Patterns of Administration and Sponsorship of Religion in American Universities

GLEN OTIS MARTIN

IN A series of papers on such closely related topics, prepared without the opportunity for collaboration, it will be difficult to avoid some duplication and indefensible conflicts. I am sure that by the time this is read in the meeting, I shall be wishing earnestly I had given in to the temptation to refuse to write my thoughts down in order to be free to rewrite hurriedly as the others talked.

This brief paper will of necessity be filled with bifurcations and multiple fractures into categories, seemingly without end, but one unity growing out of the title will be maintained arbitrarily. American universities will be treated in accordance with the assigned topic without distinction as to origin or present sponsorship and financial support. Except for a specific comment with respect to the host institution in the conclusion, no attempt will be made to judge or evaluate the patterns or to assign them to specific categories of institutions. Indeed, it must be noted that examples of almost all the various patterns can be found in institutions which are tax supported, independent or private, and church related. Most of the independent or private institutions were started by the church and reflected basic concern for religion. Clarence Shedd has pointed out that early state universities were likewise involved:

> It is a mistake to think of the early state universities as purely secular and divorced from religious influence and control. As Donald Tewksbury points out in **The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War,** they were in their foundations frequently quite as religious as the denominational colleges.[1]

No American university has been completely free from some involvement with religion and hence some pattern of administration, although there are a few whose relationships seem to be primarily negative, largely because of a rigid interpretation of the state constitution. The primary problem in outlining the various patterns is the multiplicity of possible combinations and the absence of clear and definite categories. Furthermore, there have been trends toward secularization in most institutions, followed by an about-face starting in some cases as early as the founding of student YMCA's in 1858-59 or as late as the end of World War II and producing an increased involvement with religion. The result is that no stable program can be isolated even for a given institution.

Religion in American universities will have to be broken down into at least four categories. (1) The most obvious manifestation of religion in a form undeniably integral to the university is the **teaching** of formally structured courses in religion for academic credit. There are also structured non-credit courses on many campuses, and these can be included here if they are conducted on the same standards as credit courses or in category four if they are more loosely organized. (2) A second category of religion in American universities is the program of personal **counseling** concerning religious issues, questions, and problems. The fact that this area is often neglected or ignored makes it no less real, and it is included

GLEN OTIS MARTIN is Associate Secretary of the Division of Higher Education of the Methodist Church, Nashville, Tennessee. This paper was read at the Conference on Religion and Higher Education, held at the University of Denver, October, 1960.

[1] Clarence P. Shedd, *The Church Follows Its Students,* p. 5.

even in those universities which formally exclude it or make no staff provision for it. (3) Several universities make provision for corporate **worship** on the campus, and at every university some of the students, faculty, and administration include worship in their weekly schedules. For all too many, one suspects, the weekly Sunday morning worship, when they get there, is their only direct contact with religion. (4) The fourth category is rather arbitrarily given the title **"group work"** and includes a wide variety of informal study programs, social action and social service projects, and opportunities for fellowship and recreation. All these can be designated as religious at least part of the time in terms of content, motivation, or sponsorship. The patterns of administration and sponsorship are not necessarily the same or parallel across the lines of the categories for any given institution, so each must be looked at individually.

There are four common patterns of administration followed with respect to credit courses in religion at American universities. (a) The first of these is the Department of Religion integral to the institution. In a few cases this will be a joint department with philosophy, but usually there will be a department head and one or more professors of various ranks. Salaries and personnel procedures will be the same as for other departments. Such programs are normally included in the College of Liberal Arts in larger universities and the Division of Humanities in smaller ones. Instructors may or may not be ordained clergymen, but normally all are required to have some graduate training other than the professional training for the pastorate given in theological seminaries. (b) Some universities do not have separate departments but include religion courses in the various other departments. For example, courses in the Bible may be included in the Department of English, philosophy of religion and comparative religion in the Department of Philosophy, etc. In at least one university, there is a coordinator assigned to correlate these courses in the various departments and to counsel those who wish to major or minor in the field. Again standard administrative procedures are followed, and the church is not related to the teaching program either in terms of provision of personnel or control of content. (c) A third pattern of administration places the initiative largely in the hands of the churches working together through a School of Religion. The university may be involved to the extent of providing the budget for administration of the school and actually appointing the professors (although they are paid indirectly by their churches), as at the State University of Iowa, or it may limit its participation to the simple agreement to give credit for courses satisfactorily completed when the grades are certified or transferred to them by the completely independent school. Most of the universities which recognize credits from such programs do impose some standards and require clearance of new faculty, new courses for the curriculum, or radical changes in policy. Those universities using this pattern have usually done so because they felt they were prevented by law from having a department of their own or because they felt that this was the best way to meet the demands of our pluralistic religious culture. (d) The Bible chair program is a fourth pattern. Like the third, it leaves the initiative in the hands of the churches, but it differs radically at the point of not requiring them to work together. Any faith, sect or denomination is free to submit proposals for credit courses for approval and then to teach these courses in their own church or campus center. Quality of instruction may vary widely in such a program, and control or supervision by the universities is much more difficult.

There are a few universities which make no provision for credit instruction

in religion, but these are growing fewer in number with the revival of interest in religion as an intellectual discipline under the stimulation of the new theology and other factors. As long ago as 1942, a study of the 726 educational institutions listed by the American Council on Education indicated that 555 of these offered courses in religion,[2] and while the survey does not cover this possibility, it is clear that many of the others had courses available through Schools of Religion or Bible chair programs. The percentage would be much higher now.

College students do have personal problems which can be classified as religious in origin or content; they do wish to ask questions about religion or desire to discuss religious issues as individuals. Different universities have sought to meet their needs in this area in various ways. (a) Some institutions have appointed a full-time staff member with a major assignment in this area. He may be given the title of chaplain or be attached to the office of a chaplain or director of religious activities, or he may be included in the staff of the dean of students or the Psychological Service Center. (b) Another possibility is there will be no special person or persons named in this area, but that the entire counseling staff will be alerted to the opportunities for such counseling. It should be noted that this approach must be a deliberate one on the part of the university and not an ignoring of the problem or dodging of responsibility. (c) A third approach depends largely on the staff time of persons appointed and paid by the church to serve as campus ministers but offers the full cooperation of the university in encouraging cross referral of persons in need of counseling so that the students with religious problems are assigned to appropriate campus ministers and those coming to the minister with problems they cannot meet are referred to trained counselors on the university staff. Such a plan to be effective must like the second be deliberate policy, not accident. (d) The fourth possibility is much too commonly practiced; the university has no real program of its own and when questioned about it defends its lacuna by pointing to the fine work being done by the churches. In the absence of any clear plan and regular system of channels for cross referral of persons in need, such a claim amounts to little more than an excuse. However, it is one pattern and must be mentioned.

Milton McLean deals quite succinctly with the possibilities in the area of worship, stating that ". . . some institutions provide facilities and sponsor services; some provide facilities but do not officially sponsor services; and some do neither."[3] The usual administrative patterns relating to these possibilities would be the following. (a) The provision of a college chapel and a chaplain or dean of the chapel is the most direct approach. The chaplain or dean may conduct worship services in the chapel either regularly or occasionally. (b) The university may provide facilities within which cooperative or individual student groups may sponsor services, but the university does not provide either personnel or official sponsorship for these programs. Categories can be too rigidly drawn, but it is likely that even one officially sponsored worship for a religious emphasis week or baccalaureate service would compromise this position. (c) The university may lack both facilities and personnel but give official blessing and cooperation to the worship services provided by the churches through their campus ministries or in the local church buildings. Such cooperation can be given through the inclusion of notices in campus news bulletins, catalog statements, encouragement for the students to participate

[2] Edward W. Blakeman, *The Administration in Universities and Colleges: Personnel*, p. 8.

[3] Henry E. Allen (ed.), *Religion in The State University*, p. 99.

in such services as freshman orientation assemblies, etc. (d) The fourth possibility is that the university neither has services of its own nor cooperates with those of the church. Such truly secular universities are rather rare, if for no other reason than the public relations value which inheres in concern for religion.

The patterns for administrative relationship to the various group work programs on or around the campus are almost as numerous as the institutions themselves. Some arbitrariness and compression will be obvious in any attempt to classify them, but having already taken the risks in three categories, there is no good reason not to undertake the fourth as well. (a) The university which employs a chaplain and assigns to his office the development of official university-sponsored programs of group work in the areas of study, social action and social service, and recreation as well as the coordination of such activities sponsored by the churches will have the most complete and balanced program. These campus-wide activities are not likely to be as extensive nor as detailed as those carried on by the churches, but a university chaplain is able to bring balance and perspective to the total program and assurance that no significant number of individuals or minority groups are ignored or excluded. (b) A second pattern involves the employment of a coordinator of religious activities who works actively with the church-sponsored groups, the student Y's, and others to achieve as many of the advantages of the first pattern as possible without any direct involvement in programming. It should be noted in this connection that titles and categories may not match, as there are some chaplains who only coordinate programs and some coordinators of religious activities who sponsor programs directly. This is only one of many complications attending this attempt to classify the patterns in this area. (c) The third major possibility is that the work will be left basically in the hands of the churches and voluntary agencies. The university employs no staff to coordinate and assumes no direct administrative responsibility. However, the presence of intelligent good will and such help as was suggested above in 3c is a strong positive aspect of this category, as distinct from the same situation with regard to sponsorship but without the cooperation. (d) There are now relatively few universities which not only leave the matter of religion to the churches but also maintain a complete aloofness from their programs at the campus, being either indifferent or hostile.

Every university is compelled to think through its own position concerning the administration and sponsorship of religion in all these areas. The absence of any adopted plan constitutes an informal plan which may be contrary to the basic principles of the institution but which nonetheless represents it in the eyes of the church and the community. It is outside the scope of this paper, fortunately, to evaluate these various possibilities for the different types of universities in America, but a specific request was included with the assignment that the paper include some comment on the most appropriate option for the University of Denver. The writer also begs permission to include as an appendix a reproduction of a well-written account of a carefully thought through total program at a state university.

It would be presumptuous for anyone with such limited direct experience with the University of Denver to outline a precise pattern for that institution. A careful study of the catalogs of recent issue and some personal contacts would suggest that it is already doing substantially what this writer would propose—namely, follow the first pattern listed in each of the four categories. There would be, if such a proposal is carried out, a Department of

Religion staffed with trained and committed professors offering formal courses in religion and a university chaplain's office, appropriately staffed, providing opportunities for counseling, worship, and group work (both programming and coordination). Not all institutions would be free to do all these things, but the history and present sponsorship of this university do permit the adoption of these patterns. That such a program can be creative and constructive is indicated by this most significant conference on religion in higher education. It is a genuine privilege to share in this experience.

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