IS COMPLETE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE POSSIBLE?

by Ralph B. Wright, Jr.

The relationship of church and state cannot be considered solely the concern of Christians and other religious people in the United States. For the non-religious man is also concerned—concerned that his right not to believe be protected. The best statement supporting the non-religious man's view has been recently made by Hugh M. Hefner. Writing in his magazine, Playboy, Mr. Hefner has endeavored in five successive editorials to spell out the guiding principles and editorial credo behind the Playboy philosophy. Much could be written about the views expressed concerning the interrelationship between modern Man and Woman, Man and Society, Man and government but we will concern ourselves with the views expressed in the March and April editorials, namely, religious freedom in a democratic society.

Widely read by college men and young executives, Playboy probably reflects a greater understanding of the ideas of our modern generation than many Christians would like to believe. Many of these ideas should be carefully examined by Christians, for there are many truths expressed that the Church has failed to recognize or accept. Kudos must go to Mr. Hefner for this explicit and forthright discussion of the pseudo-puritanism which pervades our society, especially in the area of alcohol, divorce laws, and censorship. He has rightly stated that one group of individuals should not legislate the morality of other individuals. The foolhardiness of such ventures has been proven by history (e.g. Prohibition). For a further discussion of this, I turn you to Mr. Hefner's editorials.

I take exception to the views of Mr. Hefner in his discussion of religion itself. "...religion ought rightly to be a personal matter between man and God and should have nothing to do with man's relationship with government." American religious beliefs today have a great influence on our society and government, and "has placed unconstitutional curbs on our freedom of speech, press, and other media of communication." No discerning individual can deny that religious beliefs have such an influence, but whether it is good or bad is dependent upon the individual. I, for one, cannot agree with the view of Mr. Hefner that not only is freedom of religion specified in the Constitution but freedom from religion as well. To interpret the Constitution in such a manner is to play havoc with the intent of our founding fathers. The concept of a Supreme Being and Divine Providence permeated the culture of early America, and it continues to permeate the American

1. cf. Harvey Cox, "Playboy's Doctrine of Male" in Christianity and Crisis, 4/17/61
3. Ibid., p. 67.

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EDITORIAL

A new quarter has begun. It brings new courses and different experiences to be met with fresh vigor and determination of purpose. One wholesome innovation of the new quarter is the abolition of compulsory class attendance. The faculty has voted to experiment with non-compulsory class attendance for one quarter. While overdue, the faculty's expression of confidence in the student body is, itself, an expression of the faculty's progressive maturity. The faculty's decision tacitly reflects their confidence in the student's mature ability to direct himself toward a worthy goal. Non-compulsory attendance is in effect on a trial basis. The shackles of regimentation have been partially removed in order to let us prove ourselves worthy of this new freedom.

Each individual student must assume responsibility for guarding his freedom of self-direction. To tolerate abuses of freedom is tantamount to supporting such abuses. To participate in such abuses is despicable. Compulsory class attendance indicated the faculty's belief that each class is not merely a means to an end, i.e. passing the final examination. Each class session provided a unique learning opportunity. Belief in this concept has not changed. Rather it is now believed that the student body is mature enough to see each class in a proper perspective. We, the editors, support the faculty's judicious evaluation of the Fuller student body. We, the editors, urge the student body to offer an equally judicious response to the faculty's vote of confidence.

We have only one question. What criterion will be used to determine the success of this experiment? Will it be by measuring the compulsive attendance of non-compulsory classes or by measuring the amount of learning indicated by class participation, papers, examinations, and rewarded by grades?

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Politics once again return to Fuller. Within the next few weeks, the student body will have the opportunity of selecting their representatives to the Student Council for the 1963-64 school year. Are these elections going to be the traditional popularity contest (voting for the person you know best) or are they going to be concerned with the real issues and the programs envisioned by the candidates?

This year the Student Council has decided to allow a presentation of the various candidates. Such a welcomed addition to student affairs, however, will only be valuable if the entire student body participates. Only through complete interaction will intelligent decisions be made by those casting ballots. This in turn should lead to an active and articulate Student Council which represents the views of an entire student body.

the editors

A LETTER TO THE EDITORS......

With regard to the editorial of last month, I would like to make known a prior opinion expressed by the Student Council. In discussing the Lyceum Psychology Forum, we came to the unanimous agreement that the Forum was very beneficial in many ways and that any negative aspects were incidental. We hope that one of the results of this Forum will be a forth coming article designed to answer some of the questions raised by Dr. Bromiley. In light of the continued discussion and interaction I feel that the Forum has been anything but a 'failure.'

Alex Aronis
culture to this day (cf. The Declaration of Independence). Thomas Jefferson spoke out against an organized state church, but he did not speak out against religion per se. Being a Deist, he felt that:

"reason and free inquiry are the only effectual agents against error. Give a loose to them, they will support the true religion by bringing every false one to their tribunal, to the test of their investigation. They are the natural enemies of error, and of error only."4

Mr. Hefner has made the mistake (as do many other contemporary men) of reading into the writings of the 18th century ideas held by 20th century men. The mistake is compounded by reckoning democracy and religion as an antithesis. For example,

"Religion teaches that man should live for others; our democracy's free-enterprise system is based on the belief that the greatest good comes from men competing with one another. Religion offers a special blessing to the meek and the promise that they will inherit the earth; democracy requires that men speak out and be heard."5

On the surface, the above statement might appear to be true; but the mistake has been made of equating a political system with an economic system. A free-enterprise, capitalistic system need not be present in a state for a democratic government to exist. A further forgotten factor is that the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason developed out of the church, especially the Reformation church. To claim that it was a total reaction to Christianity is both unfair and untrue. It reacted to the totalitarian grip of the institutional church but agreed with the basic tenets of the Gospel. For the basic assumption of Christianity has been that God created men free and equal and endowed them with reason. Thus, by supporting the morality of men, derived from natural law, Locke drew to his position the heritage of Christian political thought. Whether we agree or disagree with Lockean principles is immaterial. The important thing to note is their Christian derivation. Thus democratic thought is not alien to Christianity, but, on the contrary, was derived from it. Therefore the statement, "American religion and democratic government are built upon different premises, with a great many divergent, if not actually conflicting, ideas and ideals,"7 is inaccurate.

Christian principles were an integral part of the founding of this nation; and if they are to be separated from our culture today in order to insure freedom from religion, we would be faced with a complete secularization of our culture.8 This is not desired by the large majority of Americans. It is true that the individual should remain the all-important element in our society, but it is not true that the individual should dictate the mores of society as a whole. In other words, the rights of minority groups need to be protected, but the majority should not be made subservient to the minority. Minority groups such as the one represented by Mr. Hefner should be willing to recognize and accept this.

7. Hefner, March 1963, p. 58
8. We must be careful here not to identify our faith with the "American Way of Life." For a further discussion of this issue see Peter L. Berger, Noise of Solemn Assemblies, (New York: Doubleday, 1961).
A Christian should recognize the problems involved. For him, complete separation of church and state is impossible. He cannot compartmentalize his faith into only one area of his life and remain true to the Gospel. A Christian is the entire, complete man. Therefore, if a Christian holds an elective office, Christian principles will enter into his decisions and lawmaking. Likewise, a Christian business man will use Christian principles in dealing with his clients and employees.

The Christian must be a realist and recognize the tension involved here. He must live a Christian life; yet, he cannot demand the same of his neighbor if he to respect the integrity and person of his neighbor. Europeans have seldom tried to delude themselves, as have we Americans, into thinking that absolute separation of church and state is possible. We should take a lesson from them.

Thus, it is unwise for a Christian group to demand a complete separation of church and state; for to do so would require the breakdown of our entire culture. This is the same mistake as the one made by the non-religious man. In fact it is probably worse because a Christian, in arguing for a completely secularized state, is arguing for an antithesis of the Gospel message. We are dealing in an area where understanding, reason, and flexibility are needed. The church’s job is not to legislate controls on society but to preach Christ. If Christ is preached, then the fruits of this will be apparent in the whole being of those who accept Him and will, therefore, be apparent in our society. I will close this essay by venturing the following rule of thumb. First, we, as American Christians, should endeavor to keep the institutional church and our government as separated as possible. Secondly, we must, as individuals, strive through our witness to permeate our society with the Gospel of Christ. Thus, we argue for neither a complete association nor a complete separation of church and state.

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BETWEEN TWO THIEVES, adapted by Warner LeRoy from a play by Diago Fabbri, concerns the attempt of a German-Jewish family to determine the guilt and blame for the death of Jesus of Nazareth by reconstructing the first century trial. The presentation of this unusual play, centering in the cross and forgiveness, makes it the most ambitious dramatic project ever attempted by theological students in this area.

On Monday, April 8 at 7:30 P.M. the Lyceum Committee presentation of BETWEEN TWO THIEVES will be at The Great Hall, First Methodist Church on the corner of Colorado and Oakland, Pasadena. There will be a 50¢ donation, but it is well worth it.

Carter Doran, the director, says, "We feel that all of the time and effort is worth it in this case. BETWEEN TWO THIEVES is an exciting, stimulating piece of theatre with overt implications for each person who sees it, both Christian and non-Christian. It is difficult today for the church to find plays which are satisfying both theologically and dramatically, but we feel that BETWEEN TWO THIEVES fulfills both requirements. No one can leave the performance without re-examining his own faith and commitment."
One of our B.D. students, a Mr. "X", has come to the attention of the faculty because his "spelling and punctuation are notoriously bad." I wish to raise a frail voice in his defence. Rather than saying that his grammar and spelling are "notoriously bad" (which everyone knows), let us rather suggest that they are "creative and original." This phrase is to be found in a letter of recommendation from one of his undergraduate professors, a rather bitter graduate of Union who teaches at an unaccredited college. All of the other letters of reference warned against "X", but the admissions committee were swayed by this Union man's insistence upon X's "creativity and originality." The admissions committee did not then know that this originality took the form of creative spelling. For example, X's spelling of existentialist is Xistentulist, a fact which may have a significance far beyond whatever contribution it may make to simplified spelling.

Mr. X's term papers all belong to the "safe" school. He has never ventured to include an idea of his own in a paper; indeed he goes to great lengths to avoid any such risk. When asked to write one page of opinion on a book, he usually writes 10 to 20 pages in which he quotes from his notes everything he can find that the instructor has said on any subject. His essays consist of stringing together a series of generally unrelated ideas culled from whatever periodical articles or books might remotely be conceived as dealing with the subject, his only original contribution to the paper being his "creative and original" spelling, punctuation and grammar. No, there are the conjunctions. He contributes a wide variety of conjunctions which he uses in stringing his selected quotations together.

The spelling and punctuation are of greater significance, however, as they constitute his main defence against plagiarism (however subconscious—and certainly little he does might be called conscious.) As he reads X's essay on "Apopalipticism," Professor G murmurs, "Hmm, I should check and see if this paragraph isn't a direct plagiarism from Ronald Gregor Smith, but, no, Smith would never spell existentialism like that." So X's built-in defence operates again.

According to X's roommate, a very perceptive graduate student in psychology, X's spelling has a much deeper and broader significance as "Windows into his soul" and "into his mind, if any." His original spelling must be seen to be richer and deeper than mere Freudian slips. (Personally as one who averages three Freudian slips to a lecture, I should not myself be content with that word mere.) X's spelling, however, is not phonetic—according to his roommate—but is Xistentulist. "I deliberately use X's own spelling of the word," says his roommate. "I once asked X to tell me what the word means."

"Xistentulist," he replied, "means that when, you all think what it means to you, right now, it means something, else to them." ("Them," explains his roommate, "is what X uses to refer to 'northerners, communits, fullosofors and the Holly Trinitie'.") X used to put a "w" when using it before "Trinity." That's what happens when someone attempts to tamper with his spelling.

But to get on with X's mind, and the clues which his spelling gives to his thinking. "X says," and we still quote his roommate, "that when we need to understand what a word means, we can break it down into component parts. His third grade teacher taught him to do this, and evidently she was the last teacher to have much influence upon him, although he does mention with great affection a professor..."
of religion at college, a graduate of Union, who urged him to apply to Yale saying that he was "just what Yale needs." The Union man was evidently quite intrigued by the way in which X gets at a word's meaning by breaking it down into component parts.

Fullosofor (Philosopher) for example, means a person who is "full of lots of what for?" And Xistentulist is explained by X as follows: (we are still quoting his roommate). "X is myself, the unknown myself. The is suggests the question: Who is I? X. And then we come to tent, for we are but camping in this existence, tenting tonight between eternity and eternity, and our tents are the same tents as the children of Israel, of Abraham who went forth knowing not where. The tent of tentative, the tent of intent. Next is u, which is, of course, the "You" of I-You, still more tentative and formal, until one stands in awe before the last syllable: list. When one looks deep inside that seemingly simple noun, one finds a hidden verb, that active hiddenness which is the hiddenness of God: an is. When one drops the "l"--symbolic of that hell of sin which stands between man and God, what you have left is list...And X always stands in awe before a German verb."

The question has been asked, "How did X get into this school in the first place?" X never asks this question himself. It is a question which is always asked for him. He came because he was sent by an undergraduate professor of religion. X moves forward with great confidence. For whatever he hears, he can spell in his own way. And once it is spelled out before him, he can look at it, analyse it, and thus understand it. Recently, for example, he found a pagan sun in the Easter message. The Easter text, as he punctuated it at the end of an essay, is fraught with meaning:

"He is, resun." ****************

the opinion has entered its second year, (and Fuller Theological Seminary has survived one year of free press). We are happy to announce that the Student Council has approved as members of the editorial board for the coming year:

Willard A. Parker.............Editor-in-chief
Ralph B. Wright, Jr..........Managing editor
Carlton Snow...................Literary editor
David Williamson...............Consultant

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Carter Doran for his editorial work during the past year, Drs. Fairweather and Cole for serving as faculty advisors and Barbara Smith who has had the unrewarding job of typing stencils. We also wish to thank you, the students and faculty of F.T.S., who by your articles, letters, and comments have made the opinion a part of our seminary life. We hope that you will continue to find the opinion a useful means of stimulation and expression.

the opinion is published the first Wednesday of each month throughout the school year by students at Fuller Theological Seminary, 135 N. Oakland Avenue, Pasadena, California. the opinion welcomes a variety of opinions consistent with general academic standards. Therefore, opinions expressed in articles and letters are those of the authors and are not to be construed as the view of the seminary, faculty, student council, or editors of the opinion.