

8-1-1951

The Church's Opportunity on State College and University Campus

Ruben H. Hahn

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hahn, Ruben H. (1951) "The Church's Opportunity on State College and University Campus," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 22, Article 44.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol22/iss1/44>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXII

AUGUST 1951

No. 8

The Church's Opportunity on State College and University Campus

By REUBEN W. HAHN *

I

THINGS are happening in secular higher education. The State colleges and universities have recaptured much of their lost concern for religion and are setting themselves to the task of putting religion at the heart of the educational process as a guiding, motivating, and integrating force.

One of the most gratifying factors on the educational scene is the growing determination of college administrators to suffuse the campuses with religion.

Witness Robert G. Sproul, president of the University of California:

I believe that religion is basic to morals, central in our American culture, unique as a dynamic within the individual, able to save us from ourselves and lead us out into nobility. I believe that without religion we are forced to substitute weak conventions for permanent values and abiding standards; that, without religion, civilization . . . must yield inevitably to disintegration and decay. Believing these things, I believe also that the university which makes no effort to stimulate in its sons and daughters a sensitiveness to the issues of religion is likely to be a danger rather than a benefit to the State. Certainly it cannot serve its people as fully as it should unless it finds some way . . . to blend with knowledge

* The author, Executive Secretary of the Student Service Commission, delivered this address at the graduation exercises of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, June 1, 1951, at which time the faculty conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*.

and culture the rugged force of character and the spiritual power that give to these life and value. So only may knowledge become wisdom.¹

Dr. J. L. Morill, president of the University of Minnesota, who has freely made campus facilities available to religious groups, declared in 1949: "Our University is pleased to welcome as partners . . . the religious foundations on the campus."²

At the annual Recognition Day banquet sponsored by our University of Michigan student group last Sunday night, May 27, Dr. Deborah Bacon, dean of women, deplored the present policy which permits a required on-campus study of God's Word from such a secondary source as Milton, but necessitates a trek from the campus to the denominational student center for a study of the primary source.

In the fall of 1949 the University of Minnesota sponsored a conference on "Religion in the State University." This historic meeting was attended by State university administrators, legal experts, and representatives of national religious organizations, including our own church body. The announced purpose of this conference was to explore possibilities for enlarged provisions for religious activity affecting the whole campus life.³ A similar meeting took place in December, 1950. A third is scheduled for the fall of the current year.

II

Why this quest for religion in higher education?

The universities have seen their finished products leave the campuses thoroughly trained to split the atom and then calmly go about the business of blowing up the universe. They have seen the illiterate hobo steal a ride on a freight train, while their university product, through skillful manipulation, made away with the entire railroad. They have seen the products of their citadels of learning aggressively involved in sundry antisocial acts of exploitation. They have seen college-trained men and women prostitute their literary talents and produce stacks of best-selling novels whose "heroes succumb so monotonously to temptation that they cannot truly be said to be tempted at all."⁴ The universities are disappointed, and scared.

With amazing unanimity the administrators of State colleges

and universities have endorsed and echoed the statement which fell from the lips of Dean Maurice D. Helser of Iowa State College at the convention of Gamma Delta, the International Association of Lutheran Students, on his campus in 1945: "The student who is developed every way but spiritually is lopsided; such a person we do not want to represent Iowa State College."

A basic reason for this quest for religion is the discovery by the universities that man, not matter, is the chief problem of human existence. They have discovered as true the observation of Henry Link: "By nature the individual is selfish. . . . It requires religion . . . to overcome the selfish impulses."⁵ They have been compelled to agree with the hard statement of President Conant to a graduating class at Harvard: "Man's nature is such that all men some of the time, and some men all of the time, will feel and behave . . . as though they were possessed of a devil. . . . Human history, without a miraculous intervention of God . . . will continue to be . . . a scene of human frustrations."⁶ With Chancellor R. G. Gustavson of the University of Nebraska they readily confess: "Man has a great knowledge which enables him to master the physical and biological worlds. He lacks . . . the will to do good."⁷ This observed wickedness of the human heart has induced them to recognize the validity of Bertrand Russell's conclusion: "The heart is as necessary for the good life as the head,"⁸ and to come to grips with the corrupt human heart through the medium of religion.

We, now, who operate on the campus periphery with the dynamic Gospel of Jesus Christ, which has been designed to reconstruct the human heart, have been encouraged and urged to advance to the inside with our potent religion and assist the universities in their effort to produce what, by common consent, they call "the rounded man." We must respond to that summons universally and with alacrity.

Mere religion, however valuable it may be as a starting point, is not enough to accomplish the desired change in man. The Spirit-empowered Christian religion is the sole means to that desired end. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son,"—that, and that alone—"cleanseth us from all sin." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." 1 John 1:7; 2 Cor. 5:17.

The universities also clamor for religion because of their discovery, as Dr. George Schuster of Hunter College put it, that "secularism, the practical exclusion of God from human thinking and living, is at the root of the world's travails."⁹ When God and religion are squeezed out of education, the inevitable result is a truncated culture, a conception of life without the upward look, and an unbounded faith in man—the skilled, but uncontrolled terror of the world.

Educators and scientists who have been thinking at all have been diverted from the proud humanism glorified by the British poet Swinburne in his familiar paean: "Glory to man in the highest, For man is the master of things." Theirs has, instead, become the fear-induced confession: In times like these we need something bigger than ourselves. We need God. How can we get at Him? And how can we get man to respond to His presence and say: Not my will, but Thine be done?

The Church must recognize this repudiation of humanism as the open door and enter and help stay the tide of secularism which has overwhelmed the colleges—State and Church colleges alike—as it has all of our corporate life. It must utilize this manifest natural knowledge of God, as St. Paul did in Athens, Acts 17: 23-29, and lead seekers to the God who has revealed Himself in the Holy Scriptures as the God of three Persons in one inseparable essence, Matt. 28:19-20, the one living God, whose beloved, care-free, altruistic, and properly motivated children men *become* through faith in Christ, John 1:12; Matt. 6:31; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:11.

III

This leads to another point of concern, namely, the problem of introducing religion in the State college in view of the constitutional provision requiring separation of Church and State. What is meant by separation of Church and State? Does separation of Church and State mean separation of religion from the State? Does the constitutional provision granting freedom of religion demand freedom *from* religion? Does separation of Church and State demand secularism and religious indifference in higher education? The State universities are asking these questions, and we of the Church must help them find the answers.

It is an historical fact of central importance that public higher education has never been so completely divorced from religion as primary and secondary education. Donald Tewksbury points out that early American people who founded State universities were not willing to accept the apparent implication that State-supported higher education must be of a secular character.¹⁰ The charters and objectives of many State universities, moreover, include references to religion, and not a few early State university presidents were clergymen.

It is also an established fact that Thomas Jefferson, who founded the University of Virginia as a State university free from Church control, did not intend to divorce religion from education. As a matter of fact, he proposed that religion courses be included in the curriculum (on the denominational level), and though the chapel now standing on that campus was not built under his direction, his plans did make provision for its construction at a later date.

While explorations in this area continue, we of the Student Service Commission shall vigorously pursue our present constructive policy on the State college campus. We shall encourage the several synodical Districts to inaugurate and maintain — with synodical grants if necessary — a strong and vital religious program in competently staffed and well-equipped student centers on campuses within their respective geographical areas. We shall work for the unhampered representation of other religious groups at State colleges and universities. We shall urge college and university administrators to encourage religious activities, worship in particular, on the denominational level. We shall contribute to the university's counseling service and avail ourselves of other proffered service opportunities. We shall seek to win unchurched students and staff members for Christ. While we shall contend for the freedom to disbelieve, we shall also focus attention on the definition of academic freedom adopted by the officials of Indiana University and in essence by all the Big Ten Universities: "No teacher shall claim as his right the privilege of discussing in his classroom controversial topics obviously and clearly outside of his own field of study."¹¹ We shall encourage vigorous Lutheran participation in campus religious councils and national conferences in the interest of these pursuits. We shall, in addition, encourage the scores of

Lutheran men and women who teach at State colleges and universities to regard their teaching office as a God-pleasing vocation and indicate to them their obligation to make an impact on the spiritually ignorant and bewildered members of the campus.

A word is in place regarding chairs of religion at State colleges and universities. Factors which have militated against our going all out for chairs of religion include the following: The questioned legality of existing chairs of religion; the non-denominational character of religion courses in the majority of State universities; denominational chairs of religion without college credit; college credit for religion courses taken by religious illiterates; notoriously low academic standards, which tend to bring religion into disrepute; a watered-down theology resulting from a mandatory objective teaching of religion; and the paucity of students eligible for elective courses in religion.

The present trend toward making religion courses legal, respectable, and relevant; the movement toward including religion in the electives available to all students; and the proposed denomination-staffed and accredited chairs of religion not only encourage a revised attitude toward chairs of religion, but suggest the desirability, even necessity, of substantial financial provision for the creation of Church-endowed chairs of religion occupied by competent and respected Lutheran student pastors or full-time teachers of religion. The total absence of a Synod-maintained university and the existence of only one small Synod-related university also tend to encourage capitalization of this potential and exceedingly economical religious opportunity in higher education.

Our Church's point of chief concern as it surveys its campus opportunity dare no longer be the State university's alleged overt hostility to religion, but its unwilling neglect of religion. Our Church now has the opportunity to contribute toward the university's acknowledged and necessary task of "holoism" — the education of the whole man.¹² It can and must intensify its solicited invasion of the campuses with its potent Christian faith and enable the colleges and universities to release a body of re-oriented men and women who are thoroughly equipped to live with Christ forever and for Him now.

Chicago, Ill.

REFERENCES

1. President Robert G. Sproul, the University of California, in *The Obligation of Universities to the Social Order*. Edited by H. P. Fairfield. New York University Press, pp. 382—383.
2. *Walking Together*, a brochure on Religious Foundations, University of Minnesota, 1949.
3. *Religion in the State University*. Edited by Henry Allen, 1950. Burgess Publishing Company, Minneapolis, Minn.
4. *Harper's Magazine*, July, 1948.
5. *The Return to Religion*, Henry C. Link, p. 33.
6. Quoted in the *Christian Century*, July 8, 1942, p. 858.
7. *They Go to Church*, a publication of the Student Service Commission.
8. *Icarus*, Bertrand Russell, p. 58.
9. George Schuster, Hunter College, "The Contemporary Situation as a Catholic Sees It." *Social Action*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, January 15, 1948, p. 21.
10. *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War*. New York Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932, p. 56.
11. *Student Pastor's Workbook*, Student Service Commission, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, p. XVIII-50.
12. *So You Are Going to College*, Clarence Lovejoy. Simon and Schuster, p. 88.