



What college students say about religion has always been a great concern to their elders. It is also the topic of the following article by O.U.'s authority on religious philosophy, Dr. J. Clayton Feaver.

- I don't care about religion. I want to know what gives sense to my life.
- There is no living God. The universe is governed by a synthesis of basic principles.
- As far back as I can remember my mother always made me go to church. I guess that's why I'm anti-religious. I'm going to find a reason for living in art.
- I'm an atheist. There is no God. I believe in the focal point of ideal value which has power over human life for good.
- I am not interested in religious questions. I am interested in the origin and meaning of life and especially in the origin and meaning of human life.
- I lost my faith when I came to college, especially when I took geology.
- In astronomy class I had to reconsider my faith and raise the question, Where is God and where am I? Maybe this was an awakening for the first time of the religious consciousness or maybe it was a reawakening of the religious experience which I had never before brought into consciousness.
- Why is the question about God so important?
- Does the language of religion sometimes prevent religious understanding?
- Religion impedes the free expression of my spirit.
- In the religious experience I am free to do what I have got to do.
- The church bothers me. It makes me think about things I don't want to think about—at least if I don't think about them they don't bother me.
- I do not attend church. I get more out of sitting on the edge of the woods and looking out.
- In religion there is a question and an answer and a question about answers and an answer to questions.

If Students

THE statements and questions listed at left are from students at the University of Oklahoma. Are these religious or irreligious statements and questions? Do they reflect religious or irreligious concern? Are some of the statements religious protests or the refusal to make protest? What meanings of religion are implicit in the statements?

Any discussion of a general subject relating to the moral and religious outlook of college students admits many exceptions. This article is not a survey or a research project. Comments do not reflect a systematic analysis of the subject; rather, they result from observation of and reflection on the expressed opinions of a fair sampling of students at this University. There is no claim that these comments are representative of all O.U. students—certainly they are not meant as sweeping generalizations about students on other American campuses.

The range of moral and religious concern at O.U. includes at least (1) those students who are unwilling to give up dependence upon home and family; (2) those who break away from the family and assert their independence, and (3) those who are strenuously trying to find inter-dependence wherein dependence and independence are seen in perspective. The direction of growth in human life seems to be from dependence through independence to inter-dependence, a growth which seems descriptive of the levels of religious involvement evident currently on this campus.

Some people never pass beyond the level of dependence characteristic of the young child who relies upon others for his every need. Thus some University students postpone the trauma of bursting out of the womb of security provided by home and parents and cling to all that is accepted and practiced at home. Sometimes this dependence is transferred to sorority or fraternity, to a church student group or to a professor; but in any event the student evidences an inordinate concern to be safe with answers to any crisis he may face. Perhaps he is unwilling to question his appropriated faith

Mean What They Say

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for fear of family reprisal or out of anxiety over not knowing precise religious formulas for everyday activity.

What does it mean when a 190-pound sophomore from western Oklahoma calls home to ask permission to take a girl to a movie? What does it mean when a religiously oriented group flourishes on the campus because it offers answers and promises peace and security? There are students at O.U. who are unwilling to leave home and knuckle under the discipline of academic work, religious inquiry—they are unwilling to expose themselves or their faith to the risk and rigor of re-examination and re-affirmation.

Then there are students who break away or react against or reject home, parental traditions and regulations. They assert their independence by refusing to align themselves with campus activities. They rebel against University regulations and required courses. Some struggle to be themselves and stand on their own feet; others use rebellion as an escape from facing the fact of their deep dependence. In the latter instance, ostensibly they are breaking away; ironically they become dependent on their independence.

Some students are trying to decide for themselves what to retain from home and family and what to open to further scrutiny and appraisal. Others rebel against the old order with no alternative plan or vision in mind. These often become members of the cult of despair and hopelessness, "neurotic anxiety" resulting from no direction or purpose renders them impotent.

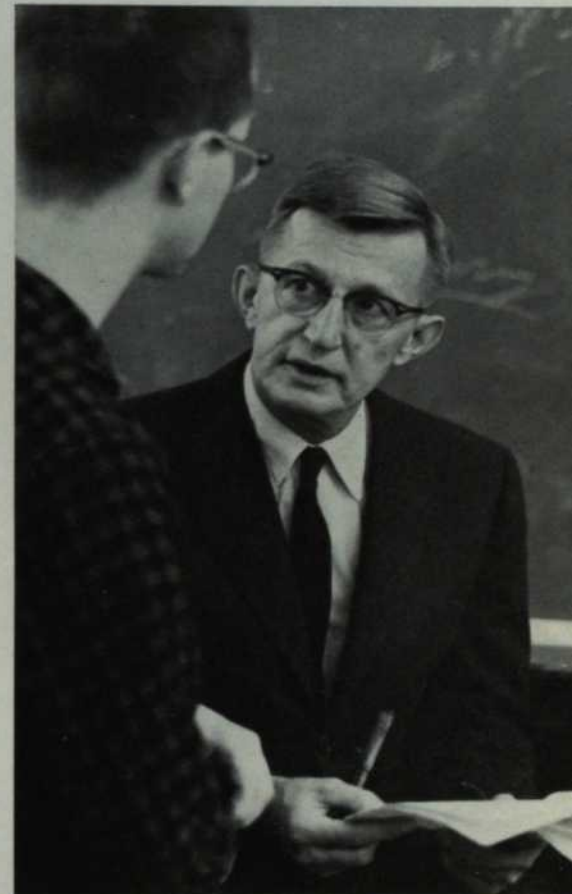
STILL other students revolt against home-town morality and religious beliefs to assert their independence and then substitute a new god as the orienting factor in their lives: science, history, success, beauty, drama. That independence alone does not give satisfaction is evident in the uneasiness characteristic of all these students.

Finally, there are those students who are looking for the conditions of inter-relation (on the moral level) and are seeking to

become persons (on the religious level). These students recognize that one cannot be a person in isolation or in total dependence. They are struggling to find meaning for their dependent/independent nature in inter-dependence. Students in this group are turning from moralism, doctrinal institutionalism, unquestioned piety, to probing inquiry into basic questions about life. They question the use of religious words and symbols which have little meaning to modern man. They do not want to do away with religious language but are concerned to reinterpret old symbols and stories or write new interpretations. The longing is to surmount terminological problems in religion and ferret out religious truth. Rather than settle for irrelevancies in religion and its institutions, these students struggle to understand what it means to be a person in a community of believers.

In a word, then, we observe that students reflect in their moral and religious outlook acquiescence to dependence, determination to be independent, or the struggle to find meaning in inter-dependence. A suggestion about the deeper meaning of man may be important to an understanding of what underlies these current expressions of moral and religious concern.

Man is a creature of balance and of aspiration. He shows two basic drives: the impulse to live, to achieve stability, order, security, the conscious control of his conduct; and the impulse to improve, to achieve the better and the best, to risk so as to ascend to new heights. Balance alone means sterility. Aspiration alone means waste. Balance and aspiration in fruitful tension means continuous advance and achievement. As in the very simple act of walking there must be alternation between standing and falling, so in life there must be alternation between balance and aspiration. An inordinate concern for dependence is the equivalent of balance abstracted from aspiration. An inordinate concern for independence is the equivalent of aspiration divorced from balance. Dependence and independence together in complementary



As both professor and minister, Dr. Feaver has heard all kinds of student attitudes on religion.

or reciprocal relation means continuous advance. As it is classically expressed in Scripture, man must lose himself in order to find himself. Could it be that the student in his religious longings and rebellions evidences an ambivalence between security/risk, balance/improvement—that he seeks in his religion that which will satisfy one or the other or both of these pervading drives?

Now the question *What is religion?* Is it a set of statements about reality, a set of judgments about special types of values, a concern with certain relationships, a certain mode of activity? Is religion a certain type of sentiment, a type of moral behavior? Is it primarily belief in God?

continued

no one exists apart from his society

Historically, the essential meaning of religion is sometimes equated with reason or feeling or moral consciousness or will or value. For instance, from the fact of feeling in the religious experience, religion is sometimes defined as feeling; or from the fact of thought in religion, it is sometimes defined as a kind of philosophy. The facts seem to suggest that religion includes all these meanings. It involves a subject, an object confronted and considered ultimate, and the relation of the two. On the subjective side it refers to trans-subjective divine reality. Moreover, it involves the relation of the subject to divine reality in worship, fellowship, service. This relationship is controlled by purpose. The immediate purpose is the conservation and enhancement of human values (whether social or individual); the ultimate purpose is devotion to divine reality for its own sake as the object of supreme and final truth and value.

So understood, religion aims at unification, at being all-inclusive or co-extensive with the whole of life. It does not mean to be one thing among many or one thing existing side by side with others on equal terms. Religion is not seen as against science or any other human endeavor; rather, it is that which perceives distinctions and at the same time demands relationship and communication among all the elements and disciplines in human life. It means to intensify, to sanctify, to enhance every human function and faculty and activity. It means to make men reinterpret and revalue the otherwise secular facts of life. It means to transfigure the commonplace, to give sacramental meaning even to material objects, to give vitality to the drab and dull. The imperative of religion is to search for and to be loyal to the source and ground of all life and to live in the light of the demands of the relationship thereby established.

WHEN the student (as is probably the case with all men) finds himself impelled by the concern for security or "increased perfection" and tries to fulfill the demand of one or the other or both of these drives, his search becomes a religious quest—though the result may not be religious achievement. And, to repeat our initial observation, students sometimes settle for the parasitic life of dependence wherein there is secur-

ity but impotence and sterility. Sometimes they risk the life of isolation and experience despair in being cut off and dehumanized. Sometimes they pioneer for deeper value and meaning wherein balance and aspiration are "seen" in their mutual relationship, and inter-dependence with the ground of all being and other persons is established.

THERE is another factor which influences the religious and moral perspectives of students. No one exists apart from the society or culture in which he is born. Some of us do pretend to escape social influences and pressures, but the world "squeezes us into its mold" even as we struggle within ourselves to establish individual identity. American students live in a culture which is moving toward dehumanization and depersonalization. They live in a world geared to enhance "thinghood." Supposedly, meaning in life is found in adjustment or getting along in the structure of society as sculptured by impersonal, efficient organizations. Everything from education to career to church is a matter of human engineering—learning to accommodate to society as it is. Institutions such as the university, even the church sometimes, assess their effectiveness in terms of their success in helping individuals be at home in their culture. Is it any wonder that students either succumb to these pressures or rebel against them or seek outlets which free them to be persons?

Returning to the level of observation, there seems to be currently on this campus a concern for *direction* or *orientation*. The question of meaning in life or meaninglessness is an open option. Is it possible that students are at times exceedingly discerning in seeing that our institutions—home, school, church—are not always fully responsible to their function in society? Is the fact that they ignore organized religion the sign that they are anti-religious or that they find that the basic questions about life are often being raised elsewhere? In any event, it seems evident that students have latent, dormant questions and longings, and that they respond eagerly to any opportunity to look at the meaning of human life and human value, personal and social.

The student who clings to the assurance of being a "born-again Christian," the one

who flaunts his assertions of being an "atheist," and the one who struggles relentlessly to know who he is—all of these students respond when confronted with basic religious questions. Is the climate at O.U. "religious"? Is there evidence that religion is flourishing? Are the values of the students grounded in the Judeo-Christian heritage? Is the moral climate at O.U. of "high quality"? Are students articulate in their faith and practicing what they believe? The answer to these questions seems to be that some students

- are quite willing to acquiesce to a life of dependence which means never breaking away from having others decide for them
- are lashing out against all that is identified with tradition, family, society, stability, and rejecting for the sake of rejecting
- are finding gods which serve as "the ultimate" in their lives and have devoted themselves to these gods, at least until the gods fail them
- are uncritically accepting the patterns demanded by the culture and do whatever custom dictates to be "right"
- are seeking every opportunity to discover insights into basic questions about life and ways to act in the light of these discoveries
- are being awakened to ask "what is man?" and "what is the source of life?"—in classes, dorm discussions, church groups
- are closing their ears and minds to anything which might jar them from the security of apathy and complacency—they have accepted "thinghood."
- are discovering what it means to be a person in community with other persons and have opened themselves to the enhancement of themselves as human beings and therefore to the prospects of endless growth
- are asking religious questions but have not recognized them as religious
- are seeing that religious questions are often raised and pursued in non-religious garb
- are finding the church a convenient place to hide
- are finding a community of inquiry within the church
- are . . .