

A New Dimension in the Ministry: The Director of Religious Affairs

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ON THE American campus there has emerged a new religious professional. He is not a chaplain, nor a pastor to students, nor an agent of the church. Rather, he is an employee of the university holding the title Director (or Coordinator) of Religious Affairs. In this paper I shall define the position of this new professional (1) by identifying the type of campus where the office most properly belongs, (2) by examining the church-state relationship involved in the position, and (3) by looking somewhat intimately at the Director as he operates in his dual role as coordinator and educator.

I

Recently a story has been going around on campuses about the two professors who were at the crucifixion of Jesus. After that sordid affair was over, the two professors walked away together, and one said to the other: "You know, he really was a fine teacher." The other professor mused over this for awhile and then said: "Yes, he was a fine teacher . . . but he didn't publish anything."

In rough analogy, the atmosphere confronting religion on campus today is something like this: it is a fine thing, but it doesn't publish"; it seems quite commendable, yet perhaps it does not quite belong. On a university campus the position of religion is ambiguous. Most people are for it, vaguely agreeing

that religion is a good thing, but many people, and especially faculty people, are suspicious of it. To be sure, there are some who are downright hostile, but mostly religion is questioned within the university community because there is much vagueness as to why it is there and what it is trying to do.

If I sense accurately the nature of our religious confusion on campus today, it is not just a reflex of anxiety philosophy, although that is in it, but a confusion which arises out of the rapidity with which we are moving from the old sectarian hegemonies to the new openness of dialogue and pluralism. More simply stated: our university world is beginning to adjust to a new concept of its role in relation to theology and the claims of religion, and this new role is different from what religion has known on campus in the past. Initially and traditionally in both Europe and America theology stood firmly at the center of things. It was one of the basic faculties along with Law and Medicine and, to a lesser degree, the Arts. From the Sorbonne to Oxford and Cambridge, to Harvard, and William and Mary, and Yale, there was never a question of where religion stood in the college, or why it was there.

The American colonials, taking their pattern from the universities at home, created colleges with a central concern for theology. When the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony authorized in 1636 the establishment of a college, later called Harvard, it did so to "advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity, dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the

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dust." William and Mary was also founded to train ministers, with the special stipulation that the youths were to be taught to spread the Christian Gospel among the Indians. Yale was founded for the purpose in instructing young men to fit them for "Public employment both in Church and State." (as a matter of religious fact, Yale was founded because Harvard was getting too theologically liberal.) The same fundamental concern for religion was central in the founding of Columbia, and Princeton, and Rutgers, and Brown, and later, the many other religion-centered institutions like them across the country. Today this has all changed for at these schools, even where the theory of sectarian theology has remained, the fact has not remained. These institutions and the clientele they serve actually represent no sectarian unanimity. Seminaries and departments of religions have survived here and there, and some of them are of unquestioned excellence; but the seminaries are professional schools touching only a few students, and the religion departments are usually not central in the institutions, and often touch even fewer students than the seminaries. In most universities both sectarian indoctrination and compulsory chapel have long since disappeared. These schools are, in fact, **public** institutions. Public not in the sense of being state supported, but public in the sense of being open to the public. Perhaps we should call them public institutions of the traditional type. This is surely preferable to calling them secular institutions for secular connotes being of the world as opposed to being of the church, and although some of the important university/seminary complexes may have in one or more of the new mythologies misplaced God temporarily they are not intentionally Godless, and at least traditionally they did aspire to literate ministers and converted Indians. The term private institution would fit them in

the fact that they are independent corporations, but this term I prefer to reserve for those institutions which from their inceptions were independent of church relatedness: places like Cornell, and Tulane, and John Hopkins, and Leland Stanford. Now the point to be made is not whether "traditional" is the right word or "private" is the right word, but that all of these institutions—the traditional types, and the private types, as well as the state and land-grant universities—have become multi-faith institutions depending upon the general public for their faculties and students.

Even many of the universities and colleges still closely identified with the church, and where some effort is made to continue the centrality of religion, are, in fact, "public" and pluralistic institutions. The University of Denver (my own Alma Mater) is a good case in point. It has a continuing tie with Methodism. It has a continuing emphasis on religion (with both a department of religion and a chaplain), but it also has more non-Methodists than Methodists attending. It is more pluralistic than Methodist, and it relies upon the general public for both its faculty and student body. What is true of the large church-related university is often equally true of the smaller institutions; e.g., Whittier College in California is by percentages more Methodist, and Baptist, and Presbyterian, than it is Quaker. For its clientele it depends upon the "public", not just the Friends.

With the possible exception of Catholic universities, most of our important institutions of higher learning are of multi-faith character, and depend for students upon a general public clientele. If such institutions are to address themselves to the religious life of their real **studia generalia**, they must do so with an awareness that the majority of the students and faculty are not Presbyterian at Yale, or Methodist at Denver, or without religious convictions, com-

mittments, ideas, needs, and aspirations at Kansas State.

That we have such a potpourri of religiosity on campus has not always been the situation even in state schools. My own institution, Kansas State University, is an example in point.

A hundred years ago The Methodist Church gave the State of Kansas a small college in Manhattan, Kansas. Under the Morrell Act it was immediately renamed from Bluemont College to Kansas State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts. But no one should suppose this changed the college overnight from sectarian to secular. Its presidents went right on being selected from the clergy; moral philosophy went right on being central in the curriculum; and chapel went right on being a compulsory. Then gradually the technological and scientific subjects developed and the humane arts became less central in the curriculum. Eventually moral philosophy went by the board, and finally even compulsory chapel. But the aura of indigenous Protestantism remained, centred now in the YMCA.

After World War II the college began to concern itself once again with the humane studies, and began to aspire to the magic title of university. With this new look at things, there came also a new concern for religion. A number of religious foundations had sprung up around the campus. Two memorial chapels, gifts of the alumni, had been erected, and someone got the idea it would be "nice" to have a chaplain. This author being a mixture of college professor and Methodist preacher seemed qualified for the job and was hired. Somewhat naively he went to Manhattan with good ideas about doing good, but almost immediately discovered that doing good was complicated by something the administration had failed to tell him, or had failed itself to realize: Kansas State was no longer a Methodist college. There were Presbyterians there, and Lutherans, and

Baptists, and Mennonites, and Quakers. It was no longer even safely Protestant, for there had been a Catholic invasion, and a Jewish invasion, and a Mormon invasion, and a foreign invasion of Hindus and Buddhists and Muslims. The safe old Protestant hegemony was gone. The place had become not only state supported, but public and pluralistic.

Whatever the University President had in mind when he hired the New Director of Religious Affairs calling him vaguely a "pastor to students" dissolved in the reality of what actually exists on American campuses today. It is to this reality—to this religious milieu; this fact of pluralism—that the Director of Religious Affairs addresses himself—and he does so not as a university chaplain, but as a coordinator of religious affairs, on the one hand, and a religious educator, on the other.

This difference we shall now try to clarify further by examining the position of the Director of Religious Affairs in the context where it has had its most effective development; on the state university campus.

II

The first and perennial question is, of course, should such an office exist at all on a state campus? Is it not somehow a violation of the "establishment clause" of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States? The answer to this (based upon reasons we shall not examine) is emphatically "no". Neither the office of the Director of Religious Affairs, nor the teaching of religious subjects in public schools are inviolations of the "law of the land".

Awhile back there was a story going round about a first grade teacher who entered her classroom and found several little boys over in the corner on their knees. In considerable distress the teacher hurried over to them and asked what they were doing. They confessed that they were shooting dice. The teacher is great relief exclaimed: "oh, thank heaven, I was afraid you were

praying." Mr. Justice Stewart, when he dissented from the Opinion of the Court in the New York Regent's Prayer Case, a year ago, said he could not see how official religion was established "by letting those who want to say a prayer say it." He also dissented from the Opinion of The Court in the June 17, Bible reading decision. But the fact is that these "religious exercises" are now officially forbidden as parts of public school practice, and the question must be asked, "What else is excluded?" and specifically here, "What about Chaplains and/or Directors at state schools?"

No one, and certainly not a layman in the law, can predict what the Supreme Court will do in cases yet to come before it, but at the moment there is strong evidence for believing that neither religious coordination, nor courses in religion taught for the dissemination of knowledge are in much danger of being found unconstitutional. At the same time, the practice on some tax-supported campuses of employing a university chaplain and conducting religious services may be in trouble.

Having read the cases carefully, I am convinced that since 1947, the five Opinions of the Court on the question of religious establishment have brought reasonable clarity and reasonable conclusions to the question of religion and public education. And these conclusions are supportive of pluralistic religion, and not antagonistic to it.

Admittedly the first two cases (the Everson case and the McCollum case) seem not to support this contention, but actually in context they do support it. In the Everson case, the Court declared in severe language the "the First Amendment had erected a wall of separation between the church and state . . ." which was high and impenetrable, and which meant, among other things, that no laws could be passed which "aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over an-

other." The prohibition against "all religions" was especially bothersome; yet, oddly enough, in that very case the Court found no violation involved when (authorized by a New Jersey statute) moneys from tax-funds were paid to parents to transport their children to Catholic parochial schools. It was held that these funds were expended for a public purpose and not as an aid to religion.

A year after the Everson case, McCollum brought suit to stop the practice in Champaign, Illinois of permitting sectarian teachers from entering the school buildings to give religious instruction. The Court, in the severity of the preceding case, struck down this practice because (1) public buildings were being used, and (2) the compulsory school attendance machinery was involved in the fact that the children had to be in school during the hours when the classes were being taught.

Four years later, however, the Court displayed a very different attitude when it upheld the released time program in the City of New York. The only significant difference being that in the New York situation the pupils left the school and went to privately owned buildings for their religious instruction.

In the two earlier cases, Justices Black and Frankfurter had resurrected a fictitious wall of separation out of an old Thomas Jefferson letter, but Mr. Justice Douglas writing the Opinion in the New York (Zorach) case in 1952 stated the situation more realistically. He found the Court to be not the enemy of religion, but the proper guardian of Church/State relations. There could be no countenance of the interference with "free exercise" of religion, or with the "establishment" of religion, but this did not mean:

. . . that in every and all respects there shall be separation of Church and State . . . Otherwise the state and religion would be aliens to each other—hostile, suspicious and unfriendly . . . When the state encour-

ages religious instruction or cooperates with religious authorities by adjusting the schedule of public events to sectarian needs, it follows the best of our traditions. For it then respects the religious nature of our spiritual needs. To hold that it may not, would be to find in the Constitution a requirement that the government show a callous indifference to religious groups. That would be preferring those who believe in no religion over those who do believe . . . we find no constitutional requirement which makes it necessary for government to be hostile to religion and to throw its weight against efforts to widen the effective scope of religious influences." (U.S. Reports, vol. 343, 1952, pp. 312-314).

This position was supported by Mr. Justice Goldberg (joined by Mr. Justice Harlan) in the recent Bible reading case.

"I agree that the attitude of the state toward religion must be one of neutrality. But untutored devotion to the concept of neutrality can lead to invocation or approval of results which partake not simply of that noninterference and non-involvement with the religious which the Constitution demands, but to a brooding and pervasive devotion to the religious. Such results are not only not compelled by the Constitution, but, it seems to me, are prohibited by it." (Advance U.S. Supreme Court Reports, July 1, 1953, pp. 905-6).

We have here a principle which endorses one of the distinctive roles of the Director of Religious Affairs, and the whole campus ministry. We have here the principles of "cooperation" and "encouragement." The importance of this principle cannot be overstated because every university, tax-supported or otherwise, recognizes the religious needs and interests of its students and makes, or should make, accommodations for those needs and interests. Properly these accommodations should be some kind of cooperation between university and church working in parallel support. The independent religious bodies should furnish the programs of worship, and the pastoral care, and the sectarian teach-

ing for their own constituents. On the other side, the university should engage in numerous administrative activities concerned with the religious life of students.

The university is concerned with all student activities. To recognize religious interests is simply to give these students the same consideration given to other students (often the same students) who want to organize in drama clubs, philosophy clubs, bowling clubs, etc. The university should regard it as proper and necessary to assist students to find people of similar religious backgrounds (to put them in contact with their own church) as it is to have them properly housed, properly fed, and wholesomely related in social contacts. The university cannot create the religion for students. On a state campus that would surely be establishment. On other public campuses it would be near-sighted, not recognizing who the faculty and students really are. Therefore, the university should rely upon outside agencies—responsible religious bodies actually to perform the services of religious ministry.

If a state school makes available information to facilitate contact between the student and the religious organization of his own free choice, even to the reasonable degree that it promotes such contacts, it is engaged not in religious establishment, but in "cooperation" and "encouragement," which, the Court in the *Zorach* case found agreeable, to the law of the land. Furthermore, the presence of recognized priests, ministers, and rabbis on campus, serving the spiritual needs of their own communicants must also be acceptable procedure, for surely if bus transportation is held an aid to parents and not to the church, a rabbi talking to a student or several students at their desire and invitation, is an aid to students and not to the church, at least according to the reasoning of the Court in the *Everson* case.

The last two establishment cases (on prayer and Bible reading) caused anguish to many people, and are getting hot debate from lawyers all across the country, but at least for Directors of Religious Affairs and other academicians interested in the teaching of religion as a part of the whole education of man, the "Bible Case" speaks with a clear and welcome sound. It is as certain as such things ever are short of a specific Court decision that religion can be handled as an academic subject taught in a public, tax-supported institution without violating the First Amendment. As far back as the McCollum Case, this was thrusting for approval. But the clear endorsement of religious teaching as a part of public education came last June 17. In the *Schempp/Murray* case, the plaintiffs, if they cannot be handled in an objective, scholarly fashion speak from ignorance. Religion is also scientific; i. e., composed of organized bodies of knowledge. To be sure, any teacher in any subject must teach from his own limitations and perspectives, but this is a problem of teaching, not the curse of religious sectarianism. A good scholar is a good scholar. If he must, to some degree see things from his own perspective, that perspective can be broadened by the simple device of hiring other teachers whose different perspectives will stand with his in corrective confrontation and dialogue. How the teaching is to be done may be moot, but that it can be done in a public, tax-supported institution seems no longer a matter for debate.

The situation of the university employed chaplain is not so sure. There are tax-supported campuses where the university hires a clergyman to act as university chaplain. He conducts worship services, performs marriage ceremonies, baptizes, engages in religious counseling, etc. One might wonder, in the light of the recent prayer and Bible cases, whether such activities can be financed at the public expense. If a

simple prayer recited or ten verses of Scripture read at the beginning of the school day constitute religious "establishment," one might suspect a whole worship service, university sponsored, might also be called "establishment." Yet it is important to remember that the Court only goes as far as necessary. It handles the case before it, and there has been no case before it concerning worship at the college level. And the state university does operate on a much different level of maturity from that of the elementary and secondary schools. Both Brennan and Goldberg (with Harlan joining) make a point that immaturity was an important concern in their consideration of the public school prayer and Bible cases. Brennan argues that prayers said in legislative chambers are delivered before adults, and their maturity spells an important difference in the seriousness of the establishment contention. Goldberg also refers to the "young and impressionable children". Hopefully, if college students are not adults, they are approaching that status, and they are notoriously unimpressionable.

But regardless of whether it is legal or not, the functions performed by a university chaplain are not the functions of a Director of Religious Activities. The Director is not "pastor to the students," but even as now recognized by the Supreme Court, he is a coordinator encouraging and cooperating with the churches in their proper efforts to serve the spiritual needs of students; and as an educator working to effect a program of religious studies, as a part of the general education of man, within the curriculum of his own institution.

III

In this last section, I shall take the liberty to speak more personally about this position of Director of Religious Affairs. This I do on the excuse that (1) some of my readers may be young men who might be interested in considering this kind of position for their own pro-

fessional life, and (2) some may be older men (even friends) who might wonder how anyone can engage in such work and still feel he is part of the ministry.

As I have operated in this position, and have observed my colleagues operating in their similar positions, it has become increasingly obvious that where the campus ministers are concerned (i.e., the campus pastors and directors of religious foundations), the Director of Religious Affairs has a major responsibility to facilitate their work in every way possible. Surely he should never become a device employed to keep religion at a safe distance from the campus, or to substitute ethics and social action for religious life. He may insist that responsible religious bodies operate responsibly on his campus, but he must never permit himself to be, or any other university mechanism to be, a substitute for pluralistic religious life on his campus. He must never usurp the prerogatives of the campus ministry and come between them and their own communicants. Rather, he must work in every way to make it possible for the campus ministers to work as freely and relevantly as circumstances will permit. Ideally he will be thought of by the campus ministers as "their man," when in technical fact he is the university's man. If this condition prevails, he will be in the situation of true liaison and extremely valuable in both directions. As the "ministers' man" he will be genuinely concerned for the work being done by the religious foundations related to his campus, and will be an important voice for them speaking inside the university system. At the same time, as the university's man, he will be a professional religionist who understands the many and often conflicting claims of religious bodies and will give expert advice for university policy concerning religion on campus. For example: my campus ministers had long agitated for courses in religion in the curriculum of the University (just as I

had done long and laboriously as a campus minister at a university in Colorado), and they (as I in Colorado) had always received a friendly reception from the University Administration which always took their suggestions under advisement. To my knowledge, in Colorado the suggestions are still under advisement, but at Kansas State, partly because there was a voice on the inside talking for the cause, courses in religion have been introduced into the curriculum, certain qualified campus ministers have been engaged as guest lecturers and resource persons for some of the courses, and now, by recent University approval, there is a program of undergraduate studies wherein a student can elect to major in the philosophy of religion. On the other hand (on the University side), when a questionable group appealed for recognition on campus as a student religious activity, they were, on the recommendation of the Director, denied acceptance, for cause. And one should be assured that the cause was not theological. They were denied not because they believed differently from someone else, but because in past demonstrations, and from the format of their proposed program, they would be, in our best judgment, operating in violation of both the principles and guiderules for pluralistic religious life on campus, and the Constitutional prohibition against using state property for the propagation of a sectarian faith. If, as I have suggested in a new NCCJ publication¹ there are such things as a Principle of Conscientiousness, and a Guiderule of Pluralism, and, on tax-supported campuses, a Rule of Separation, then the communication, support and enforcement of these principles and rules must constitute one of the responsibilities of the Director. Happily, it has been my experience that not much enforcing is necessary among

¹ A DIFFERENT DRUM, by William C. Tremmel, published by the National Conference of Christian and Jews.

the campus ministers. As they have worked together, and actually been instrumental in the development of these principles and rules, they have in fact growingly exemplified respect for the sanctity of each man's conscience, and the openness and dignity of dialogue and pluralism. They have not submitted to a new order so much as create it.

Some time ago at a conference of Lutheran campus ministers I was asked how I could be satisfied to work as a Director, i.e., feel no compulsion to preach my own particular brand of Gospel on campus. I answered honestly, I think, by saying that on campus I am an academician, or at least a member of the student personnel staff. This does not mean that I am not a practicing Christian, or on Sunday, a persuaded and persuading Methodist Elder. But on Monday, I function, as Dr. Franklin Littell points out in his fine book *FROM STATE CHURCH TO PLURALISM*, "not as a clergyman, but as an educator." On Monday I trust without reservation the good intentions and the capacities of the rabbis, priests, and ministers who supply my campus with a religious ministry, which because it is a public, multi-faith community, my University could not possibly, properly supply for itself.

In the other facet of my office, I am far more positive and aggressive. I am a professor and currently Chairman of the Philosophy Department. I am on the inside, and religion is an academic discipline which my University cannot properly ignore if it hopes really to educate. Admittedly my institution like so many others is slow to recognize this

fact, but by dint of persistence and maneuvering and, I hope, by some demonstration of scholarly ability, we are moving more firmly into the academic life of the university where it really counts—in the classroom.

In my opinion the most important role of the Director of Religious Affairs is the one not yet much more than beginning. It is his place in the academic affairs of the university. He must concern himself vitally with the dissemination of religious information, and the advancement of religious knowledge on campus. To do this he will use every proper means to instruct the administration and faculty concerning the concepts of pluralistic religion in American life; he will be the inveterate helmsman of religious dialogue; he will bend every effort too bring to his campus for special religious programs, scholars of outstanding ability; and he will use every opportunity to promote the formal classroom teaching of religious subjects by properly qualified instructors.

I believe that increasingly it will be recognized, and should be recognized, that no matter how the Director is related to the university administratively, he is primarily an educational officer. Without losing sight of his important responsibilities as facilitator to the pastor programs of the campus ministers, his more important concern will be the advancement of the religious knowledge for the benefit of his faculty colleagues, the maturity of students, the improvement of human life, and, with my Lutheran friends' permission—to the glory of God.

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