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1-31-1972

Area Four at Taylor University (faculty talk)

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Recommended Citation

Rediger, Milo A., "Area Four at Taylor University (faculty talk)" (1972). *Milo Rediger Writings & Addresses*. 6.

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*for Faculty Retreat
Jan 31, 1972*

AREA FOUR AT TAYLOR UNIVERSITY

by

Milo A. Rediger

To assume that a university is Christian because it offers religion (Bible) and philosophy courses and schedules prayer meetings and chapels is false; and to assume that a student becomes a Christian because he takes those courses and attends those prayer meetings is equally false. But the curriculum is important as a flexible structure to assist and guide the student toward the realization of the main objectives of the university; structure because a minimum of organization is necessary for progress toward these goals, and flexible because the whole thing is for people, and persons vary a great deal in their needs and individual progress in growth.

Considering our orientation and Christian commitment, it follows that contact with the Bible is an integral part of "liberating learning experiences, fused with a vitally Christian interpretation of truth and life, --- and the development of Christian ideals and personal qualities." How well required courses in the "content of the Old Testament, law, prophets, and the Messianic hope"; another in "New Testament foundation, Christ in the Gospels and Epistles and His relevancy to modern life"; and another in "philosophy and Christian thought," inspire and encourage and assist the student to achieve this goal, must be answered largely by the experience of the students themselves. On paper it sounds real good. As I talk with students the response varies.

No matter how good it sounds or reads, I must remember that general education is not in a course, and integration of truth and life are not in curricula. They are in people, in teachers and students, in living relationships, in loving responses.

I do not consider the number of hours in this area sacred; it may be that if we were to de-emphasize hours and go with courses in time blocks, two well-organized course experiences, led by vital and dynamic teachers, would serve as well as the present three. However that may be, I consider this area an essential aspect of a liberating arts experience and an integral part of personal growth and sound education.

Religious faith, personal devotion, and theological knowledge are, in my opinion, equally important with the other humanities, science, sociology, and the vocational applications of these in human growth and development. But there must be more than intellectual exposure and mental acquisition of substantive content.

There needs to be exposure to example, involvement in demonstrations, inspiration by relationship, and actual encounter with people in experience. General Education is the application of these aspects of living experience within a goal-oriented, though flexible, framework. We call this framework curriculum.

As a person for whom involvement in education must be the fulfillment of a commission to Christian ministry, I could not exclude area four from the program. My commitments to what life really is, and how personal and spiritual it really is, are too deep and meaningful for that. Today I reaffirm my faith in this goal, and I challenge this faculty to improve rather than delete the functional place of area four in the total thing.

How it gets done might well be changed, if the changes, too, are goal-oriented. I recommend management by objectives, in education as well as in any other enterprise. Perhaps if we were to express our curriculum in, let us say, a pattern of twenty-eight courses, or study blocks, two of them would be a fair and adequate part for area four. Two more could be for English and literature, two for social studies, two for science, one for fine arts, and one for physical education. Adding the senior capstone, this would identify eleven of the twenty-eight as general education, or 40% of the total. With seventeen blocks left for area studies and electives, students and professors might well work out together more meaningful experiences for growth and life.