

# IN MEMORIAM: OLIVER READ WHITLEY

JAMESON JONES

Many of us have known Oliver Read Whitley as our professor, our colleague, our friend. Some of us are here because Daphne Whitley is colleague and friend. To others here, Oliver Read Whitley was husband, father, father-in-law, grandfather.

We gather to pay tribute to him, to offer honor and respect, to express our love for the professor, the colleague, the friend, the husband and father and father-in-law and grandfather.

Oliver Read Whitley was born in Lebanon, Missouri more than 59 years ago. He grew up in Des Moines, Iowa, and that was his real home until he settled in Denver in 1956. His father died before Read could know him; his mother lived until a decade ago. His only brother died of a heart attack at the same age as Read, 59.

He earned Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees at Drake University in Des Moines; Bachelor of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy degrees at Yale University.

In 1944 he became a chaplain in the United States Navy. He was officially retired on June 1, 1947, with the rank of Lieutenant. Officially he was a disabled veteran, resulting from his active duty in the Navy.

For one year he taught at Park College in Missouri, and for three years at Phillips University in Oklahoma. He joined the faculty of The Iliff School of Theology twenty-two years ago. At the time of his death, he was professor sociology of religion, director of advanced degrees, and secretary of the faculty.

He was a member of the American Sociological Association, the American Association of University Professors, the Religious Research Association, the Society for Scientific Study of Religion, and the Association of Disciples for Theological Discussion.

He was the author of three books, one of which won the first award in the Bethany Press Manuscript Contest. His published articles in scholarly periodicals and academic journals numbered two score.

It is easy for us to catalogue these accomplishments of his, and to celebrate their value and enduring worth. Yet, what of Read Whitley, the man?

Is it the man of books, the scholar we remember today? He loved books and ideas and scholarly meetings and those things which constitute the heart of the academic life.

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JAMESON JONES is President of the Iliff School of Theology. This is the statement presented at the Memorial Service on August 1, 1978 held in the school chapel.

Or Read Whitley, the teacher? He was one who knew his field and sought earnestly to communicate it to others. One who challenged students, because he never compromised his academic standards. He knew what academic performance should be.

Read Whitley, the man of principle. One who knew the rules, who knew what ought to be, who held high the standards of excellence, who was faithful to his own inner sense of integrity. He was efficient, a man of order.

Read Whitley, the friend. The conversationalist. The one who loved to be among people, visiting, talking, sharing ideas and feelings. He felt that he had a contribution to make: to his friends, his colleagues, his professional field, and he welcomed any opportunity to make his contribution.

He knew himself to be a minister of Jesus Christ. His ministerial orders were in both the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ.

What we mirror is our own grief, the pain of our hearts, caused by his passing and intensified by the shock and suddenness of it. We mirror our uncertainty, as to what we do now—without him. We reflect in our mirrors the tragedy of too few years.

And yet, his going from us must become a window through which we see forward. We need to grasp a sense of renewal, that will enable us to live forward. We must see the opportunities to honor his memory. We must see ways of living without his physical presence among us. We must see ourselves, carrying on with courage and strength, as he would wish it. We see through that window the characteristics and qualities that always marked his life, and we renew a commitment to make the best of them our own: integrity, love of people, concern for the church and its ministry, scholarship and academic excellence, and commitment to this School.

And how he loved this School! It was so important in his life for these many years. This is a better School because he was here, and his going leaves a space that will never be filled.

We weep for things undone, and years together that cannot now be lived. We rejoice that we had good years with him, and we celebrate a life that will always be among us in spirit.

He believed in renewal, in new life. It now becomes our task to live it, for ourselves, and for his honored memory.

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