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RELIGION

in the

COLLEGES

THE GIST OF THE CONFERENCE
ON RELIGION IN UNIVERSITIES,
COLLEGES, AND PREPARATORY
SCHOOLS, HELD AT PRINCETON,
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PILLARS OF RELIGION IN THE COLLEGES

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The Analytic and Appreciative Approaches

Our education stresses two chief approaches to knowledge, the impersonal, or scientific, approach and the personal, or appreciative, approach. In the physical sciences, mathematics, psychology, and to a large extent in the social sciences, the former approach is obviously the correct one. In the study of literature, music, the fine arts, the latter approach is essential, for we have entered the realm of values. If religion is to be a vital force, our education must be so planned as to cultivate not only the analytical mind which views life objectively, but also this capacity to appreciate. There is a real danger that students should feel that only the scientific approach to reality is valid. That approach will not yield the values of literature and art; it is not the primary approach in the realm of esthetics. Nor can it be in religion. Much would be accomplished to restore to students the sense of contact with reality in their religion, if this distinction in various "ways of knowing" could be made plain to them. We must see to it that our education is designed to stimulate the capacity to respond to the finest and highest. This is a preparation for the Gospel, a John the Baptist's task. Without this development of appreciativeness, it is not likely that they will be ready for religion.

And beyond this general adjustment of emphasis in our education, there are four specific things which, it seems to me, every college and university should undertake in the interest of vital religion:

I. Curricular Instruction. Provision should be made in the curriculum for courses in religion—in religious literature, in the history of religions, in the philosophy and psychology of religion, in ethics from a religious view-point. These courses must be dealt with in thoroughly scholarly fashion. They must be taught by men who are recognized by their colleagues as first-rate scholars and who are also keenly religious. No course in poetry can be taught by an instructor who lacks poetic appreciation. No course in religion can be taught by an instructor who is not genuinely devout, an enthusiast for the life with God.

If, as President Hibben has said, students complain that religion is taught dogmatically, and not with that spirit of free inquiry to which they are accustomed in the classroom, here is the opportunity to show them

that it can be handled with entire freedom. In the past denominational jealousies and the rivalries of Fundamentalist and Modernist have made college authorities wary of putting into the curriculum courses on religion lest they prove sources of criticism and contention. But the time has come to be fearless. Religion suffers when it is taught under restrictions which do not prevail in other subjects. It asks only for honest investigation guided by scholars who are competent in knowledge and who themselves are possessed of devout souls.

In most of our institutions such courses can and should be taught from the Christian point of view. Religious literature will mean primarily Biblical literature. Religions will be studied with an honest attempt to do justice to their best points, and Christianity need not ask any more favored treatment than is accorded other faiths. Ethics will be supremely Christian ethics. But care must be taken to keep these courses from seeming propaganda. They are primarily inquiries. They will lose their real value as factors for the stimulation of religion unless students feel in them an honest and unprejudiced search for truth. Here college administrators must guarantee those who work in this realm that same academic freedom which is accorded to men in other faculties. Only let them see to it that such courses are given by men who themselves are genuinely religious.

II. Corporate Worship. Provision must be made for corporate worship. The present generation of students is more sensitive esthetically than were their predecessors thirty years ago. They appreciate architecture, music, literary form; and a service of worship ought to be conducted for them under the most favorable conditions. An unworshipful building—a hall or auditorium without spiritual atmosphere—acts as a serious deterrent to real worship. The music in many college chapels is atrocious. Those who conduct prayers must take the utmost pains with both the matter and the language of them. This is not to say that it is wise to confine the conduct of worship to ordained ministers who have presumably received training in the art of leading public services. On most faculties there are devout men with literary gifts who are prepared to give the requisite time and labor to fit themselves to help in this task. They are usually men respected and loved by their students, and the very sight of a man eminent in science, or in literature or in historical knowledge, leading in an earnest service of worship is an inspiration. By all means let us keep as many as possible of our faculties sharing in the leadership of corporate worship.

III. Voluntary Organizations. If vital religion is to exist on the campus, opportunity must be given for its expression by the students themselves. In the organization of the college church and in the Christian Association place must be made for vigorous student religious activity.

It will often be crudely carried on—that is inevitable. It will frequently manifest undesirable characteristics—that is not surprising. But apart from such spontaneous and voluntary student religious effort, the spiritual life of our colleges would have been poor indeed. In these immature and clumsy efforts the future leaders of the Church have had their training. Without the work of these voluntary associations we should have had few recruits for the ministry or the mission field or for other forms of religious service. In them men have reached their fellow students with a personal appeal and won them for the life with Christ in God. Through them much valuable education has been given in the Bible, in missions, in the life of prayer. They supply opportunities for members of the faculty and outside speakers to meet groups of students in informal meetings, to answer their questions, to guide their discussion, and to lead them into intelligent and earnest Christian living. Whatever the university does officially, it must also encourage to the utmost the active effort of religiously-minded students to work for their university and for the community.

IV. Appeals to the Will. And, either through the Christian Association or through the university church, provision must be made for a presentation of religion with a view to making students decide definitely to enter into fellowship with God. Religion cannot afford to dispense with propaganda. From the earliest days Christianity has presented its claims to men with urgency. Men seldom reach God head first; they arrive heart first, and the head makes such rationalizations as it can.

If you will look up the definition of the verb *to kiss* in the Century Dictionary, you will find the lexicographer saying: "To smack with the pursed lips, a compression of the closed cavity of the mouth by the cheeks giving a slight sound when the rounded contact of the lips with one another is broken." That is no doubt a correct and fairly adequate description of what it is to kiss; but what lover ever first looked up the dictionary description and then went and embraced his beloved? Much of our teaching about religion has to be somewhat like the lexicographer's work in trying to put down something after this verb *to kiss*. Religion is the kiss itself. There must be provided some moving presentation of religion which shall lead students to enter for themselves the fellowship with God. There is much discussion about religion among students; it is one of the major interests in the deeper conversation on many campuses. But talk about religion is not religion, and those of us who are interested in making students personal devotees of God in Christ plead that university authorities join from time to time with student leaders in such a presentation of the Gospel as shall move students to repentance and faith.

The Contagion of Spiritual Personalities

If religion is to be a vital force among students, the life of the college must be itself religious. Religion is caught—not taught. It is about as difficult for students to be really and fully religious on most of our campuses as it is to grow tropical fruit in the arctic circle. The atmosphere is not favorable. We spend millions on laboratories, libraries, dormitories, on the endowment of professorships, lectureships, scholarships; but how much attention is paid by governing boards and faculties to the effort to cultivate the interior life—the loyalties, the conscience, the spiritual insight, the faith, hope, love, of students? When professors are appointed we inquire into their scholarship, but it seems impertinent to ask, what of their spiritual quality? And yet is it impertinent, if the aim of our education is to produce men of spiritual distinction? I am not asking, of course, for doctrinal tests. That would be a sorry step backward in academic freedom. But is it possible to escape asking what is a man's spiritual quality?

Religion cannot be made a department of the university and handed over to chaplains and other specialists to promote. It must be dominant in the life of the institution. It must be the atmosphere of the classroom where biology or sociology or psychology is taught no less truly than the atmosphere of the classroom in which Biblical literature is dealt with. Religion is propagated by a form of contagion. If the faculty possess it in an infectious form, then the student body will be religious. But if religion be not present to an infectious extent in the faculty, there is not much likelihood of its becoming a contagion among the students. The place to begin seems to me not with a discussion of student religion. We have had admirable diagnosis here this evening of present religious conditions among them. But the main question for college administrators is whether their institutions are themselves religious. Student generations come and go; administrators and faculty remain. Are they men of spiritual quality? Have they a life with God?