

Emissaries From the Outside World

*Some undergraduate notes on recent
visitations to the campus*

THEOLOGIANS

Caltech students like visitors. Most of the programs which bring official visitors from the "outside world" are met with considerable enthusiasm, and such was the case with two notable visits this spring. First, seven theological students from various schools of religion on the Pacific Coast spent four days living in the student houses, and then the Yale Russian Chorus spent two days doing the same. Both groups provided Techmen with the opportunity to meet bright, dynamic college students with interests, philosophies, and personalities quite foreign to our campus.

Among the seven theologians were students of Judaism and of several branches of Protestantism. One theologian was assigned to each of the student houses, and six shared rooms with Caltech students. (The seventh was a girl.) They all ate their meals in their adopted houses, and spent most of their time in bull sessions.

Sponsored by the YMCA, the visiting theological student program runs in alternate years with a visit from some outstanding theologian. The theologians this year were intelligent and well-educated, most of them having been honor students at good liberal arts colleges. They seemed to be the counterpart in the liberal arts to Caltech students in the sciences.

The theologians exhibited a firm understanding of philosophy, and the overzealous, non-believing Techmen gave them an opportunity to display their education most brilliantly. Whenever the discussions became too loud or too emotional, the visitors displayed a cultured command of themselves and the situation. Strangely enough, it was usually the supposedly rationalistic Caltech students who tended to become excited and emotional.

The most impressive thing about the theologians

was the type of philosophical systems they put forth. For the most part, Caltech students who were expecting fundamentalistic, "hell-fire and brimstone" evangelists whom they could rake over the coals, were sadly disappointed. One theologian did profess a Calvinistic philosophy which he had (to *his* satisfaction at least) combined with the study of physics. He believed that "God's call" had been for him to devote half of his energies to religion and half to science, and so he attempted to devote certain hours to thinking like a scientist, and certain other hours to thinking like a theologian.

Several of the visitors had surprisingly sophisticated philosophies which they had formed with cognizance of the traditional atheistic and agnostic arguments. They had built their religious systems to bypass the major first-level objections that many Caltech students have committed to memory.

Most of the theologians looked upon religion as a means to producing a better world, as an effective measure against forces working contrary to man's general welfare. Physics graduate students, flying the colors of logical positivism, seemed drawn like flies into arguments with this philosophy. Their argument was that one shouldn't make assumptions about the universe (namely, the existence of God) when these assumptions are unnecessary. The theologians' answer was that religion performs a service to man which is necessary for his happiness — a service which no simpler system (one without religion) can perform.

One theologian said flatly that the question of the actual existence of God was irrelevant, since the primary function of belief is to provide an individual with motivation to live by a sound ethical system.

Another theologian admitted quite frankly that he wasn't certain that God existed outside of man's mind, but that he had accepted religion anyway because of

the beneficial influence it has on people.

A third theologian said that only through religion will vast numbers of people be made ethical enough to make possible a smooth-running society.

Although most of the theologians were convinced of the actual existence of God, nearly all agreed that this was almost an academic point, and certainly secondary to the service that belief performs.

One theologian summarized the whole new approach to theology by relating it to modern physics. He pointed out that science has defined subatomic particles by their actions and properties, rather than by their actual substance. Likewise, modern religion, said the theologian, defines God by His function and the effect that belief in Him has upon the world. If and when we discover the physical construction of the electron, concludes the theologian, our discovery will not alter the properties of it; the same argument applies to God and religion.

After the first few discussions, even the most enthusiastic Caltech atheists ceased trying to argue their traditional points against religion. Many Techmen finally concluded that the theologians professing this reformed theology were cheating by arguing morality rather than religion. The theologians were told that a scientific, logical approach didn't allow one to believe in something because it is convenient; certainly such a philosophy would ruin science. Yet even the most dedicated atheist gave the theologians credit for a good try, and respected them for forcing him to argue religion on a higher plane than he had before.

In turn, the theologians enjoyed their stay at Caltech. Most admitted that their philosophies had never been attacked so vigorously. More important, they agreed that Caltech students were less hostile to their philosophies than they had anticipated, and several of the theologians expressed a desire to come again.

CHORISTERS

With the Yale Russian Chorus (also brought to the campus by the Caltech YMCA) Techmen had an entirely different experience. Most of the chorus members, all undergraduate or graduate students at Yale, had traveled to Russia during the previous summer, under the sponsorship of the State Department. The chorus would sing spontaneously on the streets of Moscow, and then would mingle with the Russians they had attracted. Techmen were full of questions about Russia, and the Yalies tried to answer them all.

The worst aspect of the Yale visit was the tendency of many of the younger choristers to consider Caltech as a hotel, and to treat Caltech students in the same manner one hotel guest treats another. Besides being slightly aloof, the Yale freshmen were a little trying in their attempts to be sophisticated. Fortunately, Yalies definitely improve with age. The older students were friendly and outgoing.

On the final night of their stay, the choristers presented a two-hour concert, with all of the numbers (except for some encores) sung in Russian. The concert was probably the best musical event Caltech has had in years and the predominantly Caltech audience expressed its appreciation by calling the chorus back for six encores. This display of appreciation, warmly received by the visitors from Yale, provided the impetus for a very successful spontaneous party after the concert with the Yalies. The chorus sang and talked freely, and even the Yale freshmen seemed not quite so concerned with being collegiate.

Generally speaking, the visit gave Caltech a better understanding of Yale and what it represents, though some Techmen were reminded of why they had picked Caltech instead of the Ivy League.

— Roger Noll '62

The Yale Russian Chorus gives a concert in Caltech's Culbertson Hall.



ANTHROPOLOGIST

Explaining that she found Techmen to be "self-contained, rational, cheerful, inner-directed, and career-oriented," Dr. Margaret Mead summed up her opinions on Caltech students after three days of close observation as a guest on the YMCA's Leaders of America Program this month. Despite her tight program, Dr. Mead did discover many things about Techmen, and although she said that she was "not a critic," she did make a few observations on the problems that Caltech students, as a group, seem to have.

Techmen, explained Dr. Mead, are ". . . on the whole, youngsters who have been pretty dissociated from the world they have come from. They learn to think extraordinarily early . . . They've learned to figure everything out." As a result of the Techman's ability to analyze, Dr. Mead continued, he is apt to become isolated from the rest of the race.

This is the problem, and Dr. Mead's suggested solution is to try to find some kind of dilutant that will enable the Caltech student to overcome this isolation. Dr. Mead noted that the Institute attempts to provide this dilutant through its humanities requirements, but she suspected that the humanities here were probably given to us only in the form of the written word—something we have had since we were two years old, and, therefore, not as useful as such other forms of the humanities as ballet (*ballet?*) or art, where life and movement is portrayed.

Dr. Mead admitted, however, that it would probably be easier to "meet the rest of the race" by another means, and one dearer to the Techman's heart—girls. What kind of girls, and how to meet them is, of course, another problem—but Dr. Mead discussed that too.

As far as the Techman's methods for meeting girls are concerned, Dr. Mead merely noted that she had never seen less ambitious Romeos in her life. The Techman, she explained, wants girls to appear and disappear at his wish and is unwilling to go out and find them himself. Techmen, she noted, are also picky

about what kind of girls they want as well: "Dartmouth boys want girls. Caltech boys want girls that they think Caltech boys should have."

Dr. Mead then proceeded to discuss just what types of girls Caltech boys should have. She described the ideal girl for a Techman as one who does not want to get married right away. Techmen want to learn something before getting married, and they want their future wives to learn too. "This is one group in the country who want bright wives. This is unique and should be cultivated."

The girl should have some mental capacities, or some sort of gift as well. The problems involved in getting this sort of girl, as can be seen, are serious. Dr. Mead described a survey she took to see if many girls would want to marry a physicist. Very few did. The solution that Dr. Mead proposes is a familiar one, but this is perhaps the first time that it has been proposed seriously. She suggests that a high-level girls college be established on the West Coast. (As mentioned, Caltech students have been considering the idea of turning Tournament Park into a girls school since the 1930's.)

Another interesting situation in which Dr. Mead analyzed the Techman's feelings is in regard to whether or not Pasadena can be called a "college town." First of all, said Dr. Mead, a college town is one that "fights the students all the time." The students at a college, she explained, want the town to know that the college exists. Most important, however, is that in a college town, the university is the town's way of touching with the future. Pasadena, Dr. Mead continued, tends to ignore both the college and the students, thus giving the impression, at least to some of the students, that it really isn't a college town.

It is interesting that Dr. Mead's opinions on the girls' college and Pasadena seem to correlate with opinions that many Techmen have had for a long time. The solution is simple: Let's move Caltech and bring on the girls!

— Richard Karp '64



Margaret Mead, on campus as one of the YMCA's Leaders of America, discusses the natives with Robert Ryan, Resident Associate of Page House.