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Milo Rediger Writings & Addresses

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### The Religious Program of the Liberal Arts College

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THE RELIGIOUS PROGRAM OF THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE  
Milo A. Rediger

It was not indicated whether I was expected to describe it as it is, define it as it ought to be, discuss its function, or attempt to outline its content. This gives me a wide range and a great deal of freedom, and this is consistent with both the religious and the liberal arts phases of the title. I shall try to establish a frame of reference in an introductory way and then discuss three or four aspects of the subject which may combine something of description, definition, function and content.

A college does not have a good religious program just because it has courses in religion, spiritual emphasis weeks and some scheduled prayer meetings, although all of these may well be included. Its program is not necessarily religious because it has curricula for the preparation of students for the church vocations, although this also may be an appropriate part of the function of a Christian liberal arts college. Again, a college does not have a good religious program simply because it is the extension of an organized denomination of the church.

If an arts college is to be true to the name "liberal", neither its outlook nor its program may be narrow or confined. It must be limitless with reference to the pursuit of truth, free with respect to fields of knowledge, and broad in its attitudes. If it is to be Christian in its program it will strive to produce people who live the Christian life, conceive of their occupations as potentially Christian vocations, de-emphasize denominational differences in the search for a larger unity and a common purpose, and are equally sensitive to spiritual values and intellectual achievement.

Religious People as Teachers

The religious program of a liberal arts college begins with teachers who are a certain kind and quality of people. I accept the assumption of responsibility, i. e., that every person, whatever his role in society or station in the community, is accountable before God and his fellowmen for what he does with his life. These

people do not all have to be alike; they need not be uniform even though they must be unified. They need not even conform to a single pattern of behavior, though they must all be committed to certain fundamental ideas about God, revelation, and the nature of truth and life. They must be people who care -- care about doing the will of God, care about their influence, care about their students, care about their college, their colleagues and their profession-ministry as teachers.

It is out of this caring that the counseling function grows. Beyond matters of registration, curriculum, and even vocational guidance, personal problems provide most of the grist for the counselor's mill. Many of these personal problems are in the realm of, or are affected by, the religious needs and commitments of the students. Here the religious commitment and competence of the adviser becomes a matter of importance, because, to use Biblical phraseology, if the blind lead the blind, shall not both fall into the ditch? The number of our students who come from divided or broken homes, and the wide variation in their church and otherwise religious backgrounds make this a complex but important phase of our educational program.

#### Spiritual Cultivation through Worship

The program continues with college chapel, conceived as an essential aspect of the academic program. In Christian higher education, by the proper correlation of the intellectual and the spiritual, and for the cultivation and development of the whole person, it is appropriate to provide for scheduled regular opportunities for the worship of God, supported by the kinds of religious instruction and activities that are consistent with the collegiate level of experience. Many questions may be raised here. Should it be scheduled daily? Should attendance be compulsory? Should credit be given? How should attendance be taken and records kept? What should be done about excessive absences? What do we do when our enrollment exceeds our auditorium capacity?

Our answers to these questions would probably vary greatly from college to college, but perhaps the matter of greatest concern is to lift the chapel program

out of the category of assemblies, convocations or an attempt to replace the function of the Sunday church service. The chapel should be planned and conducted so as to do for the spirit of man in his relation to God what the classroom and the library do for the intellect in relation to the universe of knowledge, and what the gymnasium and the recreation areas do for the body in relation to its physical and social environment.

#### Christian Norms in the Classroom

The program continues by the extension of the norms of the Christian faith into the classroom, every classroom. This does not mean that a class should be turned into a prayer meeting or that it need be opened with a special devotional exercise. It does not imply that the teacher should be a dogmatic preacher. It does make him a leader-explorer into adventures in learning that open windows, and perhaps doors, into the vast expanses of the wholeness of the universe and of life. The pathway through this vast expanse is the free use of reason guided by a religious conscience. Religion in the classroom is not only instruction in the subject-matter of religion under the auspices of the religion department, but also instruction by religious people in the fields of natural science, social science and the humanities.

I like the sentiment written over the entrance to Northrop Auditorium: University of Minnesota - Founded in the faith that men are ennobled by understanding. Too many colleges appear to have been founded only in the faith that men ought to increase in knowledge. You know the source of the quotation, "He that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow". Of course, students sometimes take this literally as the whole of truth, and say, "I want to be happy". Now the term "ennobled" is a qualitative one, suggesting more than "increase", and understanding suggests something beyond knowledge.

#### Religion in Campus Living

Again, the religious program of the liberal arts college continues beyond this by contagion and permeation into all of the informal, out-of-class activities and all other aspects of campus life at both faculty and student levels, and in the

interrelationships between these two. This will be expressed in conscientious scholarship, intellectual honesty, ethical behavior, personal devotion and integrity, and the creativeness, courtesies and graces of the Christian life in the college community.

Student life in the residence halls, in the dining rooms, on the playing fields and in club and other interest-group activities may become the best laboratories in which to test and practice the implications and the expressions of the religious quality of our educational program. Kenneth Brown, in Not Minds Alone, insists that one of the indicators of the quality of our program is found in what the students talk about and how they conduct themselves when they are not in the chapel or the classroom, and when no faculty person is present to be impressed. Here is where much of the fusing of our instruction with the rest of living must take place.

I have tried to focus upon the teachers, the chapel, the classrooms and the out-of-class living on the college campus. I accept the conclusion, explicit and implicit, in the statement that the school is a temple of the human spirit, and the temple is a school of those aspects of the human spirit which elude verbal expression but which are necessary for health and wholeness -- and which enable the whole man, in body, mind and spirit, to unfold in ways satisfying to the person and productive in the community.

In my own institution the religious program is under the general supervision of a faculty-student religious services committee. However, the program surely begins at the point of faculty recruitment and selection, proceeds through the chapel and the classrooms, moves out across the campus, and I hope it ends in the Christian living of our graduates in their respective communities.