

U of A not narrowly secular, says president

by Suzette C. Chan

Before being invited by the Unitarian Church of Edmonton to speak about religion on campus, Myer Horowitz never had a chance to look at the situation in itself — although he has been active in upholding and promoting the university's involvement in the international community.

"Earlier this year, I read a headline in the Gateway that I have not read before," he told the north side congregation Sunday. "There was an article saying that there were 11 Christian clubs on campus and I was recently invited to the first seminar of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue group. We refer to the university as a secular institution yet it can't be said that there's an absence of religious commitment or spiritual feelings on campus."

Since he had never been asked to speak about religion at the U of A, Horowitz made some surprising

discoveries about the extensiveness the role inter-denominational cooperation had in the formation and evolution of the university.

Horowitz said that Henry Marshall Tory, the university's first president, was determined that the U of A would be a "unified secular" institution, avoiding the multiple sprinkling of small denominational (mostly Catholic) colleges in the Maritimes and in Ontario and Quebec.

Tory was a Methodist minister who taught at McGill and was invited to establish a non-denominational McGill campus at Vancouver (the beginnings of UBC), but ran into some problems.

"Tory was opposed by Methodists in Vancouver who wanted a Methodist college," Horowitz said. After stormy wrangling on the question, Tory eventually quit the ministry — but not the faith — and wrote to Alberta Premier A.C. Rutherford

about the incident and his vision for post-secondary education in Canada.

That letter started a friendship between Tory and Rutherford that led to Rutherford appointing Tory as the first president of the U of A.

Horowitz also recounted how the site of the new university was chosen. It could have been located in Calgary, Edmonton or the town then known as Strathcona. Politicians and people vied heartily for the institution to be in their home town, but the U of A finally found a home in what is now St. Stephen's, making it the first building at the U of A.

The first university senate, which differed in structure from the present senate, included the heads of colleges affiliated with the university. Four of the 25 members represented denominational institutions, one each for St. Stephen's, originally a Methodist college and then United Church after unification, Mount Royal in Calgary, the Roman Catholic St. Joseph's, and the Anglican St. Aden's (which at the time had a congregation of one — its rector).

The university has since had ties to Camrose Lutheran College and other denominational institutions in Alberta, including Faculte St. Jean, originally a seminary for Oblate priests.

The alliances the university, still a secular institution with no religious requirements for employment, made with religious institutions were often ridiculed in the press and by community members.

The affiliation St. Joseph made

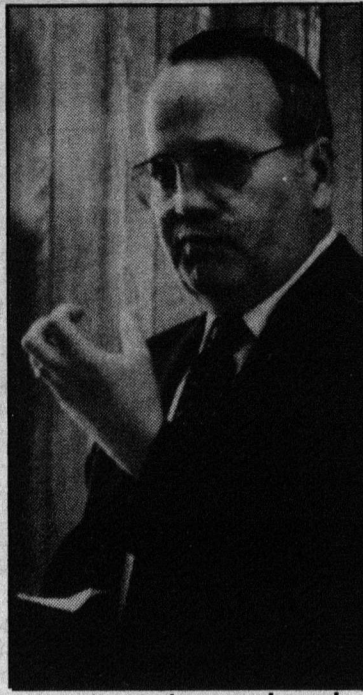


Photo Rob Schmidt

Horowitz: goodness goes beyond Judeo-Christian values.

is the reason for the university's Christian atmosphere. But we're reaching out to others." Students who have, for example, religious reasons for deferring an exam, are accommodated.

"The old university grace was narrowly Christian. I know I could never utter it," said Horowitz, who belongs to the Jewish faith. With careful regard to the intent of the original grace — which was written by another preceding university president, W.H. Alexander, a Unitarian — Horowitz re-wrote it in 1979.

Horowitz continues to be critical of so-called non-denominational meetings on campus that turn out to be Christian-oriented. He also criticized a controversial clause in the Unitarian Universalists Association Statement of Principles and Purposes, which re-affirms the congregation's roots in Judeo-Christian beliefs.

"I believe that goodness goes beyond being Jewish or Christian," Horowitz said. "On campus we have people of the Moslem faith, we have followers of Confucius, we have Buddhists, people from African religions, and so on. We have several Christian chaplains that are concerned with others. The level of religious cooperation at the university has increased. If you can imagine it, I am a member of St. Joseph's board of directors."

"We have developed our own compromise," Horowitz concluded. "It's not classical, pure secularism, but we have kept the spirit of inquiry and our commitment to social good and justice."

Nationhood first, then sovereignty — council

TORONTO (CUP) — Since October, university students have been pronouncing allegiance to the flag in record numbers, flocking to start up and join campus chapters of the Council of Canadians.

The council is the creation of Edmonton publisher Mel Hurtig, who twanged nationalist heartstrings with his popular Canadian Encyclopedia last fall.

There are now 15 campus chapters and organizers are hoping for 30 by March. The average club size so far is about 50 students.

University of Ottawa student John Frederick Cameron, in charge of the colleges and universities division, admits he's a little surprised at the response. In the beginning he felt students wouldn't care about Canadian sovereignty, but now he says, "the students I've been talking to seem to feel that we have to become a nation."

Fear of a Canada-U.S. free trade agreement sparked the group's formation, yet youth organizers say the COC will take up more fights than just that. There's the protection of Canadian culture, the promotion of Canadian teachers and teaching materials, even things which divide Canada from within, like educational and trade barriers between the provinces.

"In essence," says Cameron, "we pledge to ensure a strong Canada whenever, wherever and however the situations dictate."

In August, that meant a symbolic assault on an American icebreaker slicing through Canada's Arctic waters without the permission of the Canadian government.

Because the council felt that was a breach of Canadian sovereignty two University of Alberta students, Louanne Studer and David Achtem, chartered a plane and made the point by dropping a note wrapped in the Canadian flag on the deck of the Polar Sea.

Toronto youth organizer Joe Madill says members can expect to get involved in the same kind of direct action campaigns, as well as hearing speakers on topics like free trade and the sale of de Havilland Aircraft.

Students pay a \$5 one-time fee; \$2 a year after that. The COC estimates that roughly one-third of their 3,000 members are youth.

The universities that have or are planning chapters are in Ottawa, Halifax, Montreal, Saskatoon, Vancouver, Kingston, Hamilton, Windsor, and Edmonton. The council is planning to branch off into the colleges as well.

Madill and Cameron say Canada's young people are probably less nationalistic than their elders, an observation that political sociologist Gordon Laxer agrees with.

"It's one of the peculiarities of being a Canadian that you grow up in the shadow of American culture and as you grow up you become more aware of Canadian nationalism," says Laxer, a University of Alberta professor, COC member and in the midst of writing a couple of books on nationalism in the Great White North.

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