in order to critically examine the merits of a wide range of ideas.

And although this is not my topic, education should be free. The examination of ideas should not be tied by financial strings. (applause) The basis of real education, then, is to be found in argument. This is the point of sharpest contrast between the educator and the man of inspiration. This is the point at which the methodologies of education and inspiration meet head-on.

And this, for two reasons. The inspired man, because of the confusions I have already outlined, identifies his opinions with God's. He regards his views as eternal verities. He therefore sees no need for argument. After all, it is obvious that, if one speaks as, or on behalf of, an infallible deity, one has little need to consider the views of merely finite minds.

Furthermore, since the methodology of inspiration makes no use of rational techniques, the inspired man is unable to accept the significance of ordinary arguments at all. Possessed of some inexplicably superior method of determining truth, he sees no need to take account of normal argument.

It is my conviction that inspired men are always dangerous. Nowadays, everyone is a democrat just as everyone is in favor of peace. And as all over the world men are being asked to join the army and fight for peace (laughter and applause), so even the most ardent totalitarians praise democracy. In the political sphere, the man of inspiration, no matter what he may say in nominal praise of democracy, is necessarily inclined toward totalitarianism. His conviction that he participates in the divine infallibility, makes him impatient with the lesser mortals whose minds are finite.

But if inspired men are always dangerous, they present a particular and direct threat to those involved in education in general, and the university in particular. And of course, they are especially dangerous if they have political power and control the broad nature of the educational process (applause).

In other words, although I am opposed to such men in the realm of politics, I also believe and this very sincerely, that I am committed to opposing them simply as a teacher. It is not, I should emphasize, the arrogance of inspired men to which I am opposed.

What I am opposed to is arrogance without argument, the name for which is bigotry. (applause) It is this bigotry which leads to totalitarianism in the realm of ideas, the sort of totalitarianism which maintains, if I may borrow the words of Mr. E. W. Hinman, "that professors may teach only those ideas which the culture and concepts of the age," that it to say, Mr. Hinman and those like him find acceptable, the sort of bigotry which permits a man's naive sexual prejudices to blind him to the merits of a work of art or literature, the sort of arrogance which leads a man to believe that he is a judge in areas of thought which are quite apparently totally

beyond his comprehension. In the face of bigotry the basic role of university must be to defend reason. As Heraclitus remarks, "Bigotry is the sacred disease," a slogan which should perhaps be written at every entrance to Alberta. (applause)

round four:

thachuk comments

We have all assumed here this afternoon that a university is necessary to society. And we have each in turn tried to describe why we think this is so. I should suggest that I think a university is needed to society, probably because society must acquire new knowledge and new values in order to survive. It must, therefore, provide some sort of an institution to do this job. And a university is thus created.

But the job is not so simple. A university must also reassess existing knowledge and prevailing attitudes, whether we describe prevailing attitudes or values as rational values or as dogmas and prejudices. As scholars, I think we must constantly reassess the consequences of what is new, and strike out as hard as we can against the inadequacies of what is old, what is incomplete, and what we think is generally or completely unsatisfactory. Now each of us has attempted to describe how he thinks the university can do this job, how it can do it honestly and intelligently.

First, ladies and gentlemen, I think that a university and we as students must develop a willingness to feel heretical. Our obligation as students and professors and researchers is to discover and propagate knowledge, whatever the discomfort it causes, and whoever feels that discomfort. But at the same time, (applause) we must remember that the acquisition of knowledge is a means, and not an end, and thus a university must remember to assess the consequences of new discoveries to try and estimate their impact on society or on our physical environment.

Now, if we are willing to be heretical as some of us on this panel are obviously willing to be, we must reject the attitude of a great portion of society, and some of those are represented here too, which is stated so well in a play called "A Man for All Seasons".

And in that play, Robert Bolt created a figure which he called the common man, and the common man states at the end of the play, he says: "It isn't difficult to keep alive—just don't make trouble, or, if you must make trouble, make the kind of trouble that is expected." (laughter and applause) Any man who stands before us and tells us that we must have legitimate causes for freedom is trying to tell us exactly that: You make the kind of trouble which we can reasonably expect you to make. (applause)

Well, on the basis of what the common man has to say in "A Man for All Seasons," I suggest that a university should always find it difficult to keep alive. Now, a second requirement is that university is not here to serve the momentary sense of national or provincial purpose. It is here to assess, partially if need be and publicly if need be, the value of any given action by any government. A university must make judgments upon society's behaviour and it must make those judgments publicly.

It cannot exist as a non-partisan institution. (applause) But at the same time I realize that a university cannot hope and should not hope to direct the state and to direct government, but on the other hand, what society must realize is that loyalty or patriotism or partisanship are never the result of a blind and rather one-sided indoctrination.

The radical criticism of government and industry by both the left and the right is by far more effective than indoctrination. And thus, I think it is imperative that the university professor and the university student frequently adopt marginal values. He must resist to some extent the popular will by being critical of it. Now this may be called heresy, but it is not by any means a conspiracy against democratic society which some people suggest it is.

Thirdly, the university is not here simply to provide a way to acquire expertise—a way of living—it is not an institution whose primary value is the fact that its graduates contribute to an increase in the gross national product. This rather materialistic and utilitarian attitude is a shallow and inaccurate justification for the existence of a university.

The acquisition of expertise for various vocations and even some professions can get along quite well without any moral commitment from either professors or stu-

dents, but moral commitments are the hallmark of intelligent thought. To think is not simply an intellectual activity but it is also a moral art, a university then must be a place to think.

The university should then be identified by the public as being heretical. It should not be circumscribed by individual opinions of what responsibility is, by what self-discipline is. These in fact provide a kind of circumscribed situation which we suggest is not the best way to run a university.

Now what does a university do then? I said earlier that it exists to consider knowledge, to consider the prevailing attitudes in society and to determine what needs society will have to provide tomorrow—and thus I think it is imperative also that a university expose itself frequently and openly to rather dangerous situations. Dangerous because they represent the new, the unknown, possibly what might be called heretical ideas. And especially dangerous because particularly in this province anything new, anything possibly unknown, anything possibly better represents a conflict with what now exists.

But in order to offer society an orderly way to shift from what is old to what is new and to what is desirable as well a university plays a creative role. It is not, as some people suggest, an agency for inculcating the habits and values that continue the kind of society that has become much to comfortable and all of us here this afternoon are probably much too comfortable. A university should never equate complacency with truth. But in order to function creatively and critically the university cannot become a cloister simply because it is a state organization it should not take upon itself the fact that it should remain within itself and not venture beyond the bounds of 112 St. and 87 Ave., only part of the educative process as I see it occurs in the classroom.

As students, and this has been said already, we're not only citizens of our university community, but are citizens of the larger world and we have obligations and responsibilities to it. And not only must we have complete freedom of inquiry and experimentation, not only must we encourage scepticism and a critical attitude towards authority but we must also have the freedom to enjoy direct contact with society. Freedom outside the classroom—



LAW STUDENT THACHUK
... intellectual commitment foremost