

## ***The Faculty is the Heart of the Trouble***

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Is there a need for Christian higher education? One way to answer that question is to take a close look at what goes on in many of the secular universities. An excellent diagnosis of the predicament of the North American universities was presented by Max Ways in the January (1959) issue of ***Fortune*** under the title “The Faculty is the Heart of the Trouble”. The question he attempts to answer concerns the universal dissatisfaction with the academic enterprise on the part of thousands of students. An academic community generally involves a governing board, administration, faculty and students. And then there is ‘society’, that elusive environment that, some say, has become an Establishment. Student dissatisfaction concerns each of these factors. But which element is mainly responsible for the sickness of the university?

Max Ways points to the faculty – the body of professors – as the major weakness. Where does it fail? The faculty is the heart of any university. “The contemporary American university, in nearly all of its excellence and defects, has been shaped by the faculty”. In what way then have the faculties so shaped the universities that students are justifiably discontent (sic!) with the educational processes?

The author argues that for four hundred years, with increasing intensity, the scientific method governing the development of the various sciences has been a “way of independence”, that is, a “sharp detachment of discipline from discipline and of the disciplines from the impacted confusion of things-as-we-find-them.” In other words, the connecting links between the many sciences and the bond between the sciences and life has been utterly lost. Hence there is a sense of frustration and meaninglessness, an absence of unity and coordination: the professors and students are both caught in a labyrinth of segregated disciplines without a central purpose.

Professors display “departmentalized attitudes”, especially in connection with the frightfully specialized research-projects that take the best members of the faculty away from the students, particularly the undergraduates.

And attempts at achieving some sort of an educational balance by requiring courses in the humanities (literature, history, philosophy, etc.) outside of the students' major area of interest have largely failed. Such general education often means little more than twenty centuries of western culture one-eighth inch deep! As a matter of fact, the literature and history disciplines have adopted the very compartmentalized and quantitative methods of the natural sciences that have created the disconnectedness we must overcome.

(An excellent illustration of this de-humanizing tendency in the sciences that deal with man is presented in a recent *Time* article, "Ethology: That Animal That Is Man", January 17.)

And philosophy? Does it fulfill its proper task by clarifying the connections between the special sciences? Not in the least. It encourages the special scientist in his fragmented analysis of partial givens and helps him only by telling how to think straight. "Philosophy, trying to find some work that would fit the new mode, became a sort of linguistic water boy and groom for the big scientific elephants, cleaning up messy logic."

It is not in the least surprising that in this confusing situation, with each special science going its own detached and merry way without sensing the wholeness of man and the unity of reality, the student tries to find meaning outside of his studies: in drugs; or in a revolution against the social, economic and political Establishment; or in the student power movements within the university. These avenues lead us nowhere, Max Ways rightly points out, since they leave untouched the heart of the trouble: the disconnected and ultimately meaningless work of the faculty.

What does he propose instead? First of all, professors have to realize that life is not departmental, cut up in the neat divisions of the different sciences. That means that the professor – and the student – cannot deal with life's problems in terms of the neutrality and detachment of science. "Aspects of individual men and their societies, like the rest of nature, can be fruitfully studied by the method of detachment: yet men and societies, like all nature, continue to exist, in a state where these separate aspects are most intricately scrambled." "Decisions are not made within the boundaries of the organized knowledge of nature's aspects as segregated by the intellect. Decisions are made in the hurly-burly of raw phenomena".

At this point the message of Max Ways becomes crucial. How can the professor discover the unity of life and the wholeness of man? This is his answer: "Hard intellectual work is needed to put the material together; an effort must be made to find generalized truth". And: The university must "give the faculty as much freedom as possible to teach what they want to teach and students as much freedom as possible to take the courses they want to take".

This, of course, gets us nowhere. We have had plenty of hard intellectual work and freedom in the past, without finding the key to the unity and the wholeness of man. Here we are faced with the bankruptcy of humanist scholarship in the twentieth century as far as the foundations of science and scholarship are concerned. Max Ways presents an excellent diagnosis of the university's ills. But this therapy leaves the problem unresolved.

Why is this so? Why can't a cure be found after such an excellent diagnosis? Basically, I think, because Max Ways relies on a tool ("hard intellectual work") that – in and by itself – caused the very problem he set out to solve. The human intellect, man's reason, never functions in a vacuum. Man's intellect does not think. Man himself thinks, by means of his intellect. The direction of the intellect, therefore, is determined finally by the direction of the thinker - by man's central commitment.

Consequently, before one can talk meaningfully about the unity of the university's scientific enterprise one must answer the question: Who is man? What is his ultimate allegiance? How should he relate to his fellow-man? An answer to these questions does not lie at the end of the scientific journey but at its beginning. And such questions of one's basic "beginning", one's starting-point, are religious questions, and require a religious answer. This is not only true for the Christian, but also for the humanist and the Marxist.

A basic critique, therefore, of what goes on in the modern university ought to start with an analysis of the most fundamental – religious – answers that the faculty has arrived at before it begins its scientific pursuits. Also, more importantly, a meaningful re-direction of the troubled university enterprise requires new answers to these fundamental questions. Without that we are engaged in mere patchwork. This is precisely what the New Left movement among the students has recognised. It rejects the fundamental framework of

reference of the contemporary university establishment and is searching for a radically new perspective, for a new gospel that gives meaning. The New Left is inspired by a Neo-Marxism (Herbert Marcuse etc) which, in my view, is not sufficiently radical to supply a cure since it, too, finds its ultimate spiritual drive in man's self-sufficiency. In other words, it still operates within a humanist context. The history of the twentieth century, I believe, supplies sufficient evidence that we ought to search for a new context: man, individually or collectively, cannot lift himself by his own bootstraps, cannot redeem himself.

If we understand a little of the spiritual crisis of twentieth century man, evident foremost in the temple of humanism: the university, then the significance of a radically Christian academic enterprise becomes meaningful to the entire Christian community. In a small way the Institute for Christian Studies hopes to contribute to such an enterprise.

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