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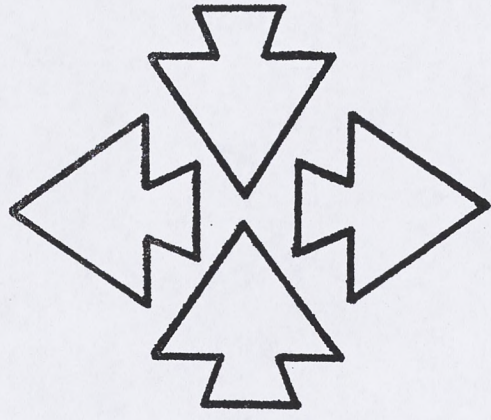
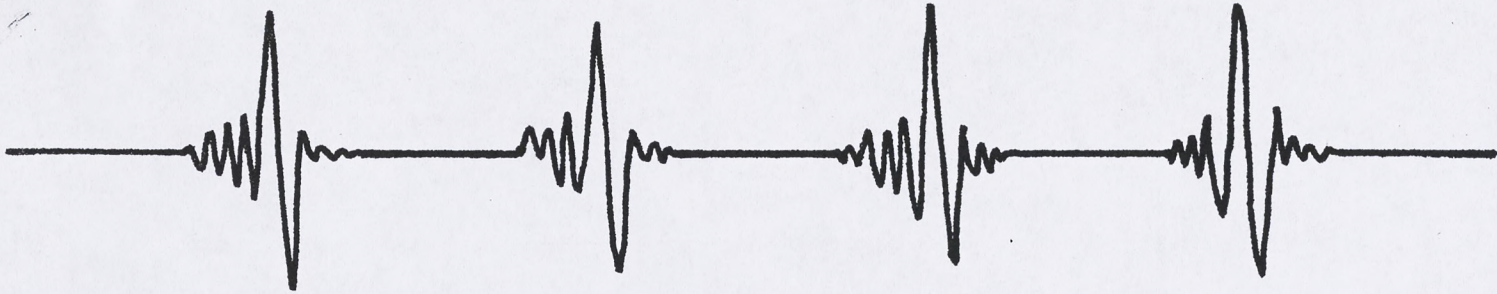
Chuck Van Engen

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the OPINION

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THE OPINION / ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The viewpoints expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by The Opinion staff, the Associated Students, Faculty or Administration of Fuller Theological Seminary.

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SET YOUR OWN PRIORITIES! OR, A HEADSTART PROGRAM FOR THOSE
WHO ARE ALREADY BEHIND

By Jack Rogers

The issue is not grades! The issue is education. Especially it is education for Christian service. Persons come to study at Fuller Seminary bringing with them a wide variety of gifts. There are different natural capabilities, interests and background. Students graduating from Fuller Seminary go out to serve in a startling variety of situations. There are different churches, kinds of ministries within churches and specialized service in the world. Our task educationally is to enable students to develop their varying gifts for ministry.

Let us be concrete. Previously students felt it necessary to demonstrate their worth by maintaining, e.g., a "B" average in all subjects. This often meant spending disproportionate time on subjects not central to their future ministry just to maintain the "B" average. Averages have value only in the artificial environment of a school. No congregation ever chose one candidate over another simply because one had a "B" average! Congregations are not interested in marks on paper. They want to know what you know, what experience you've had and if you seem to have the maturity to meet new situations.

The new grading system allows a student to determine his/her own priorities. There are a variety of gifts among the faculty, but the one element we seem to share in common is each sincerely believing that our subject is most important! So it should be. But you are not here to please us. You are here to please God and to satisfy yourselves that you are doing so. Satisfaction grows as you become qualified for your future task.

You can get honors! Give your best effort to the courses in which you are most interested. Any graduate school or employer will be more impressed by honors in the areas of your chosen expertise than by a "B" average in all subjects.

No one here wants to lower the standards of Fuller Seminary. The real issue is helping you to set standards for yourself. You will not always be students! The saddest statement I hear is: "I need grades to motivate me." After seminary you must choose the kinds of rewards you will seek. You must determine what you ought to do and for whom! Sad will be the minister in judgment day who lets the person with the most power determine his priorities. Regretful will he/she be who worked hardest for whomever gave him/her the most tangible rewards.

Most of us have years and years of A,B,C,D,F grading drilled into us as the only standard. It need not be so! Today my ten-year-

SET YOUR OWN PRIORITIES (cont.)

son brought home a new progress report form from fourth grade. There were three categories: Working Above Grade Level, Working Approximately at Grade Level, Working Below Grade Level. Best of all, there were two paragraphs of specific comments by the teacher! It was the most encouraging and useful report we have ever gotten! When today's fourth graders get to seminary they won't worry about a "B" average. Maybe we could get a head start on them.

WORSHIP

We enter
Boldly but shyly
Confident yet fearful
Joyful yet sorrowful
Peaceful yet in a tumult

Because

We see you yet only by faith
We hear you yet do not understand
We know your love yet are afraid
We call you Father yet we are creatures

And so

In the paradoxes of worship
In the dimness of this world
In the contradictions of love

We cry, "Abba, Father."

--Chuck Van Engen

THE GRADES FLUNKED

By Bill McIvor

The grades are in. And the new grading system got an "F". Some may try to call it "No Credit" but that would be a euphemism. The new grades just plain flunked.

Two weeks ago in The Opinion I said in effect that the change of grading systems was unwise. I also asked for your opinion and set out a little box to monitor them. 98 cards were dropped in that box. Before I indicate the results two points require emphasis.

1. The poll was voluntary. Some may say that 98 responses don't mean much. I disagree. (98 represents 33% of the theology student body, the only ones immediately affected by the change.) Some effort was required to respond. Though it is not legitimate to argue that only those who responded are interested it is fair to say that at least those who responded are concerned with this issue. Many comments on the cards also reveal decided opinions. (I was again told that I was dumb and even naive. But I had a few hearty supporters too!) 98 voluntary responses indicate that many people are aware of what's going on, concerned about it and willing to take a stand. (Most signed their cards.)

2. The number of responses to my poll is not dissimilar to that of other polls taken on the grade change. This is significant in that the option here was simple: do you FAVOR the change or do you NOT FAVOR it. Other polls presented a number of options which, in my opinion, confused the issue and split the vote. In my poll the question was clear and so was the response.

There were 98 responses. Of these

28 (28.6%) FAVOR the grading change

4 (4.1%) were UNDECIDED

66 (67.3%) DO NOT FAVOR the grading change

Rather than play around with figures lest I be called a liar (as in "Figures don't lie but liars will figure") I will just say that a lot of folks don't think the grading change is a very hot idea. To be specific and emphatic: 67.3% DO NOT FAVOR THE NEW GRADES. That, I suggest, is a rather decided majority. What does it mean? One thing: reconsideration is in order.

Many who voted against the grading change expressed approval of a system similar to the one I outlined in The Opinion, that is, "A-B-C-NC."

THE GRADES FLUNKED (cont.)

Now an interesting fact is that such a system was being considered until it was superseded by the current change. Furthermore, almost all responses to my poll show that the overwhelming student concern is for more and better evaluation of work, whatever form this evaluation may take. In light of these facts I am making the following proposal to Academic Affairs for their positive recommendation to the Theology Faculty.

1. Place a moratorium on the present grading change for one year.
2. Adopt the A-B-C-NC system that I outlined in The Opinion of April 10, 1973, or a similar system.
3. Maintain the Pass/Fail option for a specified number of courses.
4. Make efforts to insure that faculty grading is consistent with the grading system.
5. Encourage all faculty to give as much response and evaluation as possible on papers and other work.
6. Take appropriate steps to evaluate the effect of this change during the course of the year.

There is every reason to believe that such a system will solve many of the legitimate criticisms of the present grading system. The change to such a system would be a major change from what we now have. I think it would be a wise decision and one which the majority of students support.

THE GOSPEL AND ACADEMIA

Lately I have noticed an attitude in myself and my fellow-students which bothers me a little. Let me give a few examples. Recently I heard that some students threw down their Biblical language test and walked out, angry and frustrated at the academia. And the anti-scholastic comments heard here and there prevail over any defense of a highly scholastic (scholarly) life-style. It also seems that the discussion in the School of Theology over a new grading-system is at least in part a product of this attitude. The attitude deprecates scholarship in favor of an emotive, existential experience of God. Now I am wholly in agreement with this orientation toward experience. But what worries me is that this is seen as a choice against scholarship.

THE GOSPEL AND ACADEMIA (cont.)

We seem to have driven a wedge between our scholarship and our lives. We don't let our Gospel inform our academia.

Now I'm sure there are many reasons for this. But let me point out one which I have noticed. American culture is extremely quick to compartmentalize people. College for most of us, for example, was a matter of "taking courses" in different "disciplines". And because these disciplines were defined in opposition to each other, we then had to take "integration seminars" to reunite them in our minds. From a different perspective, a recent article in Time Magazine stated that American people have been psychologically, sociologically, and politically analyzed and polled more than any other people in history. American culture divides itself into such classes as students and non-students, white and "minority", Protestant and Catholic, conservative and liberal, liberals and non-liberals. In fact, I am a "middle-class, white Protestant conservative student." As such, certain statistics almost demand that I believe certain things and vote Republican. My pigeon-hole is so small I have no room to move. If I act differently than the statistics indicate, I am "reacting against my background".

Now the problem with this comes when we begin thinking in this way. And this seems to be what we are doing when we think about scholarliness. At one moment, for example, we think we are "doing theology". That means we are doing abstract propositional thinking which we are not to apply directly to our lives. At other times we may be "having our devotions". This means we are ignoring conjunctions, literary elements, parallelism, and historical context and simply waiting for a word to "zap" us. We feel we have really "met God" if we feel emotionally high or at least peaceful. But our minds are hardly working. Thus anything scholastic is not relevant to our lives.

There is, however, a direction which could help us destroy this pseudo-dichotomy. In our class work, we need to begin working as whole persons. Faith is not merely an emotion; faith "comes from hearing (propositions), and hearing from the Word of God." A new concept thus demands a new response in emotion and spirit and "exists" as well as intellect. For example, not long ago I was sitting in Dr Ladd's class struggling over the nature of the New Testament concept of the "Kingdom". We were talking about Peter's first sermon in Acts, and how his assertion regarding Christ was that Jesus sits right now on the Davidic throne as King over the world. A few weeks later I was reading Colossians 3:1 & 2, waiting for a word to "zap" me. Suddenly the verse came alive. But not through being zapped. Instead I suddenly realized the real significance of the passage could be found in the dynamic interpretation of the "already-not yet" Kingdom of God. Suddenly I found myself praising God through a concept learned in class.

THE GOSPEL AND ACADEMIA (cont.)

Now this is the crux of the matter. We as students have fallen into such a compartmentalized mind-set that we do not allow our scholarship to influence our lives. We have not let the Gospel of new life inform our academia.

Now simply by changing our perception we will not erase all the problems of high scholarship. But I do think that many of our problems at Fuller will lose their severity as we apply our scholarship to our lives. As the writer of Hebrews has told us, let's leave the beginnings of salvation and go on to Christian maturity. Let's realize in experience what we learn in concept. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..." We are complete persons-let's think like whole persons.

Editor's note:

The position of editor of the Opinion is an appointment made by Student Council. The present editor, due to taking a teaching position in Mexico, will not continue next year. We are taking nominations for a new editor. Preferably he should be a Junior or first-year Middler. It is very important he be able to write clearly and well, and be sensitive to the issues at Fuller. Please submit your nominations to:

Chuck Van Engen

Deadline for articles for the next Opinion is May 10.