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# RELIGION

*in the*

# COLLEGES

THE GIST OF THE CONFERENCE  
ON RELIGION IN UNIVERSITIES,  
COLLEGES, AND PREPARATORY  
SCHOOLS, HELD AT PRINCETON,  
N. J., FEBRUARY 17 TO 19, 1928

*Edited by*

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## STUDENT ATTITUDES AS AN ADMINISTRATOR SEES THEM

JOHN GRIER HIBBEN, *President of Princeton University*

President John Grier Hibben as host and chairman graciously welcomed the members of the conference and spoke in part as follows:

I wish to bid you a hearty welcome to Princeton. We are under a debt of gratitude in that you have chosen Princeton for this conference, and it is a privilege to have you here. I feel that by your presence you will bestow a great blessing upon the university.

I read a few days ago in a volume written in answer to "Mother India" that the great difficulty with India was the "other-worldliness" of the people. They had no concern about economic conditions or sanitation. Their minds were centered upon the contemplation of the infinite. The author's solution of all India's troubles would be to have a law enacted that no one should entertain any religious belief or take any time for religious contemplation. I imagine such a law would be more difficult to enforce than the Eighteenth Amendment! We have no law of that kind. We cannot command our students to think of religion. We have, however, a body of young men who are *at times* thinking and talking of religion. Drawing on experience and conversations with our undergraduates, I would mention three of their objections to religion.

### *Dogmatism and Freedom to Think*

The first is that religion is presented in a dogmatic manner, contrary to the spirit of the age. In their minds there is no conflict between science and religion, but a conflict between the presentation of religious truth, on the one hand, and the general spirit and attitude of the man of science in his candor and his desire to discuss the various theories of his science with his students. They say, "We recognize an attitude in the one that we do not find in the other."

We are endeavoring to throw our students more and more upon their own initiative and to encourage them to think for themselves on every problem, whether or not they agree with their instructors. Therefore, we must expect independence of thinking also concerning religion. We must have great patience with what Doctor Johnson called "the overpowering confidence of twenty-one." We are too apt to grow impatient

when we hear statements made that are contrary to our traditions and convictions.

### *Self-expression and Self-legislation*

The second objection they make is that religion is a great obstacle to the freedom of self-expression. They say this not only of religion, but they go so far as to say that old-fashioned standards of morality cannot be accepted, because they hamper the great adventure of self-expression.

I feel very strongly that if we are patient and sympathetic with our undergraduates they will outgrow their present mood and come to a more profound view of freedom and self-expression. They will sooner or later discover that freedom must be limited by self-legislation, that the only expression of self that is of any value comes from a self-governed will.

### *Reality Seen and Unseen*

Perhaps the most serious of the objections raised by students to religion is, that religion does not have reality. In the vernacular of the campus, an undergraduate said recently, "Religion has no kick in it." Students say there is something vague about religion, because it is based upon the idea of God, and God seems very far from everyday life. Unfortunately, the only kind of reality which they have so far experienced is that which comes through the senses. They have not yet come to recognize that the realities which give life value cannot be measured. It is difficult for a man of twenty in the midst of the rushing current of life to realize that the great realities of life are the things which are unseen, and that he is missing them.

In all this, the very encouraging feature is the fact that the young men who are so immersed in this material world are not satisfied. If they were satisfied, continuously interested, our problem would be an impossible one. Many acknowledge that they are bored, and some are disillusioned. A few, not many, have become cynics, saying, "What is there to the whole game?" I believe that through various available influences we can bring them to understand a way of life that will release unsuspected capacities, so that life will take on larger meaning for them.

### *Uncharted Voyagers*

Stevenson writes that the adventure of life is like a pilot starting out with his ship on a voyage to India, his only chart being that of the Thames and the port of London. On his long and dangerous voyage, all that he has to guide him is a local experience. So students of today have no adequate chart for the more adventurous voyage of life on which they

are launching. In some way we must touch their imaginations. If I were asked what above all others would be my prayer for the young men of Princeton and of our country, I would reply: "That they might have an enlightened imagination." I feel they are missing sadly the great fact that there is a movement of the spirit across the history of mankind and that the great benefactors of mankind, that have had a part in this movement of the spirit, are those who have contributed to the "coming of the Kingdom of God upon the earth." My wish and ambition is that our young men may not merely be looking on in the great happenings of this generation, but that they too may have a part in this eternal movement of the spirit.

#### *Unfit for the Army*

One of the saddest things in my experience occurred during the war when our able-bodied youth were enlisting in arms. A considerable number, however, were examined and set aside as unfit. The Great Cause called them and they were ready, but there was no place for them. Other strong men had to take their places. Infinitely more tragic is it to see the army of consecrated men and women bearing the burdens and trying to solve the problems of our generation, while there are others who take no part in it because they are unfit.

#### *Make It Hard*

Our problem is an extremely difficult one. It reminds me of an incident which occurred in 1916 when the International Y.M.C.A. sent Mr. E. C. Carter to get twelve volunteers from Princeton to go to Mesopotamia to serve the British forces there.

I had a meeting of a few men at my home before he made his public plea to the undergraduates, and he asked them what prospect he had of getting twelve of their number to go to Mesopotamia. One student replied, "Mr. Carter, make it hard enough and you will get your volunteers." He did and seventy-five men volunteered.

Our young men will volunteer for the adventurous life of Christian living and of Christian service if we can only put it in the right way. Their native idealism may be choked by the immediate interests and pursuits of life, but it is there. There is a native honesty in them endeavoring to think out the problems of life as best they can. It will respond if we are only wise enough to touch the living springs that lie, deeply hidden, in their hearts.