

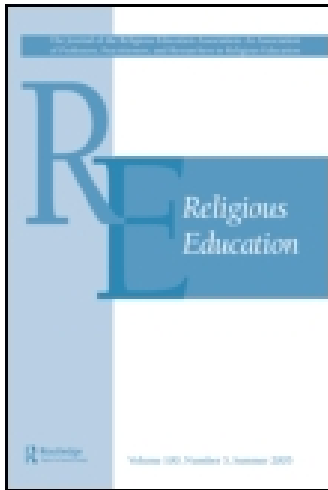
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# Responsibility to the Youth in Colleges\*

HENRY F. COPE

Our fundamental responsibility to students in universities and colleges is the same as it is to all men, to help them to form religious purposes in life and to devote themselves to the new spiritual social order. Out of this grow certain duties which need only to be stated, concerning which there would seem to be no room for doubt or for argument. First, it is evident that any church or religious body has the same duty toward several hundred young men and women gathered and living in one place for purposes of learning as it would have for any like number of other persons in any other place. The university community creates the same duties of ministry as any other community.

Second, we are responsible to see that the ministry really ministers by being definitely planned for the actual needs of its community. Blind following of ecclesiastical routine would be inexcusable here.

Third, a peculiar responsibility rises in the fact that the choicest of our youth are here, certainly a large proportion of those who are to be leaders and makers of tomorrow.

Fourth, the place of religion as integral, and supreme, in education must be asserted with peculiar emphasis. The opportunity lies in the fact that here religion ought to be lifted to a plane of intellectual sincerity, above the fogs and the ignorant muddling that imperil or make impossible its place in elementary general education.

Each of these propositions would furnish standards by which we might test our present methods, and devise better ones. But it is possible to concentrate on the second one alone, the principle of determination of methods by the discovery of the nature of the situation and the special needs of the persons to whom we would minister.

The principles of adaptation must be applied with thoroughness in this field. Special efforts to minister to students frequently fail because they are not especially for students. Much current work is pitifully fruitless because it proceeds on the assumption that students need just what the home-folks need, that the local-church forms of service, of ministry and worship will attract, stimulate and guide the college group.

Perhaps the adaptation must begin with ourselves. If these young people are to become religiously motivated men and women, those who plan for them must set the religious purpose first. At present, frequently—perhaps usually, the dominant purpose is rather ecclesiastical than religious; ministries are designed to lead students to become part of the existing order of churchly things, to hold or win them to some particular group.

The next assumption is that college students are students. They are, but only incidentally. On this assumption the emphasis has been upon instruction about religion. Even here many colleges manifest little appreciation of religion as a field of knowledge. This is true not alone of state

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universities; indeed many of them with their courses in Religion, Religious Literature, and Religious Education, offer all that any student would be likely to take in this area of knowledge. In any case the circle of knowledge ought to be complete in the curriculum; to defer to fear of controversy is a cowardice not usually found in other departments of learning; to omit religion as negligible is to be blind in the historical optic, as Mr. Wells has so richly reminded us.

But if the first common mistake of ministry to students has been that of a servile imitation of church programs, the second has been that of attempted parallelism to the college program. Naturally this follows on the assumption of the primacy of the intellectual interests and on the facility of the intellectual approach to religion. But students are not primarily intellectualistic—that needs no demonstration. Nor is the intellectual concept of religion their prime need. This does not discount the value of efforts to complement the university curriculum with courses in Religion. That is often necessary; but it is not necessarily the means of any special religious ministry to these young people. If it is urged as a means of meeting their religious difficulties, it may be answered that these are not the difficulties that keep them from being religious. Those difficulties seem important because they alienate them from some churches. The real impediments to a religious life are practical, rising in the actual problems of life, of daily conduct, and of the world as they see it. The most liberal and the most liberally endowed theological seminary, set on the university campus, would offer little religious ministry to the undergraduate body; it would not reach them where they are. But it is futile to assume that courses about religion make people religious.

A further difficulty or deficiency in the ministry through studies lies in the fact that nearly all these studies are conceived, whether they be modernistic or conservative, in the popular Protestant fashion of Bibliolatry. Imagine what religion signifies to the student who is academically habituated to thinking of it in terms of a critical study of Leviticus!

What then is needed? That is to be determined by the facts about these young people, by their characteristics and their needs. We need a real program of religious education, that is a program for the development of persons as persons, for their growth in religious living, for something more than a curriculum in religion, for processes under which these persons will develop governing religious motives, will accept life in religious terms and will move forward to make a religious world. Now, just as we have been insisting in recent reforms in religious education, that the processes must be determined by the natures and needs of persons, so we must accept this principle here.

The situation seems to be something like this: here are several hundred young people whose days are passed in three great interests: social activities, sports and athletics, and class-work. Our problem is: in what ways can they be led to take life in religious terms, to form religious purposes and to acquire and develop the riches of the spiritual life. And when we say "life" we must mean their present, current life, through which they will interpret life in the larger sense.

Are we right in looking on this world of youth in the colleges as revealing themselves through the three major interests of social activities, athletics and class-work? If this rough analysis has any truth then we must remember that these three fields of interest are intimately integrated; they are fused in one common interest, to experiment with life, to discover its possibilities and to acquire its technique. We ought to face the fact that young people today are not tracking to college under some irresistible thirst for knowledge. They are there, principally because social custom guides their parents. They move along in that stream of custom, but they follow the lead of their dominant interest, to discover life. To them the major activity is experimentation with life in social terms, through the college societies, fraternities, organizations and politics. College athletics is not so much a matter of developing physical perfection as it is one of promoting group loyalties; the main issue is social. It is experimentation with group life, with society. And the chief interest that keeps the minor activity of learning vital is the hope that it may aid in the technique of social life, particularly through acquired abilities in some occupation or profession.

Interest in the technique of practical living is intensified in the state institutions, principally because, on both sides, it is frankly recognized that the guiding purpose is preparation for some field of usefulness; men and women attend under the drive of life-occupation interests. There arises one of the most insidious dangers of academic life, that it shall become definitely anti-religious—not because the subject of religion is lacking in the curriculum, but because a dominating interest in vocational technique tends toward social selfishness. That is, it tends to thinking of education as a means of social, occupational leverage. Students come to regard their advantages in terms of ability to exploit the world; education is a means to advantages to be cultivated for profit, for gain. The seriously irreligious aspect of modern education is that to so many it stands only for opportunity to perfect the implements of social exploitation.

Now that is the situation we have to meet, youth experimenting with life and tending to take it in dominating self-regarding motives. It is our responsibility to lead those who are discovering life to see it in social terms, to accept it for what they may give to it, and to help them highly to resolve to be all that they may be, in developing powers and widening vision, for the sake of giving the richer life and service to their day. Either men and women take the religious attitude or they do not; either they become pivoted on the self-center or on the service center; either life means the satisfaction of gain or the joy of giving, either the aim of property or the aim of people with all that they may be. The question with the collegian is not whether he holds our view of what religion has been, or of what its theories now are; the question is whether he can be guided to religious motives and purposes.

Have we not been organizing religious ministry for purely hypothetical students; providing for the type once prevalent, but now as extinct as the dodo? We seek far and wide for preachers who have sounded the depths of the philosophy of religion because we imagine the college campus as we have idealized Athens and we picture these young people as peripatetic seekers after knowledge. But the sermons that they talk about are

the ones that, though perchance scorned by the erudite, still tell them something about life, give them glimpses of its real meaning, color the great spaces opening before them with the glow of ideals and show that their coming days may have satisfaction that goes deeper than all that is promised in their professional courses.

Perhaps we need to ignore the traditions of the college just as we must ignore many of the traditions of the churches, and begin to shape programs determined by the distinctive characteristics of this group of young people. And these characteristics are revealed in their most common attitudes toward life. And here, I think, they are different from other groups; they are forward-looking. They are thinking about their own futures. They discuss freely the future of the world; indeed, they have rearranged it many times. Every day, sometimes between breakfast and bed, some collegian settles all the problems of Dean Inge with the celerity of Mr. Chesterton.

Has religion any special meaning for the prophetic group of youth? Has our religion, the faith of free men with free minds, any meaning or message to them? If not it is not faith. No matter how liberal our faith may be it is not faith unless it is forward looking, unless it has to do more with things not yet accomplished than with things completed. "The faith once for all delivered" is a ridiculous phrase, as it is interpreted, it brings up a picture of a delivery wagon and a boy handing out a parcel tied up by the apostle Paul, the carton duly certified by the Evangelical Association. Having cashed for the C. O. D. tag the package is put in the safe.

When we can bring the faith of Jesus to the college world we shall get a hearing; by this I mean the faith that this sad, distraught, torn and bleeding world is not the last word in human possibilities, that there may be a social order of justice, love and satisfaction. This is the real evangel; those who proclaim the possibility of a religious future for the world are the real evangelicals, and this is the good news, the evangel, that the forward-looking minds of youth await. They care nothing for our historical niceties—though they do have rather more respect for truth than for volitional blindness—but they are deeply, intensely concerned with the future. Our responsibility to them is to so set the Christian vision of a spiritual democracy before them that it may win them, may command their purposes, may persuade them as the great, worthwhile enterprise.

College youth are as sheep without a shepherding purpose; they drift through school because they have no aims great enough to compel them; they go out into life to follow the "governor's" business, to take up tracks that others have beaten; but they have gone through the college years eager for an overwhelming cause, for great things to do, for great purposes to achieve. They have looked forward, wondering whether they are fated to live in the old familiar tread-mill. And we stand by with the one hope of the world, with the faith that things need not be, must not be as they are, with the Christian vision of a world in which it is possible to love, and what do we say to them? Scare anything about this that ought to so passionately move us, but learned, and pleasant words about the past. Liberals and reactionaries, we are all more or less

gummed up in the "mint and anise and cummin"; have we not forgotten, has not the church forgotten that Jesus really taught? Vain is all our faith unless we can give the coming world the hope of love.

And are not the college youth seeking this? Is it not our main responsibility to see to it that they know what He taught about our world, about this future society on which they are looking, about such times as these? To see to it that they shall go out with the supreme religious purpose and passion to make this world the place of justice, love and happiness, to change our present property-motivated civilization to a personally-motivated one, to substitute for the current philosophy of competition the Christian way of loving coöperation, and not only to hope for a new world, but to make it? Whatever theological views one may hold if he takes life in terms of such a purpose he will be a religious person, and no other attitude toward life can be called a Christian attitude. Not ours to make these youth this or that as to party or sect, but to make them makers of a new world, to give them a purpose and task that can only be conceived in spiritual terms, only carried forward in the religious motive of love, and can result in nothing less than making them religious persons because they become part of the religious social order they seek. Youth needs a faith for the future great enough to satisfy imagination, high enough to call out the depths of devotion and spiritual enough to make them spiritual in seeking its splendid ends.

## Research in Religious Education\*

1. What should we understand by "research in religious education?" Specify both as to "research" and as to "religious education."

Unfortunately, the dictionary does not define religious education. It does, however, define research as "careful or critical inquiry or examination in seeking facts or principles; diligent investigation in order to ascertain something, etc." While much fault can be found with the definition it will serve as a starting point, because it admits of broad interpretation. Many types of research are recognized. The most common are literary research, historical research, and scientific research. It is true that religious education may profit by all kinds of research, still there are certain kinds from which it may expect most. Since education in general has ascertained most of its facts by means of *scientific* research, we may reasonably expect religious education to do the same.

Scientific research is seeking after facts and principles by the use of scientific methods. It is beyond the limits of this paper to enter into an exposition of the scientific method. Suffice it to say, however, that the validity of facts and the soundness of principles is determined to a considerable degree by the methods employed in deriving them. Research in religious education is seeking after facts and principles of the religious

\*At the request of the Editors Professor Mark A. May, Ph.D., of Syracuse University, prepared answers to the two questions propounded on the nature and fields of research in religious education. It is expected that answers from other contributors will be published at an early date.