

When Campus and Faith Come Together

Ever since UNC's founding as the nation's first public university, religion has been a part of student life. Now more than ever, it is also part of the political scene, as questions about funding raise the issue of separation of church and state in public education.

Anyone who thinks religion is not an integral part of the UNC community need only walk through the Pit on any given afternoon. Without fail, a crowd of students will have been drawn into a heated discussion with a Pit Preacher about the "evil" lifestyles of UNC students. These impromptu religious debates are as much a part of UNC tradition as Silent Sam or the Old Well.

The number of religious organizations on campus also points to a definite student interest in religion. There are at least 24 religious organizations — more than any other kind of student group — with memberships ranging from six to 750.

The emphasis placed on religion is nothing new to the University. It has been a part of its history since the first students walked through the doors in 1793. After Old East, the second oldest public university building in the country is Person Hall, which once served as UNC's chapel.

But despite religion's long history and popularity among students today, it is a controversial issue. Concerns have been raised about the exclusive nature of religious organizations. Some students view these groups as fanatical and socially conservative. There exists much confusion about the beliefs and practices of religious groups and the role they play in the University community.

In July, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in the *Rosenberger vs. University of Virginia* case that denying a campus religious publication university funding simply because of the group's religious affiliation violated students' freedom of speech and free exercise of religion.

Following this decision, religious organizations at UNC started requesting money from Student Congress. Now, UNC is grappling with the challenge of deciding on what basis student religious groups should be recognized and funded.

The DTH sponsored a roundtable discussion to address these and other issues surrounding religious organizations. The leaders of five groups were asked to participate in the dialogue. While this is in no way a comprehensive sampling of the opinions and views of all religious organizations, it does provide a sense of what the purpose, beliefs and functions of these organizations are at the University.

The following is a list of those who participated in the discussion and the groups they represent:

■ Allison Dunnivant, a senior international studies major from IntersVarsity Christian Fellowship, a non-denominational Christian group.

■ Elisheva Ende, a senior psychology major from N.C. Hillel, a Jewish organization.

■ Angelique Bartlett, a senior journalism and Spanish major from the Newman Catholic Student Center Parish.

■ Annika Harris, a senior sociology major from New Generation Campus Ministries, a student prayer movement targeting black students.

■ Joel Wilson, a senior psychology and sociology major from Kallisti, a student pagan organization.

An Open Discussion

THE DAILY TAR HEEL: One of the hot issues with religious groups on campus since the *Rosenberger* decision has been obtaining funding from congress. Do you think Student Congress should fund religious organizations? Why or why not?

WILSON: I am really happy with the *Rosenberger* decision. I think it is religious discrimination to not fund someone based on their religious nature. Up until a week and a half ago, Kallisti was funded by the people in it. This year, we have \$120 from Student Congress. It's not major funds, but it takes a lot of the burden off of the four officers who end up footing a lot of the bills.

ENDE: We are funded from the national Hillel, partially from the Jewish Federation and partially from donations. I recently went in front of Student Congress to ask for money, and we did get some money to do programs we couldn't have done otherwise.

BUT I have mixed feelings about universities giving religious organizations money, because you get into a lot of stickiness of who gets how much, and if one group gets it and another doesn't, there's going to be a controversy there between the two groups.

WILSON: They (Student Congress members) have done a couple of things. One is that IVCF and Muslim Student Association were denied funding not on the basis of their religion but because membership is largely based on religion. It's one of the provisions in the Student Code for funding that you have to not discriminate in any way in your membership. MSA, although it allows anyone to become a basic member, has levels of advancement you cannot reach if you are not Islamic. I think it was the same thing with IntersVarsity, that



ANGELIQUE BARTLETT

you have to be Christian to do certain things.

DUNNAVANT: We don't have a running roster of members, so there's no list with an 'X' by your name if you haven't signed a statement of faith. You only have to sign a statement of faith if you hold a leadership position.

WILSON: They told us funds received cannot be used for religious practice. If you want to fund educational programs or speakers, that's fine, but no money for communion wine or a retreat.

BARTLETT: We are getting ready to go up for funding. Our center is funded partially by the parish that we coexist with, our parents,

alumni and our fundraisers. We thought we should be part of this process as well, so we're asking for funding for Catholic Awareness Week.

We were hesitant of asking for anything else because we figured what would congress fund, and it would have to be something not religious exactly, but educational. Since this is a new thing, there are going to be problems.

One thing I think there needs to be a guidebook for the funding procedure to make it clearer for those of us who have never asked for funding.

HARRIS: We were the first religious organization on the campus to receive funding from the Student Congress. We support ourselves through our own efforts as well.

I agree religion should be no way of discriminating against somebody. Even in the mission statement of the entire campus it says the University of North Carolina does not discriminate based on sexual orientation, religion or whatever. Just to say you can't have funding because you are a religious organization, I don't think that's necessarily fair. One of the reasons they agreed to fund us was because of our newsletter. We said we wanted it to be used to teach other people about Christ and the ministry.

DTH: What do you see as your role in the University community?

ENDE: It is my opinion that the main thing Hillel is there for is to say, 'Here is a place for Jews to gather and to educate the rest of the campus about what is Judaism and what we do.' The second major thing is to unite Jews either socially or religiously or educationally.

BARTLETT: I see the Newman Center as a place where college students can go and feel comfortable. It provides a place where they can practice their faith and learn more about it and also to acknowledge that religion is an important part of their lives.

We try to educate people — dispel ignorance — about what Catholics really do. That's why we have Catholic Awareness Week.

WILSON: Kallisti, I feel, is different from most religious organizations on campus in that we are not a place for religious practice. We serve to connect pagans on campus and to steer them toward smaller groups who have a religious community who do practice together. We also help members explore their spirituality.

HARRIS: Our role is to bring about a reality and a relevancy of Jesus Christ on the campus. We historically target the black community because we see a great need and the desolation that is currently taking place.

We are definitely not ethnically controlled, just ethnically conscious. We recognize there is a need for God in the black community, but also in society as a whole. We want to represent a standard of Godliness and show other people there is another way besides drugs and partying or whatever routes people are taking.

DUNNAVANT: Our role on campus is to provide a place for people to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and then to explore the way it can apply to their lives. We are predominantly a white organization and part of our mission statement is to engage the campus in all its ethnic diversity. Annika (Harris) and I have become friends this year, trying to work friendships between our fellowships. We want to address the needs of the entire campus population, not just one group.

DTH: Earlier in the year the DTH ran a cartoon depicting student religious groups in competition over membership, a view which some people on campus hold about religious organizations. How do you think your organization is viewed by other people on campus?

WILSON: One: "There are pagans?" Two: "Euhhhh!" There's not much reaction. Nobody is really sure what a pagan is and what pagans do. They figure they're funded by Student Congress, and they exist here so they can't be too strange. We've been trying to publicize more, but the pagan community is one that is hard to get plugged into.

DUNNAVANT: I think we get a real wide variety of responses. I could never say I know what everybody else is thinking, but I think some people view us as fanatical. Some people think we are conservative. Some people think we are just interesting, just another Christian group.

I would say in reference to the cartoon, because I know that had to do with IntersVarsity, some of what that cartoon had to say isn't true, but it was a real wake-up call for the Christian community. A lot of us started talking and saying we're not like that, and we need to show people it's not IntersVarsity here, Campus Crusade over there, New Generation over there and Fellowship of Christian Athletes way back there. We know each other, we have friendships with each other. We like each other, and we're not at war. While the cartoon showed us what some of the campus might perceive, it also encouraged us to show that's not all that's there.

HARRIS: The cartoon definitely sparked something in me: We have to be more unified. We each play a part, and when we come together it's really awesome. We come together and meet and do a lot of things that people on campus don't even know we're doing because we don't announce: "Look at the Christians! We're coming together!" But at the same time, we really want to



ALLISON DUNNAVANT

represent a true picture of what Jesus represents.

I really want to promote good race relations, reconciliation and unity and just showing I can sit at a table and talk to a Catholic, a pagan, a Jew, and at the same time never compromise my stand on Christ but be open to what everybody else has to say.

DTH: UNC has a reputation of being a liberal campus. Do you find it hard to be a religious organization — and a religious person — here at UNC, or do you think that's a completely inaccurate representation of UNC? Is the atmosphere at UNC conducive to being a religious organization or person?

BARTLETT: It's not hard for us at the Newman Center, because we're representing a church that's been around for thousands of years. It's not like we're trying to forge new territory. But the question of what does it mean to be a religious person on campus really interests me. At least for Catholics, some people say, "How can you believe what the Church says when you see all this knowledge out there, and that's what college is all about?"

But I think religion and the university have something in common. They're both searching for truth, and when you put it like that, we're all here for sort of the same reason. There is a feeling among some people of how can you be religious and be an academic? And, "Is it cool to be religious?" and, "Can you still have fun?" I think to be a religious organization, sure, it's easy. But to be a practicing, faithful person is a different issue.

ENDE: I don't see being liberal and being identified with a religious organization at odds. I think we try to embrace that diversity or the liberalness. We have gay and lesbian programming and political talks all the time. Those people who see religion and being liberal as two different things, I think can still find a place at Hillel, because we also have purely social things. Judaism, along with being a religion, is also

a culture.

HARRIS: Just by being at a liberal university, it allows that freedom to practice your religion. I can't deny what I see as being immorality taking place in Chapel Hill and just on our campus. In a lot of ways, I think being a Christian can be a liberal approach because it goes against what is the norm on campus.

There are a lot of people who don't feel the way I do, but I don't find it hard.

DUNNAVANT: I think there are hard decisions to make sometimes. You're faced with a behavior or value decision where your faith definitely influences which direction you go, but I think the



atmosphere here is actually good for religious organizations, because it's a challenge to become a Christian and to become involved in the faith.

You have to take it seriously. There's thousands of things coming at you, thousands of different points of view every day and so you really have to decide if this is what I believe. In that sense, I feel like this atmosphere is conducive to producing genuine faith.

WILSON: We haven't been harassed. No one calls my house with death threats. We haven't had people jump into our meetings and call us all sinners or tell us we're going to hell.

We don't face any of the conservatism of campus. Nobody has given us a hard time, even the Pit Preachers. Most of us at some point have talked to them and told them we're searching, and trying, and they have told us to keep on searching, and God will lead you where you're suppose to go.

DTH: What do you consider to be the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of you individual organization?

WILSON: Our diversity is our strength. We have Christians, we have atheists, we have agnostics, druids and witches. Everybody on the planet is a member of Kallisti.

It is also our greatest weakness, because no two people believe the same thing. It means that it becomes very hard to worship together as a community.

BARTLETT: One of our weaknesses is that a lot of people who come to us may not be coming because they're really searching for their faith. It's just the comfortable thing to do. Our strength is the community feeling.

HARRIS: Even though we're small in numbers, the people who are involved are really committed to God and each other. At the same time, one of the things I see a need for is to reach out to other ethnic groups, because we're not trying to be another black organization.

DUNNAVANT: Our strength is that we are a family. We really love each other, and we have a wide variety of Christian and non-Christian backgrounds.

Our weakness is real closely tied to that, in that we don't engage enough in dialogue with other religious groups on campus.

DTH: What function do you think religion serves on campus?

ENDE: That goes back to what you think religion should serve, and I think religion should serve the individuals. I think it serves the purpose of letting the individual find the place of worship or the place of comfort that best suits them.

BARTLETT: And to find strength. I think religion to many people is somewhere where you do find strength and meaning in your life. Some people would say religion is not an answer, but to many of us obviously it is.

It's something to hold on to, to give you hope.

WILSON: I think direction and meaning are two key words. Long ago, I was confronted with the question of, "Why, with the rise of science, has religion not fallen away?"

What science does is tell you how the world works, but not why or who cares or what you should do about it or how you should behave. It's nice to know that putting one foot in front of the other lets me walk, but where do I walk to and why and with what intentions?

Religion, Education Go Together Well

When I was first approached to write this column, regarding the purpose of religious organizations, I was excited. For one thing, I would be able to voice my opinion in the campus newspaper. But then the recent controversy in Student Congress came to mind. IntersVarsity Christian Fellowship was denied funding due to the fact that their leaders had to sign a statement of faith. Also, the Muslim Student Association was denied recognition by the University for requiring voting members to be Muslims. These events give my message a timely importance.

To look at the purpose of religious organizations, I must first understand the purpose of the one I am active in, Campus Crusade for Christ. The purpose statement of CCC is, "to glorify God by loving Him and trusting Him to develop a movement of students all across UNC who are willing and able to win, build, and send others worldwide for Jesus Christ in a culturally relevant way." What does that mean to those of you who are not involved in CCC? Nothing. But I believe there exists an extremely important, underlying intent in all religious organizations. That intent is for members to know what they believe and to be firm in those beliefs. But it is at this point where society comes in and heads begin to butt.

American society cherishes religion, as it does all matters of private conscience, but it's a society in which tolerance and relativism are the highest ideals. We are told that when we are public with our beliefs, we have crossed the line and become intolerant of others' views. Our culture presses the religiously faithful to be other than themselves, to act publicly, and



VIMAL PATEL
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sometimes even privately, as though their faith does not matter.

Not to dwell on it, but the recent Student Congress incident comes to mind as a prime example of this. On Nov. 8, IntersVarsity Christian Fellowship was denied funding for being discriminatory in their choice of leadership (in order to be an IVCF leader, one must be a Christian). Congress' action was in line with the cultural shove to be tolerant of others and not discriminate. In asking Christians to be tolerant of others' beliefs, society says that our existing views have become intolerable, making this highest of ideals a paradox.

We have a Constitution that requires our nation's leader, the president, to be a natural-born citizen. Wait! Hold on! But that means that our president can't be Canadian, Japanese or whatever. That's intolerance! No, that never comes into question. However, if a non-Christian can't be a leader in a Christian organization, the bells sound.

Society asks the religiously devout to act rationally. What is rational? Tolerance is good, but by making it the highest ideal people are living in a society the views of which are ever-changing and which continually asks people to accept new norms. In this environment, we find it difficult to establish a firm world view, as culture unceasingly prods us to amend our existing view for the sake of tolerance or relativ-

ism. Being caught in this wave of acceptance causes us to be washed away by these changes.

The University is supposed to be a marketplace of ideas where a person can define his or her way of thinking. However, it has recently become a place where we are asked to sacrifice our beliefs for the ideal of tolerance or relativism. Rather than defining ourselves (or allowing God to define us), we are shaken and moved to where culture wants us to be. In this wave of tolerance, it is easy for people to come along for the ride and not have their own world view, because they're continually amending it to fit the mainstream.

To me, it would be more rational for me to know one's beliefs and be firm in them, rather than always to conform to the culture's views. This is where religious organizations have come to play a crucial role in university life. These organizations have held up through a wave of changing ideals, and they have remained rooted in their doctrine. When society tells us God is to be nothing more than a hobby and that we should give Him up for tolerance, we can look to these organizations, and see that they have been an anchor in this ever-changing society.

What these organizations have taught me is it is imperative that we know the beliefs we stand for, or we are no stronger than the beliefs we are relinquishing for the sake of others. My question to you is: Do you know what you believe, or are you just along for the ride — going wherever society takes you?

Take this question seriously. It defines who you are.

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