

Campus & City

Evans Speaker

Tolerance of other religions was stressed by an internationally known expert in world religions who recently visited St. Andrews Presbyterian College in Laurinburg, N.C. The Rev. Willard G. Oxtoby held several public lectures during his stay and also visited several classes.

Dr. Oxtoby was chosen as this year's E. Harvey Evans Distinguished Fellow. Evans fellows are chosen for their significant contributions to society, through both their world and community activities.

The program was established in honor of E. Harvey Evans, a businessman from Laurinburg, N.C., who had

strong ties to the Presbyterian Church. Evans was a ruling elder of the Laurinburg Presbyterian Church and served as a trustee of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va., for 28 years.

Dr. Oxtoby talked extensively about the evolution of the primary world religions, as well as the conflict of the Jewish state in Israel. Israel was formed primarily from "a desire for a haven from anti-Semitic persecution," as well as a means for greater Jewish identification, he said.

The major reason Christians, particularly those in the West, find Eastern religions so hard to understand is because those religions do not

separate church and state like the Christian religion does. "We don't subscribe to the theory that the church is the state. This colors our thinking about happenings in the Middle East," he said.

Dr. Oxtoby also discussed the importance of looking below the surface and avoiding stereotypes when trying to understand other religions, saying knowledge of other religions can help widen perspectives and increase appreciation for different points of view.

Modern technology has helped expand the world's knowledge of various religions, as has the migration of peoples from East to West and vice versa, according to

Dr. Oxtoby. This expanded knowledge has brought about a greater tolerance of other religions, even in the face of conflicting social and cultural values. "The existence of other religions is a fact, not necessarily a problem," he said.

A professor of religious studies at the University of Toronto, Dr. Oxtoby is also involved in research in religions of Asia and interreligious contact and dialogue. He has taught at

Harvard and Yale Universities, and is currently serving as president of the American Society For the Study of Religion. Born in California, Dr. Oxtoby graduated with honors from Stanford University and received his masters and doctorate in Oriental Studies from Princeton University. He has also studied at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and done post-doctoral work in world religions at Harvard University.

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