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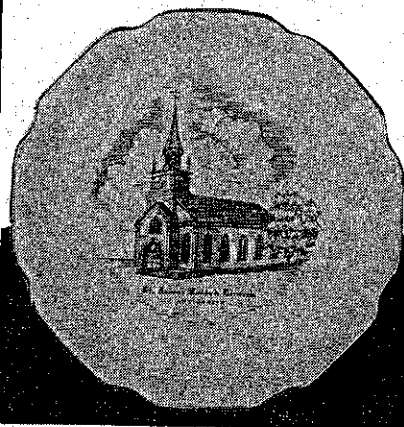
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Chaplain 6a

Revelations of a University Chaplain

by M. John V. Shaver

TODAY's university, like any living reality, is a constant surprise. It is shallow where I expected depth. In other places its dizzying depth shames my shallowness.

There is the campus atheist who writes drivel for the college paper. There is the campus atheist who changes his philosophy master's program from one university to another because no one at the former school is taking the philosophy of religion and ethics seriously. There are the campus Christians who smile and whistle under all difficulties, and feel nothing. There are the campus Christians who feel everything, making up in themselves what is lacking in Christ's suffering.

While rumors and surveys of the sexual practices of the university community leave me with a sense of unreality, I am always shaken by the knowledge of actual cases of promiscuity among students and faculty. And I am surprised where I find people who still think that it matters that sexual union between humans be confined to the man and woman who are committed to one another in all things for life.

When individuals or church courts write me protesting some frightful breach of the moral code on the campus beginning, "We have heard ...", I always feel like replying, "You

have heard right. Only it's worse than you think and it's better than you think."

Is sexual morality in the modern university community as promiscuous as the surveys make out? Probably. I have been on the UBC campus for five years, and I don't know, and I have found no one who knows. But I do know that at academic seminars and in classes, significant status people are saying, "Do whatever you like." I do know that students are saying, "I intend to experiment before marriage." It is also true that this position does not go unchallenged. A significant number of status people are very concerned about the promiscuity and even more concerned about the students who are in the lonely darkness of not knowing what to think.

It is interesting to be on campus with a generation of students who are among the first products of the new permissiveness. Superficially, at least, there is a striking absence of inhibitions against the frank discussion of sex, yet the fascination with the "dirty" joke still appears to receive its power from the fact that it is forbidden.

Other indications suggest that the modern student is not as liberated in this matter as it might seem. It is not very often that anyone gets down to the business of discussing his or her own personal position. It is still not



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easy for people to talk openly about what they fear and there is a great agony of uncertainty about one's personal sexual code. Students are frightened by the prospect of marriage. They want it to be something very good and are afraid it isn't going to be.

On matters of morality in general, the university is a mixed bag of tricks and full of surprises. The idea is firmly intrenched that morality is purely a matter of personal preference based on emotional response and arbitrary training. No one wants to be moralistic. Yet every one is, who has not engaged in the discussion of morality at some depth. Many are so engaged—maybe Christians—maybe not, maybe non-Christians—maybe not.

Religion dies on campus

I hear the president say that he sees his role as standing between the public and one of his professors whenever public clamor attempts to remove a professor who has expressed a deviant opinion. Academic freedom matters terribly to the academic community. It will make great sacrifices to protect this, especially on behalf of people with opposite opinions. The same president declares publicly that when influence begins to follow money onto the money-starved campus, his policy will be to refuse the money.

Generally speaking, religion dies on

the campus. The one firm statistical trend indicates that the longer one attends university, the smaller are his chances of being related to a church. I won't even guess what percentage of UBC students have an active church life. I will say that I am always surprised whenever I come upon an active churchman.

The academic community is certainly critical of the church and it turns a great many sympathetic people into critics. Much of the criticism is superficial, but much of the criticism is that the church is superficial. It is dull. It is irrelevant. It is about nothing at all.

When I try to find a more incisive expression of this disappointment with the church I get the following:

1. The church isn't listening. It isn't hearing anybody but itself. It is not taking seriously the people who deviate from it. It is trying to correct them only.

2. It is offering the kind and number of answers to the human predicament that betray that it has no appreciation of how enormous the predicament is. Again and again I hear from students who have attended a Christian address, given in up-to-date language, "It didn't get to me . . . too many answers."

3. The students who start out

churchmen and give up, complain loudly about the bad academic quality of their education in the church. There is little solid content. They have had no experience with a critical study of the documents or the ideas of their faith. They have been raised on bad history and flabby theology. —

4. The most telling criticism of the church comes from the students who sought a redemptive community there and did not find it. The community they found had no room for the deviant. It had no place for the doubter and the sinner. It could not bear anyone who was an offense to it. It could not even bear honesty.

As the various denominations were appointing chaplains at UBC, and as the department of religious studies was being formed in the arts faculty, no one expected that theology would ever be accepted into the dialogue of this secular campus. Again I was surprised by the actual development. It is true that there is an appalling ignorance of historic theology at all levels of the academic community. It is true that an official representative of the church cannot gather any non-church people to discuss theological questions. I get nowhere trying to make the case for theological dialogue, but when I appear at an academic dialogue the theological questions came up as naturally as any other. I am welcomed and asked back. A book like Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death*, in which the thought of Freud, Nietzsche, Saint Augustine and Saint Paul is all stirred together, is read by a large selection of people and this kind of inclusiveness is typical of the better academic discussion on today's campus.

Already hidden Lord

However, my most surprising discoveries since becoming a university chaplain are of the places in which Christ is already hidden Lord of the university.

This appears in the deep responsibility many assume towards their tasks and colleagues. Indeed there is plenty of shallow academic dialogue, the kind that is nothing more than a game of one-up-manship. But there are more intimate discussions in which people put themselves on the line. There is the student creative writer who longs for a community in which people can get through to each other and who says, "I can only witness and wait."

There are people who care about
concluded on page 26

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In writing, use short words. Little words have "guts" — they jolt the idea "home". And be thankful you write in English — it's filled with short words — German is . . . well, read this story of a Hottentot mother in the old German colony of Strattertrottel. (At this point, she is a *Hottentotenstrottelmutter*.) She kept a pet opossum (*Beutelratte*) in a covered cage (*lattengitterwetterkotter*). A wicked assassin (*attentater*) killed the unhappy woman, and went down in German police history as the *Hottentotenstrottelmutterattentaterlattengitterwetterkotterbeutelratte*.



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THE NEW HYMNARY

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to maintain a link "with our fathers of generations past and with our fellow Christians of today". Another aim was to "provide a hymnary true to the genius, history and tradition of the communions which now compose The United Church of Canada". These two aims are remembered by the present committee in its work and it may be presumed that they will be true to the past, to the Universal Church and to the traditions of the Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches.

A new aim, however, should be to reflect, if possible, the spiritual life and growth of the people of The United Church of Canada, the Canadian churches and the great spiritual movements which have been taking place during recent decades. This provides the opportunity for persons with talent, insight and devotion to write hymns which may be suitable and helpful to the people of the church in their worship and spiritual nurture.

And the whole project—the most important end of which is to produce an excellent new *Hymnary*—should result in great numbers of worshippers carefully examining the hymns they sing, and discussing with their neighbors the ones they love, and why. ●

REVELATIONS OF CHAPLAIN

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others, at great cost to themselves. There are staff members who conduct a continuous ministry among their fellows. There is the professor who spends 15 hours a week counselling students on non-academic matters. There were 20 applicants for Crossroads Africa this year and 35 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 Doukhobors during a recent crisis. An atheist professor carries on a personal crusade to turn the public education system into a program for producing citizens who can make responsible political decisions. The people who profess unbelief 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. ●

CHURCH LIBRARIES

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still in the main stream of church activity. A measure of its acceptance is an amount written into the church budget and the fact that the UCW now makes an annual grant to place books in the library in honor of their retiring president.

When I asked the present library chairman, Mrs. Ralph Hardern, for some words for this article, she wrote, "I cut out reviews like mad and we try to bring in things to interest different groups in the church. I guess it all comes down to publicity and talking about books at every opportunity. It breaks my heart when a book sits on the shelves." ●