

## WILLIAM HENRY BERNHARDT--1893-1979

HARVEY H. POTTHOFF

Dr. William Henry Bernhardt came to the faculty of The Iliff School of Theology in January of 1929. For thirty-five years he served the School as teacher, editor, administrator, friend and counselor of students. He found time to assume responsibilities in the church and community. It is estimated that by virtue of his long tenure at Iliff Dr. Bernhardt taught over one-half of the graduates of the School.

After his retirement in 1964 Dr. and Mrs. Bernhardt moved to San Diego, California where he served as a member of the faculty of California Western University for six years. He died in San Diego September 5, 1979, fifty years after coming to Iliff. A memorial service was held in the Iliff Chapel October 15.

Dr. Bernhardt taught in the fields of Philosophy of Religion, Theology, and Ethics. A major part of his scholarly attention was given to the functional analysis of religion and to research related to the problem of God. His interests reached into the fields of value theory and ethics.

Four times Dr. Bernhardt was called upon to serve as interim president of Iliff. He nurtured the School's ecumenical character. He was instrumental in introducing the tenure system and sabbatical leave to the Iliff program.

Dr. Bernhardt was mainly responsible for bringing *The Iliff Review* into being. He served as its first editor from 1944 to 1952. He was a regular contributor to this publication until 1964 when his papers under the theme *Truth In Religion* appeared.

Dr. Bernhardt came to Iliff at a time when the fundamentalist controversy was still raging. Not many years later personalistic theism became highly influential particularly in Methodist seminaries. Reflecting the influence of Barth and Brunner in Europe, American neo-orthodoxy later came to exercise widespread influence. In 1933 the Humanist Manifesto made its appearance. Through all these variations of theological thought Dr. Bernhardt steered a steady course.

He was committed to empirical methodologies, calling for "a willingness to investigate and use critical methodologies." He affirmed the "reality principle" in religion. In the study of religious phenomena he used the method of functional analysis. In research related to the problem of God he employed the method of operationalism. He set forth a version of theistic naturalism which he called "operational

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theism." His ethical system called for "the conservation and enrichment of the life for which we have reverence." He affirmed an "ethic of responsible power." At many points Dr. Bernhardt anticipated theological insights which were to come to more widespread consideration decades later.

If today The Iliff School of Theology is a School of liberal and ecumenical spirit, seeking to deal with living issues, drawing on interdisciplinary resources, employing empirical methodologies; if Iliff is a School perceiving itself as being in and for the church—the intellectual center of the church's life; if Iliff is concerned with preparing ministers competent to serve the present age with an awareness of the historical functions of religion and the resources of tradition, but also with knowledge and skills related to contemporary experience, we must thank a company of persons who have contributed to making this possible. Dr. Bernhardt is one of the most distinguished of those persons.

In and out of the classroom he was interested in his students. He was both patient and prodding. He brought a kindly humor to his work. In the finest sense he was a gentleman and a scholar. His influence lives in his students, in colleagues with whom he was associated, in his writings, in structures and policies of the institution he served so well.

Dr. Bernhardt was committed to the vision expressed by Bishop Henry White Warren in 1893: "The Iliff School of Theology has been established to promote progress in doctrine and experience. In doctrine it fears no criticism, courts always an advance." Dr. Bernhardt took the torch at a crucial point in the School's history. He passes it on to those who in days ahead will share in creating and re-creating the Iliff tradition

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*Editor's Note:* A special issue of *The Iliff Review* was devoted to analysis of Professor Bernhardt's philosophy (Vol. XI, No. 1; Winter, 1954), which is out of print. However, his valedictory lectures, "Truth in Religion" (Vol. XXII, No. 3; Winter, 1964, 50 pp., \$1.00 plus postage), are available. In addition three of his monographs are available in hardback cover: *A Functional Philosophy of Religion* (1958, 167 pp., \$3.50 plus postage); *The Cognitive Quest for God* (written 1946-1956) and *Operational Theism* (1958-1959). These last two are published in a single volume (1971, 205 pp., \$4.00 plus postage) and may be ordered from *The Iliff Review*.

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