

Thomas Explains Chapel Policy

Sir:—I regret that Rice University is undergoing attack (e.g. "Rice suffers from a sort of academic paranoia..."—Samuel B. Trickey, Houston Chronicle, "Letters," November 7, 1964) over the shoulder of the faculty Committee on Religious Activities, especially at a time when Professor Niels Christian Nielsen, who has been chairman of the committee most of the time since the chapel was dedicated, is not in residence. I am not a member of the committee, but was at the time referred to in recent newspaper agitation.

To conduct a strictly nondenominational chapel program, and to oversee any and all other religious activities on a strictly nondenominational campus, has always been the responsibility of the committee.

Concerted Attack

In this responsibility it was subjected to a concerted, and apparently centrally directed, attack during the transitional, *entre deux administrations* academic year 1960-1961. Nonmembers of the committee, even nonmembers of the university who had been extended the courtesy of offices on the campus, quite openly and directly participated in the attack.

It was disguised as a move to eliminate the nondenominational worship service in the chapel (this was the precise proposal brought to us by members of the Student Religious Council at a luncheon meeting in Baker College); however, as Professor Louis H. Mackey points out in a letter to the Chronicle (November 4), the real intention was to subvert the administration policy of nondenominational chapels and to institute a new policy "that each chapel speaker be provided with a worship service appropriate to his heritage, and that uncommitted speakers be allowed(sic) to lecture in a sec-

ular hall without benefit of clergy"—in other words, that the chapel be closed to all except denominational worship.

Right Side Prevails

The issue was squarely joined. Only one side could possibly prevail: if I may, not altogether spoofingly, say so, the right side. Once and for all the nondenominational character of religious activities at our constitutionally nondenominational university was reaffirmed.

Professor Mackey may, if he choose, regard this policy as a token that "Rice is not yet old enough or mature enough to be wholly objective about religion." I will not argue the definition of "objective."

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