

Religious Questions Raised

NOTE: This article will by its very nature be biased. Not all religious personnel of the campus were interviewed; and since it is a synthesis of six interviews done by five different people it will of necessity present the views of its author as much as the views of the people consulted. It will on occasion distort these views. For any offence taken I apologize beforehand; and I wish to warn the reader of hasty conclusions regarding the views of the people quoted. I also wish to thank the Features Staff for its work.
—Wolfe Kirchmeir

"Every student, whether he is aware of it or not, has a religion", Rev. Wishart, United Church chaplain to the University, said in a recent interview. The evidence of Rev. Wishart and others indicates that most students on this campus are unaware.

STUDENTS APATHETIC

Rev. Wishart thinks most students here don't have the energy to be either atheists or believers. Peter Paris, SCM secretary, thinks that "There is something wrong with the University if the basic questions about life are not raised. We

are turning out social robots." Brother Prudent, Rector of St. Joe's, has a more positive view: "A fair number of students seem to be interested in religion in a general way, as seen from (Gateway religious) notices," he says, but does not define "fair number". Rev. Keil, Lutheran chaplain to the University, accuses U of A students of lack of religious understanding, and lack of curiosity about religion.

Only Prof. Penelhum, who teaches Philosophy of Religion, disagrees. "U of A students are not apathetic about religion and philosophy" he says. "(Here) they don't have the contemptuous and blasé attitude you find so often overseas."

Several reasons were suggested for religious apathy. The most common was that many students come from fundamentalist or other intellectually restrictive backgrounds, that discourage curiosity, particularly in religious matters. False ideals of sophistication may be a reason, thinks Rev. Wishart. Many students seem to think complete disinterest or atheism to be the mark of the intellectual. Exactly the opposite is true: "Religion encourages the student to question,

challenges him to think, to come to grips with reality," says Rev. Wishart. Dr. Cragg agrees: "Religion plays a central part in the life of the community and the individual."

RELIGIOUS CLUBS

One would imagine the religious clubs to be responding to this situation. But are they? "Yes", say most of the men interviewed. "Religious clubs are an effective means of bringing true religion to the students" says Rev. Wishart. "They are doing fairly well," thinks Rev. Keil. Brother Prudent cautiously admits that religious clubs "seem to be a recognition of the fact that religion is an important factor for everybody." "The SCM is doing a good job," asserts Prof. Penelhum.

However, unqualified approval was rare. "Denominational clubs have a place on campus, but they should take care not to isolate the student from the rest of the student body. Their contribution is greater the more they stress the factors the various religions have in common." Dr. Cragg praised the cooperation shown by several groups, as did others. Rev. Wishart put the case more strongly when he said religious clubs should not retreat into little 'holiness groups'. The remark seems to indicate they do in fact show this tendency.

RELIGION NECESSARY

It can be asked whether religion



CADET AWARDED—Cadet W. A. Griswold, left, a physics student at the University of Alberta, has been appointed chief cadet captain for the winter training program at HMCS Nonsuch. He is shown receiving his naval officers telescope.

is at all necessary. All asked thought it was, but this was to be expected. With the exception of agnostic Prof. Penelhum, the men are all believers.

"Religion attempts to answer the basic question of man's existence. What is the basis of man's life? Ethics cannot necessarily answer this," says Peter Paris. He added that the greatest danger to the Church today is the good respectable man who is merely ethical. Rev. Keil places religious maturity on a level at least equal to academic and social maturity. The student has a basic need for a goal, a feeling of ultimate loyalty, which is expressed, if not to God, then to a god, thinks Rev. Wishart. He names scientism, humanism, and idealism as some of the pseudo-religions that confront the student.

Prof. Penelhum agrees that there is no necessary connection between religion and philosophy: "Philo-

sophy can only make the nature of religion clear; twentieth century philosophy has shown some religious beliefs to be meaningless. Nevertheless, basic notions like 'God' can be made roughly coherent."

DEPT. OF RELIGION

If one admits the importance of religion, what should be done to make religion intellectually respectable; they would both like to see a Department of Religion established in the University.

There are some denominational residences, but Dr. Cragg does not favor more of them. "The fellowship would be so closely knit as to isolate people of one faith from all others." As an alternative, Dr. Cragg suggests founding a religious centre, presumably along interdenominational lines, as many Universities in the US have done. Interfaith cooperation seems a promising approach to several others.

Peter Paris stressed the individual approach. "We don't say, come to us with your religious problems, but rather, come and prove for yourselves that we are Christians. The only condition is that you discuss intelligently". It seems however that the day of intelligent religious discussion is far in the future on this campus.

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