

# Religion at O.U.

I HAVE been asked on the basis of a number of years in direct and indirect association with O. U.'s Religious Emphasis week or the Conference on Religion to express some reflections on the religious life of the campus.

Relying solely on this association and on more-or-less casual observations, I do not think I hazard much in expressing such reflections. I want to assure anyone, however, who thinks I am trying to be pontifical or scientifically authoritative, that I make no pretension of judging O. U.'s religious life from other than the narrow experiences and perspective indicated.

In any case, my observation is that religion considered either as a mystical reflection or as a more narrow, formal, institutional behavior is not significant on the modern secular university campus as compared with the rest of the students' reflections and interests. In the philosophic sense, in the search for naturalistic values and in the creation of ethics, it is quite in evidence.

This conclusion is based on a particular view of what religion concerns—a view of which the reader should be aware before I go any further.

Such a view is expressed by theologian Paul Tillich in one of the most disturbing sermons I have ever read ("He Who Is the Christ" in *The Shaking of the Foundations*):

". . . the real Christ was not the Christ in power and glory.

"The Christ had to suffer and die, because whenever the Divine appears in all Its depth, It cannot be endured by men. It must be pushed away by the political powers, the religious authorities, and the bearers of cultural tradition . . . We see that in this rejection, not the lowest, but the highest representatives of mankind are judged. Whenever the Divine appears, It is a radical attack on everything that is good in man, and therefore man must repel It, must push It away, must crucify It. Whenever the Divine manifests Itself as the new reality, It must be rejected by the representatives of the old reality. For the Divine does not complete the human; It revolts against the human. Because of that, the human must defend itself against It, must reject It, and must destroy It."

Tillich then goes ahead to explain that the Divine takes our rejection upon Itself, accepts our crucifixion and thus conquers us. For, he argues, if it did not do so but instead imposed Itself upon us, conquering us directly, this would be meaningless in terms of our accepting It. It would be the destruction of our freedom.

Thus he implies at least that the really Good Life can never come through humanistically-conceived value and its activist institutionalized manifestations, but only through ourselves as we give ourselves in deliberate spiritual choice to Divine value.

If one views religion—be he Jew or Christian, Muslim or Buddhist—in the sense of which Tillich writes, if he accepts religion as a personal, thoughtful reflection about ultimate value and the real way this value or meaning can fully manifest itself in our lives, then I am correct in saying we do not have religion on the modern secular campus or upon this campus in a significant proportion to our other activities.

In observing this I reserve in my mind the fact that O. U. is a state institution and under our state constitution is supposed to be relatively secular. Nevertheless, O. U. is one of the most religious campuses, in the formal sense, with which I have had experience here or abroad. Our faculty is, I know, one of the most church-related and active. There are many students vitally concerned with religion both in the narrow and the broad sense. Thousands of them attend church on Sunday morning and the student governing body appropriates more than \$1,500 each year for C.O.R.

Many students individually also contribute in different ways to their own respective churches and religious foundations. Scores attend week-day religious activities. One of the

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most vital religious discussions I have heard recently was at a Wednesday night meal in a campus sorority house.

Still, it seems to me that not really a significant proportion of our overt campus life is spent on these formal religious activities.

The money appropriated is actually not very significant in proportion to money spent on material luxuries. A good campus-wide dance band costs far more than the money used to finance the entire C.O.R. period. Attendance at the major C.O.R. convocations where some of the outstanding religious and philosophic leaders of America appear runs from 100 to 125 students out of our many thousands. At the coffee-discussion gatherings where one may meet these speakers face-to-face, together with earnest faculty members, student attendance ranges from two or three to thirty or so.

Finally, it is pretty obvious—although no transient observer can really know what passes through the mind of another—that there is not much spontaneous, sustained, general religious meditation going on during most of the waking hours.

It may be claimed that much more exists than meets the eye or ear, but in any civilization surface behavior and manifestation count for something. Student behavior at O. U. is hardly like Caliban's on Setebos.

Nor is the modern college campus vocally vibrant with intellectual or spiritual excitement. It suggests little of Savonarola preaching to the Florentines.

I am aware that this is not a religious age (in the Tillich sense). But then there is poor logic in arguing that a man is really a pretty religious fellow by the standard of his age which in turn is not religious. Even secular courts give little consideration to the pleas of those who say, "I didn't steal nearly as much as thieves customarily do."

But there is a side to the religious coin other than Tillich's—the human creation of ethics and values as opposed to the contemplation of Divine value. This is the naturalistic view of religion.

From this viewpoint the modern campus, and ours in particular, is truly religious. A Jonas Salk of cancer or heart research may be working among us; or a coming philanthropist and a future atomic scientist may be studying here.

Most of our campus is devoted to the institutionalizing and objectifying of humanistically determined values (and pretty good values at that) in art, in literature, in science, in law, in sports—not to overlook citi-

zenship or home economics, contributions to the Good Life estimable and esteemed.

In support of this view one of the most profound professor-scholars I ever knew, the late Elijah Jordan, once argued that the Good or the Good Life if it is real is not a state of mind but lies in action and especially in institutionalized action, in the corporate life of man and his institutions.

"The good man," he said, "is here; he came with Socrates and Jesus and Buddha." What we must do now is to create the Good Life, ". . . a world in which all men may be good men," in that they are not cut off from the opportunities to goodness.

Like our burdened fellows in those oppressed lands where Lenin lies embalmed, we are busy—but in our case "goodly" busy—materializing the values of life. At least it is not our intention to institutionalize the bad life. At least we are trying hard to build for our present ideal of the Good Man—and the Good Woman, too—a good World in which to house him.

But, of course, this is where people like Tillich shake the foundations; for aside from suggesting that we are trying to succeed by our own power and glory they also intimate that we are Roman activists—so busy building stately mansions we fail to see that the terrain changes and the value foundations on which we started, or the value blueprints for our structures require reconstruction or at least new readings; or they say we fail to realize that a set of new builders comes along in every generation without the clear, original view of the first blueprints, and so has tendencies just to add bathrooms and bedrooms and kitchens, but no living room.

Thinkers like Tillich suggest that values cannot be traded or borrowed on forever. Eventually any ideal of the Good Man is found to be less than true. That is, it is suggested that even Socrates, Jesus, and Buddha had to pause and contemplate the Good Life to seek the meaning in more universal terms than those then held.

In fact, come to think of it, this is generally why they became known as good men and the ideals of the good life, isn't it? They seemed to grasp more firmly than the average man that ". . . the dreamer lives forever, but the builder dies in a day."

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