

RELIGIOUS  BULLETINVOL. XLIII, NO. 11
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1963REV. LLOYD W. TESKE, C.S.C.,
UNIVERSITY CHAPLAIN - EDITORA PROFILE OF AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT BELIEFS

The results of a "Survey of the Political and Religious Attitudes of American College Students" have been published as a supplement to the October 8 issue of National Review.

Conducted by The Educational Reviewer, the survey covered seven per cent of sophomore to senior students in twelve widely divergent kinds of colleges and universities. All, however, have this in common, that they are liberal arts institutions. The questionnaires were sent out in 1961-62 to Sarah Lawrence College, Williams College, Yale University, Marquette University, Boston University and Indiana University. The second six schools covered in 1962-63 were the University of South Carolina, Howard University, Reed College, Davidson College, Brandeis University, and Stanford University.

Some of the more startling conclusions drawn from the survey with regard to religious attitudes are:

American liberal arts colleges, with the sole exception of Roman Catholic colleges, tend to debilitate the religious convictions of their students.

Protestant students are most likely to retain their faith if sent to predominantly Roman Catholic colleges.

Protestant students are most likely to apostasize if sent to privately endowed secular colleges.

Students raised as Catholics are least likely to retain their faith at small, privately endowed colleges at which the vast majority of the student body is Protestant and Jewish.

Although a substantial majority of liberal arts students believe in the immortality of the human soul, only a minority affirm the existence of a God capable of exercising an effect on their lives.

The conclusions and value judgments of the survey can be questioned. George N. Shuster, assistant to the president here at Notre Dame, in an article in the Ave Maria (October 26, 1963) asks whether "generalizations about Catholic education can be properly formu-

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SPLIT-LEVEL TEACHER "The Founding Fathers in their wisdom," says George Caldwell, the Centaur in John Updike's latest novel, "decided that children were an unnatural strain on parents. So they provided jails called schools, equipped with tortures called an education. School is where you go between when your parents can't take you and industry can't take you. I am a paid keeper of Society's unusables."

Ever since Ulysses, writers have been trying to repeat Joyce's success in telling a story structurally parallel to some mythological tale, thereby giving greater depth of implication to both narratives. The Centaur* would seem to be among the best of these multiple-level stories. One not only finds here great interest created within the framework of the Centaur's three days of chaotic activities, one at the same time finds himself reading extra richness of meaning into the lives of human beings because of the mythical parallelism.

Updike has chosen well from the many myths available for literary exploitation. The story of Chiron is that of the noblest of the Centaurs, the master and instructor for some of the most celebrated Greek heroes. Wounded by a poisoned arrow, however, on the occasion of a Centaurian brawl, and tormented by the unhealing wound, Chiron longs to shed his immortality and thus end his pain. He asks, therefore, that his immortality be transferred to Prometheus. The gods hear his prayer and Chiron as Prometheus' substitute descends into Hades.

In the book of Genesis, we are told that God looked on creation

and found it good. In great periods of history, philosophers and artists have also looked on creation and found it good, or at least have found the good in it. The great teacher, likewise, finds the good in life. He makes it easy for people to believe in goodness. He has the power of seeing good things which are ordinarily not seen, and of making them visible. "Whoever does that in any degree, through an unselfish deed or a courageous word, or a compassionate thought," says a modern writer, "helps others to believe in the indestructibility of goodness; and belief in goodness makes it indestructible. This lifts up the life of every man to an overwhelming importance."

This quotation summarizes the story of the Centaur, a man of whom Updike says, "He had a more-than-human selflessness, a total concern for the world at large."

Updike's way with words, one discovers in this novel, is that of an artist second to none in America today. Some readers may regret the many sex-involvements, but no one will fail to observe here a beauty and mastery of language which is most rare among modern novelists. The painstaking accuracy of his choice of word and image is almost miraculous in the many poetic passages.

COLLEGE STUDENT BELIEFS (continued from the front page)

lated on the basis of reports from a single institution, namely Marquette University. Good school though this is, it happens to be predominantly an urban and regional institution." Mr. Shuster also points out that "A really grave weakness is that the terms 'Protestant' and 'Jewish' are neither analyzed nor explored. Thus it is highly probable that the responses would have been quite different if a Lutheran college had been included, or if the 'Anglicans' at Yale had been classified separately. Similarly, the fact that no institution identified with Orthodox Judaism has been included makes the use of Brandeis University as a major source of information about trends among Jewish students dubious. For Brandeis, though attended by many Jewish young men and women, is happy to call itself 'nonsectarian.'"

Throughout, Mr. Shuster's analysis is very penetrating and deserves to be read in its entirety. He acknowledges the help of his sociological confreres at Notre Dame, Donald Barrett and John Kane.

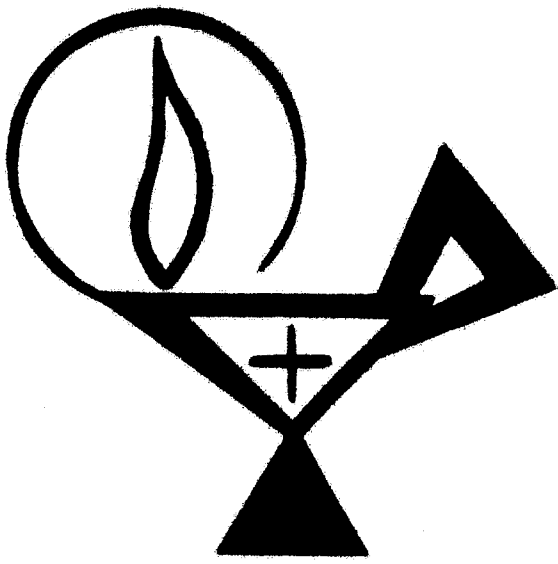
David Q. Liptak in the Hartford Catholic Transcript (October 16, 1963) approaches the survey with a less critical point of view, but on the basis of his own analysis comes up with some rather disturbing conclusions. He says, for instance, that "college students tend to be theologically illiterate. Thus, when asked about frequency of Scripture reading or study at least 15 per cent of those questioned at four of the institutions had to reply 'never.' The percentages were notably higher with reference to reading (1) religious newspapers and magazines and (2) 'popular' religious writers such as Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and Norman Vincent Peale. "

"Such illiteracy," Mr. Liptak continues, "was borne out not only by direct inquiries about reading (which is essential to knowledge) but also by some of the erroneous replies given to questions which could have been answered correctly on the basis of information in, for example, Catholic and Protestant newspapers, magazines and books. Thus, incredible as it may seem, over 80 per cent of the students from three colleges (and over 70 per cent of those from six others) replied 'no' to the question: Do you feel that religious beliefs are among the central issues in the conflict between the Soviet sphere and the West?"

Mr. Liptak goes on to question whether liberal arts colleges are so liberal after all. "How else explain the fact that a student can go through college and never learn -- the question here is not about belief, but about knowledge -- that Christianity and atheistic communism are contradictory ideologies?"

More analyses, comments, criticisms of this survey are certain to be written. The survey itself ought to be read and the observations of the commentators studied.

ENCOUNTERS WITH WHAT?



A non-Catholic caricature used to picture Catholic worship as satisfied with a mechanical prayer centering on a priest-performed action that involved nothing of the individual. Can we not admit that we sometimes give too much reason for this caricature? The idea that the Church relied too readily on an impersonal, mechanical prayer led the Protestant reformers to the conviction of Catholic insincerity, and the fear of this formalism has been a gnawing doubt in the minds of Protestants even in this ecumenical age.

Do we justify this impression of us? Our theology makes neat distinctions between grace gained for us either by the act itself or by our involvement in the act. We are forever talking about the Infinite value of the Mass, as if the action in itself is so immense as to need nothing from us. On the level of rite, language until now and much of the sacramental symbolism has been blissfully unconcerned about its psychological openness (for people). We are painfully passive at church functions. And on the level of intention, who is to say how much the action of Christ in the sacraments proceeds without much of our response in it? Protestantism can justly object to our formalism if we wreak havoc with the things of the spirit. If we are guilty in any degree, we should fear having offended the consciences of others and having thwarted the growth of our own.

The challenge becomes the more pressing for us today as the Church is deep in institution and ritual renewal. And this realization forces us to question our own involvement in the liturgical acts that are our prayer: the dialogue between us as persons and the Persons of God. As long as our conscious obligation extends only to some FORM, we can avoid the claims of personal involvement. But as soon as we see our FORM intimately tied to the Person of God, we lose this comfortable area of non-involvement. How long does any personal relationship last that exists on form only? In our time and culture social analysts tell us of the underlying hunger for an authenticity and sincerity that seems forced to break with traditional forms. Can we then risk losing authenticity and sincerity in our liturgical prayer by a continued reliance on purely formal reception of the sacraments as automatic dispensers of grace and justification?

Our sacramental responsibility asks a personal involvement of ourselves at the levels of action and intention using liturgical, sacramental forms as ways of expressing ourselves. St. Paul wrote of making up in his body what was lacking to the sufferings of Christ. Obviously, he had in mind no automatic, mechanical justification, but the harder, more satisfying involvement of himself as a part of the total Christ. Our liturgical prayer has to show this same involvement if the forms are to touch us.

--Father Watzke