

# AND THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION

## DO THEY ?

by Shirley Greene

Do universities foster atheism? In order to answer this question, we must investigate several facets of a university.

First, is the administration geared to discourage belief in God? Very few universities have compulsory religion courses; nevertheless, nine of the twenty-one Canadian universities have affiliated theological colleges.

Religious training is made available then in 43% of our universities. The other 57% allow such organiza-



I believe!

tions as Student Christian Movement, Newman Club, and Hillel to take an active part on campus.

In fact, UBC features a soap box preacher. During clement weather he sets up on the main patio and never fails to gather a crowd of hecklers and enthusiasts. If such activities are conducted in an orderly manner, administrations do not attempt to curtail them.

Secondly, let us consider campus life as a possible contributor to atheism. Certainly, religious and philosophical discussions rank high on the topic-preference ladder. Students love to express their own theories and to challenge those of their classmates. Volubility tends to extremity as philosophies are declared and countered and voiced again.

But sociology texts indicate that radical reactions are characteristic of this age group. A student is likely to renounce and attack the teachings of his home until he marries and establishes his own home. Then his children hear the things he heard as a child and not the new philosophies he may have voiced while attending university.

Finally, let us consider the role of the professor. Good professors attempt to stimulate

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## SHOULD THEY ?

by Ed Thiessen

Should a university inculcate Moral and Religious values? Before this question can be answered, or even considered, the problem of definition arises. What does the term "University" mean?

One definition involves the conception of a university as being intimately concerned with research. In this light a university may be defined as a collection of specialized individuals organized into an efficient body. However, if a more inclusive definition is to be set forth, the university may involve, as well, the various other organizations which link themselves with the university. Comprising this latter body are various groups such as secular and religious organizations designed to complement the academic life of the student with social activity.

The primary function of a university is to suspend an in-



I'm not so sure . . .

dividual's entrance into society as a responsible member so that when he does so he will make greater quantitative and qualitative contributions. In addition, the university allows the individual to develop intellectual tools which will enable him to manipulate his environment with greater facility. For a university to develop these desired traits it must change the belief system, and develop the thought patterns of the student.

To accomplish this with a minimum expenditure of time and effort the university must concentrate its

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Interior of St. Joseph's

photo by Conrad Stenton

## FIFTH COLUMN

"Should a university inculcate moral and religious values?" was the topic of last week's S.C.M. debate. Well, you can't really believe that everyone reached one glorious conclusion and proceeded by torchlight round the campus screaming

We're for God and Son J.C.—  
Good for you and good for me!

No, some of the talk was interesting, some unintelligible and some plain dull. Naturally no conclusion was reached, although all the old questions were dredged up ("Is morality bound up in religion?"—remember?) and the three speakers contradicted themselves at least once each.

The Problem of Atheists on Campus disturbs many students so profoundly that even the typesetter uses initial capitals when he comes across it. While some tolerance of intellectual and emotional freedoms has been observed here, it is a rare occurrence outside the right times and places. In philosophy 240 one may perhaps be an atheist, but not when one is filling out forms of application for entry to the university. At least, its inadvisability is enough to scare us off—so that both some of those who do know their own minds, and most of those who don't, enter these august halls of "Quaecumque vera" with a falsehood over their very first signature.

All too often, tolerance in the last extremity is only lip-service. The Canadian Bill of Rights mentions freedom of religion amongst its august aims but is one free not to have any religion at all? Let us imagine the reaction of a trial jury when a witness asks if he may affirm that his evidence is the truth, instead of swearing by a God in whom he does not believe. That his atheism may be most thoroughly considered and reasoned would not affect the issue at all.

If our witness sticks to his guns in face of the strong opposition he will meet, let us compare him with another who has no particular beliefs one way or the other. The latter will go gladly through the magical rigmarole of asking help in telling the truth from a Being about whom he has never even bothered to think. Which man is the more moral and the more likely to be truthful? He who refuses to recite a, to him, meaningless prayer, or the man who rattles through it with a smile of Good Citizenship on his face and the weekend's golf in his heart?

But we know which set of actions would be expected of us in such circumstances. And we dare say that 95 percent of the faculty and student body of this university would meet such expectations. In doing so, how many would be per-

jurying themselves straight away? Dishonesty of this sort is necessary in our society to avoid the attentions of the witch-hunters — a breed which has never died out. Even the tolerant are seldom that tolerant, and the witch-hunters shout louder anyway.

We are at university in order to exercise our intellects, let us hope, to prepare ourselves for life by ranging through the limitless regions of mind and body. But if we should actually go too far from home, there is hell to pay. Let us suppose that two students live in common-law together — what then? Should the Administration know of it, the adulthood of the man and woman, their deliberate rationality, will not enter into the case. That they have decided their union is morally permissible will be no argument in face of the official ruling that they are damaging public morality and religion.

Yet if the fabric of our morality and religion is such that it is damaged by the few whose convictions run counter to society's, should we not rather look to the foundations first? Can we accept as a sound basis for religion and morality a system which permits only theoretical and half-hearted dissent from what the majority is used to?

In our own culture, St. Paul and St. Augustine were at one stage in their lives a persecutor of the early church and an atheistic rake respectively. It was not just public opinion which changed them into the saints we remember today. While it seems superficially wasteful to duplicate earlier human experience, perhaps the nature of the experience makes it necessary, by virtue of its sincerity. And surely sincerity in the truth means more than truth accepted under authority.

"To be a philosophical Sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian"—David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.