

A CHAPLAIN'S IMAGE OF UBC STUDENTS

Rev M John V Shaver
United Church Chaplain

This should have been written last year. After a term as one of several church-appointed chaplains at UBC I had formed a firm image of the modern student. One year later, during which time many interviewees had turned into real people, this image got a little shook up.

Perhaps there is some point in trying to salvage it. Images are useful as far as they go, - just don't trust them when they try to go all the way. There has never been a general image that reflected any actual person. The image I had may be useful as far as it goes, or it may be real gone.

The dominating ^{element} image in this image is FLIGHT. The picture I had of the academic community is of people in flight. The political clubs do not appear to be engaged so much in thought as in propaganda. These clubs are not a forum for thrashing out answers to political problems, they are party organs for the training of future leaders. A short acquaintance with student political activity does not reveal much crossing of heredity lines as a result of it. An identical remark, also upon short acquaintance, might be made of the religious clubs.

The modern student is in flight from problems generally. Top brains just naturally go into technical fields, where intelligence is needed of course, But this is also where problems are less ambiguous, and where one has to be responsible only to his data, and not for decisions when his data consists of conflicting elements. Our age is cynical of the simple solution to political-economic problems, with good reason. The human situation has reached the state in which it is frightening to think about them at all. Lets keep busy with problems that can be handed over to a computer.

ministry among their fellows. There is the professor who spends fifteen hours a week counselling students on non academic matters. There were twenty applicants for Cross-Roads Africa this year and thirty-five applicants for posts with Canadian University Service Overseas.

This hidden Lordship confronts me in the quality of thought and moral responsibility of people who profess atheism. An atheist student is profoundly upset by the smallness of the God of religious people. Another has spent time in jail with the freedom-riders in the south. A group, made up largely of atheist students and faculty championed the civil rights of the Freedomite Doukchabers ~~Doukchabers~~ during a recent crisis. An atheist professor shames most campus Christian moralists with his moral philosophy. Another atheist professor carries on a personal crusade to turn the public education system into a programme for producing citizens who can make responsible political decisions. It is the people who profess unbelief who are the first to see paternalism and condescension in their do-gooding, and seek to eliminate them.

I long to have these people come to a more accurate theology of their own position, but I have to thank God for the Judgment and Grace with which they confront me.

Finally, I see the hidden Lordship of Christ most clearly in the University in the rare but present places where a community of grace exists.

It is true that disciplines are dangerously isolated at the University. The education faculty people have coffee by themselves to avoid facing people from other faculties. Even where the disciplines mix, the talk is shallow. There is no real engagement where anyone risks anything. The serious sickness of the modern university is the sickness of flight.

But there are places where the engagement is genuine and costly, where the exposure is real and bruising. There are communities which put together people that are an offense to each other and yet who bear one another. There are communities within the University where the truth is spoken in love yet they stay together. These can only be communities of grace.

I wish people called them by their right name. I think they would mean more and be even more redemptive if they did. But I can't help but be confronted by the hidden Lordship of Christ in them.

It seems to me that one of the chief ways in which the Word of God in Christ addresses the Church today, is in the world of the University. Certainly one of my chief thrills in the campus ministry has been the discovery that there is nowhere the Word of God is absent.