Why Church Affiliation? (chapel talk)

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WHY CHURCH AFFILIATION?
by
Milo A. Rediger

I have been asked to make a statement relative to the proposed affiliation between Taylor University and the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church. I have explained the proposal and the reasons for it to the faculty, to the board of alumni directors, and to many individuals. Before any of these, however, I spent two hours with the Student Council doing the same thing and hoping that through your own representative organization I might reach most of the students. Obviously, this did not happen to any great degree, as was represented in the opinions which were expressed by eight students through the pages of the school newspaper. Only one reaction was favorable, and that one was from a member of the Council. This means, however, that the sampling reflected one informed and seven uninformed opinions, since the Student Council was first in the line of communication.

Thomas Jefferson, in his first inaugural address, said, "...I ask so much confidence only as may give firmness and effect to the legal administration of your affairs. I shall often go wrong through defect of judgment. When right, I shall often be thought wrong by those whose positions will not command a view of the whole ground. I ask your indulgence for my own errors, which will never be intentional; and your support against the errors of others who may condemn what they would not, if seen in all its parts."

I do not consider myself a salesman for the affiliation of Taylor University with the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church. I feel that my responsibility is much more related to participation in and contribution to the maturing of people's ways of thinking and in the realistic facing of life as it is.

There are three areas of focus in the building and perpetuation of a college program. The first is personnel. In this respect, God has richly blessed our efforts to bring together a superior teaching staff. The second is program. It would be quite inadequate if only those of us who are so much at the center of the institution were to say, "The Taylor program is good, even superior." But here again, God has richly blessed us in our efforts to build a multi-purpose curriculum, providing majors in sixteen fields, pre-professional courses in medicine, law, nursing, medical technology, theology, business, engineering, and both elementary and secondary teacher-education. Outside agencies which are charged with the responsibility of evaluating and accrediting institutions of higher education have placed their stamp of approval on the Taylor program. The North Central Regional Association, the State Department of Public Instruction, and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education have all given their approval between the years of 1945 and 1962.

The third area is plant, including all of the material resources necessary to make it possible for a superior teaching staff to conduct a superior program for a group of worthy and capable young people. In other words, the third essential is financial stability. Failure to achieve this would undermine whatever degree of success has been achieved in the other two.

This is a chapel talk, and I want to call a scriptural text to your attention: Luke 6:6-11. When Christ was in the synagogue on a Sabbath morning, He looked over the crowd and saw two kinds of people. The first were the Pharisees -- prejudiced, bigoted, and with their minds already made up. In fact, they were watching with hawk-like scrutiny for an act or a word by which they might condemn Him. The other part of the crowd was made up of sinners like you and me -- people with withered
hands and other infirmities, but with minds that were not closed. Jesus addressed Himself to a man with a withered hand and challenged him to do the very one thing that he was incapable of doing. What Jesus was suggesting is the very essence of true faith in New Testament terms. There is an "inner motion" which precedes every external act that we perform. It is something we cannot see, nor can we analyze it completely. Physiologists say that the brain sends an impulse through a nerve to a muscle, thus determining the movement of the hand. It is this inner motion which precedes the outer movement that Jesus was stimulating in the man -- and this the man was able to do.

Let me assure you, we administrators are at least as interested in preserving the essential characteristics and climate of Taylor University as each of you is. The comments we sometimes hear show lack of understanding, although undoubtedly well-intentioned. The comment of one faculty wife to another was, "Why don't they pray the money in?" Note two words in this question -- "they" and "pray." Who are "they"? And why didn't she say "we"? "They" is a lonely group, and often I am concerned about how easily we can dissociate ourselves from responsibility; stand, as it were, outside the group; and pass judgment on "them." What we need is mutual understanding, the sharing of responsibility, and the favorable climate of a united front.

The word "pray" in the question I take even more seriously. I take it as an exhortation, but I trust it was not meant as an indictment of unspirituality. It is so easy to question another's faith in God if his proposal includes something that must be done the hard way by human beings. Too often we attempt to pattern the exercise of faith after the Old Testament. It is the idea of Gideon's fleece -- and I admit, it is restful to rock back and relax while we wait to see if God will let the dew fall on the wool. This is an entirely too easy and external kind of faith, and it has been superceded by the New Covenant:

God, who of old spoke to our forefathers in many fragments and by various methods through the prophets, has at the end of these days spoken to us through a Son, who is the predestined Lord of the universe, and through whom He made the world. His Son told us about the new and better way of faith through the incident of the man with the withered hand. By the response of the inner motion, we move the hand that was otherwise incapable of movement. We do not sit back and wait for the dew on the fleece.

Declaring my faith in the words of the Apostle's Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty..." But I also believe God when He says through His Word such things as, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."; "...if any would not work, neither should he eat"; and, "He that provideth not for those of his own household is worse than an infidel." In other words, we do not pray and then rock back in an easy chair while God rains money into our backyard! We use our intelligence, invest our blood, sweat and tears, and God helps us by blessing and making our efforts fruitful.

Taylor University must have an anchor beyond the twenty-five men who are its trustees. This anchor is more than economic in nature -- it must be people with concern for and interest in the college. This is Taylor's weakness -- it has no unified constituency. But the needed anchor is also, and unapologetically so, a matter of dollars and cents. A group like the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church could be an even more appropriate anchor than a "community" -- about which many have expressed a sincere concern relative to the relocation in Fort Wayne. We are building in safeguards.
against any erosion of Taylor's witness and standards -- and with the support of the Fort Wayne civic leaders. But also, we want to insure our ability to pay faculty salaries, and we carry the responsibility to see to it that the money is there when payroll time comes around. I don't take very seriously the "criticisms" and "accusations" of those who feel free to make evaluative and judgmental comments but have no realistic plan to offer as a substitute for our proposal.

It is expensive to attend a college like Taylor, but Taylor is not, and will not become, a "rich man's school." It is even more expensive to attend most state colleges -- unless you happen to live in the same town and get the kind of education represented by simply going to classes according to the bells. The president of one of our four state schools in Indiana assured us at a recent conference that their students pay as high a percentage of the cost of education as do ours in the private and church-related colleges. It is only that they collect it differently. Our tuition is higher than theirs; their living costs and auxiliary fees are much higher than ours. He assured us that, in a $9 million building program, less than $1 million came from the state legislature -- the $8 million plus was paid by the students and their families.

And by the way, it is doubtful that some of us deserve the privilege of attending an expensive small liberal arts college, especially one that features personal honor in a Christian atmosphere. When we "cut" chapel services and submit "smart" reasons for the absences, we have obviously not yet caught the spirit of the Christian liberal arts college. Because the very heart of the honor system is the principle of dual responsibility, it is even more important that I say this to you that are here than it is to convey it to the few who are absent. To be a part of a Christian liberal arts college is a privilege, not a right. We must earn our membership in it; in this sense it is expensive, and rightly so.

Affiliation with the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church is not yet a reality -- it may never be. If not, we shall have to find some other equally good anchor. I respect the right of each individual to arrive at his or her own conclusion. My appeal is that all of the facts, the real intentions of those who must make the decisions, and a fair interpretation of faith and works will combine to bring you to your conclusion. And I am not so naive as to assume that all others will see it my way! I am resigned to the possibility of losing a few at each level, should affiliation become a reality. My concern is that such losses can be sustained within a framework of friendly relations and mutual respect. And my confidence is that most of you will find a satisfying answer in a combination of careful thinking and faith in God.

If you are afraid that a working relationship with the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church would be damaging to Taylor University and would change the character of the college, then you have two alternatives. One is to dissociate yourself, close your mind, and stand on the outside passing premature judgment. The other alternative is to exercise the inner motion, stretch out the hand, and help us to keep from happening the very things you say you fear.