

# RELIGION AND THE COLLEGE

*This article is the result of a questionnaire which was presented to several of the religious leaders of Fredericton, representing various denominations. The questionnaire was prepared and the contributions edited by Neil Mulvaney and Ken Grant. We hope that the results will be of interest to U.N.B. students, concerning whom much of the opinion is centred. We would like to thank the following who contributed to the article: Rev. T. J. Watson of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Monsgr. Boyd of the Roman Catholic Church, Rabbi Spiro of the Jewish Orthodox Church, Rev. A. H. Moore of the United Church, Rev. B. C. Cochrane of the Reformed Baptist Church and Dean Gray of the Anglican Church.*

**What Congregational effects has the presence of University students in Fredericton upon your Church?**

Here, an enlarged congregation, a closer balance of girls and boys, and assistance in the choir were all mentioned. Most religious leaders felt that the attendance at public worship of college students was stimulating to him, in the sense that a certain part of his preaching is an answer to the challenge of the presence of "young, thinking men and women seeking enlightenment on questions that disturb them". Rev. A. Moore wrote: "Individually it is perhaps more effectively measured by the consultations which clergymen have with interested students who are seeking answers to their problems in religion. Then too, the shadow of a university, with hundreds of students, places a direct responsibility upon the local church and pastor, to make the worship as helpful and as sound doctrinally, as possible."

**What effect is your Church having on the lives of the College students with whom it comes in contact?**

Perhaps the most representative answer to this question was "I wish we knew". One religious leader suggested that from the number attending, the effect of the university numerically was not great. However, they were unanimous in expressing the "hope that it provides a steady influence on young people whose way of life is suddenly and drastically changed by attendance at university." It was also stated that: "the friendly contacts made at Church Services and at other congregational functions may help to tide students, especially first year students, over loneliness and homesickness, a feeling most young people have who are away from home for the first time."

**In what way do you feel that college students are spiritually lacking?**

Most were agreed that university students did not have a sufficiently wide knowledge of the Bible. Rev. Cochrane wrote that "a spiritual lack with many students is a vital, personal, Christian experience born out of implicit faith in Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of men." However Rev. Moore expressed the view that "sometimes there is a deep undercurrent of religious faith in otherwise seemingly in-

different youth". One of the religious leaders said that college students, especially in the early years at college, are too readily carried away by the impact of new and strange opinions, unfamiliar systems of thought that seem antagonistic to or vastly different from the familiar teaching of their Church and home. It was also suggested that this attitude is sometimes facilitated by teachers who pronounce on religion without perhaps having any special qualifications for doing so.

**Do you feel that College students of your faith are patronizing your Church as they should be?**

In one case the use of the word "patronize" was objected to here. On this question, only Monsgr. Boyd observed that attendance at his church was quite adequate, but he said that attendance at Newman Club should be much higher. "Every Catholic student should be a member of Newman Club." Although the other religious leaders did say that not a sufficient number come to worship, it was generally felt that the ratio did not differ greatly from other church members, "some of whom are quite faithful, in their attendance at Church, others are 'Christmas' or 'Easter Christians' while some do not attend church at all". Rev. Moore said "there are approximately three hundred United Church members at U.N.B. We get a mere handful in Young People's Union, and a larger number, though still a small group attending Sabbath worship".

**What specific problems does College life present to a member of your faith?**

Here, Rabbi Spiro pointed out that "to an observant Orthodox member of the Hebrew faith one of the problems may arise when an examination has been scheduled for the Sabbath or a Holy Day. Since writing in any form is strictly forbidden on these days, these students are placed in an unenviable position. Except where human life is in jeopardy there is no special dispensation. A Rabbi cannot advise a student in the above case. He must quote the law; there is only one interpretation." In answer to this question Rev. Moore said that "at U.N.B. lack of a chapel, and regular chapel services, and lack of official religious emphasis, along with the scattered residence life throughout the city, makes

'community of spirit' difficult." Monsgr. Boyd stated that the problems for the Catholic student would be much greater than for example at St. Joseph's. Dr. Watson expressed the views of some of the religious leaders when he said that "materialistic teaching offered at the University level tends to undermine the 'old faith' in which the students were reared: this seems to be a phase through which most students pass, but time and experience, in the over-ruling and understanding Providence of a Sovereign God, usually take care of it."

Dr. Watson also expressed concern about the "so-called 'social drinking' or the amount of it" which might cause students "to 'play the fool and err exceedingly' for a while. But here again time and the experience of a few 'mornings after', the sorting out of friends, some wholesale advice from University officials, and a bit of shame in their own souls, bring them back to the moderation of true Presbyterianism". Some of the leaders, in answer to this question, expressed concern over "the intra-mural sports on Sunday that seem to have the tacit approval of the University."

**What problems do you feel that College presents in respect to interfaith marriages?**

Most of the religious leaders felt that University life, by bringing students into very close contact with members of other faiths in a 'democratic' atmosphere, tended to break down old restraints and prejudices and make inter-faith marriages more common. Almost all, felt that this was not a good thing. One said "I suppose the problems of inter-faith marriages are the same in every area — domestic discord, misunderstanding and maladjustment in family life." Another seemed to express the opinion of the group when he said that "a home is usually the better for a common reverence."

**Do you feel that Colleges make students more tolerant of other religions?**

Dean Gray gave a "No" answer to this question. However, the general consensus here was that "college life inclines to make students more tolerant of religions other than their own. The common ground of college classes, social functions, athletics, and so on tend to develop this tolerance". Monsgr. Boyd answered that "It should. College

life is supposed to enlarge student's thought." He stressed that what purports to be 'objective history' must really be objective. Rev. Moore said "I believe that colleges make for greater understanding of other religions if there is some objective study of religion given." He seemed to express the opinions of most when he said that "perhaps, rather, we should say college life makes for a less indifferent acceptance of other faiths, for unless one's faith is the vigorous and practical kind, there will be indifference rather than toleration, which latter sees the good and fine in other faiths. Toleration presupposes in the individual a strong basis for his own beliefs". All seemed to concur in the opinion that "tolerance must never be taken for approval."

**Do you feel that college students of today are more religious than students of ten year ago, or of twenty years ago? Do you feel that the situation is improving?**

There was mixed opinion on this question, but perhaps a stronger note of optimism than of pessimism. Rev. Moore said that "ten to twenty years ago students more generally came from family backgrounds which were less strenuous and more professedly Christian". However, he felt that scientific studies brought students into contact with the deeper implications of religion. The student comes to consider religion as part of the normal and necessary growth of personality. Rev. Cochrane felt that students today are more interested in religion than were students of ten or twenty years ago. However, Dr. Watson stated that "from the religious point of view, students are much the same in every generation. I have been asked the same questions on doctrine that I thought were smart when I asked them about thirty years ago." He said that "if there is any change at all for the better, it is perhaps that many students today do not consider religion a matter for ridicule, and they will discuss it more freely with ministers than students of former years."

**How do you think that relations between your Church and the College students could be improved?**

Monsgr. Boyd again stressed the need for Catholic students being members of Newman Club. Rev. Moore said that "this is the \$64,000 question. Our United

Church Presbytery has made efforts to have the first and second year students together for a social evening for community of spirit. We are concerned that something should be done in this respect. Perhaps by a representative, or a "Church committee of the Student Body" with interests in the church life of the city, we of the local churches could learn more of the needs and desires of the students, and could help to formulate our week-day programs, and our Sunday services, so that we would meet more efficiently the student's spiritual needs. I am sure my church would welcome such a representative or group of representatives."

Rev. Cochrane suggested that "perhaps the college could help in this matter through its Student Council, or some other medium, by strongly encouraging all students to attend the church of their choice. From that point more intimate association might be encouraged through personal interest by the minister, invitation to home fellowship by people of the church, friendship contacts between students and youth of the church."

Dean Gray said that "by students realizing that religion is a religion of a Cross and that the Cross must enter into their whole outlook. Sacrificial service is one way in which they could improve their relations with the Church." In answer to this question Rabbi Spiro stated that he would be extremely interested to see what the students themselves might suggest on this subject, of improving relations between the student and his faith. He suggested that the question be posed to a cross-section of the student body.

Dr. Watson said that the students should feel free to come to a clergyman, or other religious leader in the church, with their problems. "Another good thing would be for our church to have an organization solely for Presbyterian students (such as the Canterbury Club for Anglicans, and the Newman Club for Roman Catholics) where they can meet to discuss their problems as they are related particularly to their own church. There could be occasional inter-club meeting, for a joint social hour, discussion of common problems; such contacts are helpful, for among other things, they help to save us from that smug 'holier-than-thou' attitude that has almost made the word 'religion' stink in the nostrils of decent, thoughtful and enquiring students".