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A
Brief History
of the
School of Religion,
The University of Iowa

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This brief history is not intended to replace earlier accounts of the history of the School of Religion of The University of Iowa by Marcus Bach and Willard Lampe. However, ten years have passed since Willard Lampe's last revision of *The Story of an Idea*. This present history extends that story into the past and to the present. It is based upon research by Robert E. Page and edited by Mary Lou Doyle. To them should go the credit for authorship.

James C. Spalding
Director and Professor

A Brief History of the School of Religion, The University of Iowa

Half a century ago a group of citizens in the state of Iowa engaged in a bold new educational venture: they proposed the foundation of an interfaith School of Religion that would include Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, and which would make provision for teaching about the other major world religions. They further proposed that this school should be placed in a tax-supported state university, believing firmly that this could be done within the traditional understanding of the separation of church and state. The fact that the program of studies of the School of Religion of The University of Iowa continues to be acknowledged nationally as of the highest quality attests to the foresight and dedication of these people in bringing their dream to reality.

It is impossible to say when the idea for a School of Religion at Iowa first arose. From the founding of the University, its leaders accepted religion as an integral part of a student's life. In 1875, the trustees of the State University of Iowa made a ruling in favor of mandatory attendance at daily chapel services.

Not too surprisingly, the legality of that activity came into question. In 1898 the faculty voted to abolish the morning chapel, creating instead the Religious Education Committee, which established a monthly vesper program, presenting well-known religious leaders who lectured in a setting of worship. This activity continued on a formal basis until the 1950's.

Another activity of this committee was to coordinate all religious education activities on campus. At the turn of the century it was highly unusual for there to be any church- or synagogue-supported student-oriented programs at state university campuses. In response to a felt need during the first quarter of the century, denominational campus ministries, often including teaching programs in religion, were developed at state universities across the country. People associated with The University of Iowa played a pioneering role in this national movement.

1908 marked the first attempt by the Religious Education Committee to provide a program of coordinated academic classes in religion. At the invitation of President George E. MacLean and Prof. Edwin Starbuck, religious leaders of Iowa City were invited to meet with the faculty committee on May 8, 1908, to discuss means of providing religious education on campus. At this meeting a committee was formed to come up with a workable proposal. The proposal suggested that local pastors teach courses for credit. The faculty committee, composed of Professors Thomas H. Macbride, Forest Ensign, and Carl Seashore, administered this program. It was called a School of Religion for the two years of its existence. In the academic years 1909-10 and 1910-11, School of Religion News Bulletins note that four courses were taught each semester, with 50 students receiving University credit each year.

Five years later, minutes of the Committee on Religious Education record another attempt to found a School of Religion. In 1916 the committee presented a plan to President Macbride for the establishment of a Department of Religion at the University, but it was subsequently abandoned for the duration of World War I. In 1921, five years after the second abortive attempt, the Committee on Religious Education again initiated a process that this time finally culminated in a firmly established School of Religion at The University of Iowa.

On January 18, 1921, Chairman Clarence W. Case of the Committee on Religious Education called to order an informal meeting which included religious leaders of Iowa City. The topic for discussion was how religion could take its place alongside science and be taught in a scholarly manner at the state university. After a lengthy discussion those attending indicated a consensus on two points: there was a need for religion to be taught at the State University of Iowa; and the treatment of religion should be broad enough to include at least the thought of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. This meeting concluded in the appointment of a special committee. Rufus H. Fitzgerald, YMCA Secretary, as chairman, Prof. Edwin D. Starbuck, noted pioneer scholar in the psychology of religion, and Father William P. Shannahan of St. Patrick's Church in Iowa City were designated to investigate the possibilities for a School of Religion and to develop a feasible proposal for such a School.

These three men devised a plan, presented to President Walter A. Jessup in April of 1921, for a School of Religion to be established on "separate foundations affiliated with the University," to teach courses that would "enable students to cooperate more effectively with the ministers of their respective communions." In addition, the University would establish a Department of Religious Education which

would offer "non-sectarian courses in Religion." It is interesting that this proposal is close to what Thomas Jefferson originally envisioned for the University of Virginia.

The Dean of Liberal Arts, in an academic review of the plan, approved the concept of a School of Religion, but rejected the Department of Religious Education in its entirety. He recommended that the School of Religion be integrated more fully within the University and that the seminary character of the School be eliminated. Despite such major misgivings, President Jessup appointed a University committee composed of Dean George Kay, Dean Carl Seashore, Dean Chester Phillips, Prof. Forest Ensign, Prof. M. A. Shaw, and Prof. Edwin Starbuck to work with the original committee in an attempt to arrive at a workable revision of the proposal.

The committee started immediately on its task. They began by setting down absolute necessities. First, they decided that the School must be financed independently in order to avoid possible constitutional difficulties. Second, the 1909 experience had shown them that the interfaith School must be fully integrated in the University curriculum and its courses conducted by specialists of equal rank with other University instructors. Having established these needs, the committee met with Charles Foster Kent, a professor on leave from Yale, who had a proposal for the establishment of a chain of Schools of Religion affiliated with state universities. Recognized scholars supported by philanthropists would teach courses in religion at major universities, and university professors would teach such schools' related courses. After lengthy discussion the Kent proposal was rejected. The committee could not accept what was seen as a Protestant bias to the Kent plan. It was at this time that the committee established the "equal rights" requirement that the School have at least representative professors from Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish backgrounds. The cooperation necessary for such a requirement could not be taken for granted.

An address at the Conference of Church Workers in Universities, held in Chicago, provided the committee with the key to such cooperation. On January 11, 1922, Rufus Fitzgerald and two other members of the committee heard O. D. Foster, University Secretary of the Council of Church Boards of Education, deliver a paper on "Schools of Religion at State Universities." This speech gave the three men hope, and later the entire committee extended an invitation to O. D. Foster for consultation.

Mr. Foster showed the committee from personal experience with

the military chaplaincy in World War I that a cooperative interfaith effort could succeed. He demonstrated how the integrity of each religious tradition in cooperative effort could be ensured through the slogan he had coined: "Cooperation without compromise." At the end of three days he left, pledging his active support for the new program.

On April 12, 1924, after Dean Kay submitted the revised "Iowa Plan" to President Jessup, who in turn presented the plan, "constituted in such a way as to secure the cooperative efforts of the religious bodies of the State and of the University in the support and control of the school," to the State Board of Education. On May 22, 1924, the Board approved the plan.

During the next year the "Iowa Plan" was discussed with religious leaders throughout the state, while O. D. Foster simultaneously developed national interest among representatives of the major faiths. This combined effort culminated in the selection of electors chosen by each of the representative religious traditions. On May 12, 1925, the electors met at the Old Capitol and with only minor modifications adopted the Iowa Plan as their constitution. From among their number they elected Dean George Kay to be President, and Father Shanahan, Rabbi Eugene Mannheimer, and Judge H. C. Ring as the first executive committee for the School of Religion of the State University of Iowa.

Only two obstacles remained to be overcome for full implementation of the plan: the problems of financing and of selecting the proper personnel.

In the summer of 1925, Rufus Fitzgerald developed a request for a grant of \$500,000 from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. It was proposed that Rockefeller finance half the construction of the Union where students could meet, endow the School of Religion so that students would receive high quality religious instruction, and fund the YMCA to act as an experimental lab in spiritual health. The request was rejected.

After the rejection O. D. Foster was again asked to help. Having worked with the Rockefeller interests before, Mr. Foster realized that the proposal was far too comprehensive. Mr. Rockefeller would not support a proposal until he was assured there was local support for the program among the institutionalized religious groups. At this point Mr. Foster wrote to Rockefeller requesting that the School of Religion be considered separately; then he solicited and received letters of support from national religious leaders of all three faiths. On July 9, 1926, President Jessup received a letter from John D. Rockefeller, Jr.,

stating that the School of Religion had been granted \$35,000 to cover administrative expenses for the first three years.

On November 29, 1926, the executive committee met and appointed President Jessup and Deans Kay and Seashore to search for a Director of the School. Because of his academic, organizational, and ecumenical background, everyone's immediate choice was O. D. Foster, who declined, but who recommended to the committee his friend Dr. Matthew Willard Lampe, University Secretary, Presbyterian Board of Education. At the second meeting of the Board of Trustees on March 14, 1927, M. Willard Lampe was appointed the first Director of the School of Religion, a position he held until his retirement in 1953.

The work of the trustees in raising money that first year was crucial. Father Shannahan, along with O. D. Foster, imbued Bishop Henry P. Rohlman with the spirit of the School, and subsequently Prof. Henry G. Takkenberg from St. Ambrose College, Davenport, was released to become the Catholic professor as well as priest to Catholic students at S.U.I. Mr. Foster, Dean Kay, Judge Ring, and Dr. Lampe wove together a combination of denominational, congregational, and individual contributions known as the Protestant fund, and Prof. Charles A. Hawley was hired.

Rabbi Mannheimer, with the assistance of E. P. Adler of Davenport, raised the money for the Jewish fund for the first 20 years of the School. These two men spent innumerable hours giving speeches and soliciting contributions from their audiences. Prof. Maurice H. Farbridge was appointed the first Jewish professor and adviser to Jewish students on campus.

On August 27, 1927, the University announced the new School of Religion to the state in a University Bulletin:

The School of Religion represents a venture into new territory, sponsored by many University and Religious leaders who have high hopes of its success. It is an unusual recognition of the important place which the study and practice of religion must hold in the adequate system of Education.

The School of Religion's first offering of courses included Old Testament, Prophets, Hebrew, the Life and Teaching of Jesus, Christian Ethics, Growth of Christian Religion, and Comparative Religions. That year the School initiated the practice of listing courses in religion offered by other departments, thereby showing the interdisciplinary nature of the study of religion.

During the early years of the School, M. Willard Lampe and the

faculty actualized many of the dreams of the founders. Together they provided a curriculum of high academic quality that was elected by nearly 200 students each of the first three years. Also, recognizing the limited number of students reached academically, the School began to take a more active interest in extracurricular activities.

In 1929 the trustees heard a report from President Jessup's special committee "for study of the moral, religious, and spiritual needs of the University." This committee had proposed that there be some permanent organization, representing all the communities' religious interests, to coordinate the various religious activities on campus. It was felt by the committee that the School of Religion was best suited to provide the coordinating service. When the trustees voted to accept this proposal they reaffirmed their belief that the School of Religion was not only to provide courses on religion but that it must also be involved in "laying a foundation for religious education," thereby reaching a large number of students who did not avail themselves of the courses.

With another Rockefeller grant, Prof. Harry H. Morgan was appointed in 1930 to work with campus religious workers as Administrative Director of the Commission on Religious Activities, "to provide the largest measure of fellowship, unity, and understanding between workers without compromising in any way the special work for which each is responsible."

The first three experimental years were a moderate success for the infant School of Religion. Students were becoming more interested in the School, and the three major faiths had worked together not only in the academic area but also in the area of extracurricular activities.

In 1933 the School of Religion became a more integral part of the University. That fall, Willard Lampe and Herbert Martin, chairman of the Department of Philosophy and also an ordained minister, developed and jointly taught a freshman course in Religion and Ethics. In 1934, at the urging of the University faculty, Prof. Morgan instituted a popular class in marriage that drew upon the faculty of several departments.

In June, 1935, Miss Ortha Lane became possibly the first person in the United States to receive a Ph.D. in religion from a tax-supported school. This was another footnote to progress toward equal opportunities.

In 1941 the School registered 814 students, a fourfold growth from the first year's enrollment.

World War II brought about significant changes that would have

long-lasting effects on the School. In 1941 Dr. Marcus Bach, a religious dramatist, was hired to replace Prof. Morgan as Administrative Director of the Commission on Religious Activities. His major innovation was the use of the University broadcasting facilities. By broadcasting first a morning chapel service and then various lectures, Bach creatively presented the belief and culture of many religious sects to a large audience.

In 1944 the College of Liberal Arts began a program of "core courses," whereby a student met basic requirements by taking courses covering four different areas. "Introduction to Religion," later called "Religion in Human Culture," was accepted by the College of Liberal Arts as one of the core options in the area of historical-cultural studies.

During the postwar years the School experienced tremendous growth; in three years the enrollment tripled to 2,407.

To meet the need for expansion, the Board of Trustees appointed a special committee to develop an explicit policy on faculty appointments. After a year of study, the committee proposed a plan ensuring balance in the School and avoiding special interests. They began by welcoming the idea of any group financing an additional professor for the School, within the categories of Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, as long as the individual held the appropriate academic credentials and his areas of competence contributed to a balanced curriculum. Besides dealing with chaired professors, the committee established procedures for guest lecturers and visiting faculty.

Through added contributions the School supplemented its program with visiting professors, choosing those who went beyond the traditions of white America. The black scholar, Howard Thurman, taught in 1947-48 before going on to become one of Martin Luther King's mentors at Boston. In the fall of 1948 the School welcomed as a visiting professor the Chinese scholar Dr. T. Z. Koo. The success of Dr. Koo and his special contributions prompted Dr. Lampe to work toward the establishment of what is now the Department of East Asian Languages and Literature in the University.

On May 19, 1952, the School of Religion celebrated its 25th anniversary. The occasion was marked by the publication of a booklet of prayers by M. Willard Lampe and a history of the School, *Of Faith and Learning*, by Marcus Bach.

This celebration was tempered by the coming retirement of Dr. Lampe and the need to find a qualified replacement. On January 1,

1954, Robert Michaelsen of Yale University Divinity School, who had earlier been a professor at the School from 1947-51, assumed the Directorship.

Under the guidance of Dr. Michaelsen, the School experienced significant expansion. In the spring of 1953, representatives of a Lutheran Synod approached Dr. Lampe "about the possibility of supporting a teacher on the staff." The discussions culminated in a formal offer to support a professor of Protestant theology. At the 1954 meeting of the trustees, Dr. George Forell, a Luther scholar, was appointed Assistant Professor. That same trustees' meeting noted that the Director of the School had been made *ex officio* a voting member of the important University Committee on Lectures. That year the School received its first grant from the Danforth Foundation to provide conferences and lectures in religion.

During his first year as Director, asserting his philosophy regarding the direction of the School of Religion, Dr. Michaelsen entered into discussions with both the Catholic and Jewish sponsoring bodies aimed at releasing the respective professors from their direct responsibilities for campus religious programs. The School was regarded as first and foremost an academic division of the University.

The growing enrollment in the School placed increased pressure on the limited faculty to provide adequate instruction in the undergraduate core course, a situation somewhat alleviated in 1956 when the College of Liberal Arts granted a graduate teaching assistantship to the School of Religion.

In 1958 University President Virgil Hancher requested an evaluation of the School's graduate program from Director Michaelsen. Although the Articles of Incorporation had placed equal emphasis on graduate and undergraduate programs, Dr. Michaelsen informed President Hancher that the necessary expansion of the graduate program required additional faculty. In the spring of 1958, Dr. Michaelsen, in a follow-up report, advised the addition of a qualified scholar in either Biblical studies or history of theology.

Within a year of Dr. Michaelsen's report, progress had been made toward implementing the recommendations. In the spring of 1960, the School received a \$40,000 seed grant from the Danforth Foundation to support a professor in Biblical studies for three years, and for visiting lecturers who would be on campus for a semester each year. In 1961, David Stanley, S.J., was appointed the Danforth Professor in New Testament Studies; lecturers for the three years were Abraham Heschel, William Albright, Nicholas Zernov, and Sidney Mead.

As the termination of the Danforth Foundation grant approached, forces again converged to bring about another increase in the faculty of the School. The Board of Trustees set up a special committee to study the legal implications of the Supreme Court's ruling in the Schempp case, with its rulings on prayer and Bible study in public schools. They noted that Justice Clarke wrote in the majority opinion:

It might be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization.

Professor Russell Weintraub of the College of Law informed the special committee that as a result of the Schempp case "the School of Religion might be on sounder ground legally if its basic teaching program were supported from regular University funds." Simultaneously, discussions were initiated with the Lutheran Welfare Society on the feasibility of founding a clinical pastoral education program at University Hospitals, and with the History Department on the possibility of a joint appointment in religion in American history.

As a result Visiting Professor Sidney Mead became a professor of both history and religion. Then, in the fall of 1964, Dr. David Belgum was appointed Associate Professor in the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Medicine to set up a program in clinical pastoral education. The following year Dr. James F. McCue joined the faculty in the area of history of theology.

In 1965 the School helped to establish the Association of Theological Faculties in Iowa, an ecumenical effort to improve all the graduate programs in the state. The School of Religion, the Theological Seminary at the University of Dubuque, Aquinas Institute, and Wartburg Theological Seminary agreed to make the resources of each institution more available to the students and faculty of the other schools.

In 1965 Robert Michaelsen resigned as Director to head the developing Department of Religion at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California. As Director of the School of Religion, Dr. Michaelsen had built a nationally recognized graduate program, reduced the extracurricular demands upon the faculty, and revised the basic financial structure of the School.

Dr. George Forell was appointed the new Director; under his leadership faculty additions continued and the University increasingly shared the financial support of the School with private sources.

During his first year as Director, the faculty was expanded in the area of non-Western religions. Although courses in the religions of

the East had always been a part of the curriculum, the appointment of Robert Baird brought to the School the first specialist in this discipline. During the following five years, four more persons were added to the faculty, including Dr. Helen T. Goldstein in Judaic studies, the School's first woman appointee, and Dr. W. Pachow, an internationally recognized Buddhist scholar, in world religions.

In 1971 Dr. James C. Spalding, faculty member since 1956, was appointed Director of the School.

As the University increased its financial commitments to the School, the need for major revisions in the legal structure of the School became apparent. The Board of Trustees had been set up to provide the legal base for all financial and policy decisions. There was a duplication of duties between the trustees of the School and the regents of the University, since both approved all appointments and salary adjustments. To eliminate this problem the trustees proposed that a Board of Fellows be set up to replace the trustees, in order "to encourage, support, and interpret the work of the School of Religion at the State University of Iowa, and to maintain liaison between the School of Religion and the religious community of Iowa and the commonwealth generally."

The new corporation officially began on November 2, 1971; the following day the old corporation was dissolved. Today the Board of Fellows continues to advise the School and to maintain liaison between the University and the larger community.

When the School was founded in 1925, it was unique in providing both graduate and undergraduate education in religion at a state university. Today there are more than 900 institutions in North America with courses in religion and over 50 offering Ph.D. programs. With an annual enrollment of approximately 3,000 students, the School of Religion demonstrates its appeal to undergraduates.

The excellence of the School can be seen in the work of its graduates. Today they are working and teaching in 39 states and in several foreign countries.

One of the greatest assets the School possesses is the high degree of cooperation between students and faculty. The School has led other University departments in giving students representation on policy-making committees. There is a feeling of openness and concern within the School.

Religion has been termed by some a field outside the proper realm

of academic study. The success of the School of Religion at Iowa counteracts this claim. The School affirms the concept that the study of religion provides a necessary base for human understanding.

Religion has been accepted as an important part of a liberal education at The University of Iowa. In 1973 the University awarded Dr. George Forell the Carver Distinguished Professorship, recognizing him as one of the outstanding professors in the University.

While the faculty believes that continual research in religion and a scholarly presentation of the results is the essential task of the School of Religion, there is at the same time an active involvement in other university and community affairs. The clinical pastoral education program provides training for clergy in counseling techniques; the School provides lectures and conferences open to the public.

At the present time the School is involved in projects aimed at developing new programs and strengthening existing ones.

Two years of research and planning have resulted in the development of an in-service training institute for those who teach about religion in public schools, held for the first time in the summer of 1974.

The undergraduate and graduate programs are continually under examination and re-evaluation in an effort to offer students the best scholarly preparation possible.

For a half-century the School of Religion of The University of Iowa has offered instruction in religion. The School began as an experiment and has remained firmly established in the forefront of education. In the years ahead the School will continue in its efforts to impart to its students greater knowledge and understanding of this universal dimension of human culture.