

Appendix A

The Case Against the reestablishment of AXP at Wesleyan

Statement by Bruce Kirmmse

A Statement by Norman Daniels

A Statement by Stephen D. Crites

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A Report Submitted to the
Joint Committee on Fraternities
By EQV Fraternity
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From the time of its inception at Trinity College in 1898 until 1954, the exoteric manual of Alpha Chi Rho excluded all non-Christians. The first Landmark stated clearly that membership was to be “from among Christians only.” Then at the National Convention of September, 1954, the first Landmark was revised so that members were required to look up to Jesus of Nazareth only as the exemplar of a very fine life. The revised landmark states:

Alpha Chi Rho believes in a God whose moral law is the guide and law of the universe, and in Jesus of Nazareth as the one whose life, above all others, exemplifies such law. While recognizing our Christian heritage and seeking adherence to Christian ideas, Alpha Chi Rho leaves to each of its Brothers the determination of his religious tenets. Membership in alpha Chi rho is not denied by reason of race, color or religion, but the Fraternity requires that its members look up to Jesus of Nazareth as their moral exemplar.

However, the esoteric ritual was not modified at this time in accordance with the revised landmark. It asked its members to accept not only the sociological ideals of Christianity, but required them to swear allegiance to Christianity as a theological doctrine. In a letter to the Garnet and White dated January 9, 1959 (not published), the Phi Gamma Chapter stated that this is entirely “inconsistent with the exoteric manual’s statement that membership in Alpha Chi Rho is not denied by reason of race, color or religion. In order that the contradiction between the two documents might be resolved, the chapter proposed what that the following changes be made in the text of the ritual:

1. omit “and my faith as a Christian”
2. omit “and in this sign conquer”
3. change “which our higher Christian revelation inculcates”
4. omit “Serve our great Kind, the Lord Jesus Christ,” and “You must serve your King”

The proposals were subsequently ignored, and Phi Gamma was expelled from the National when it persisted in deleting the portions of the ritual which demanded a theological commitment.

Two years later several members of the graduate chapter of Phi Gamma approached the Administration concerning the possibility of reactivating the chapter. At that time President Butterfield placed three conditions on their return. These conditions are, first, that adequate housing be found for the existing fraternity, EQV, should AXP be successful in its efforts to return; second, that the contradiction between the exoteric manual and the esoteric ritual be resolved; and this, that the University receive first option on the AXP property should that organization decide to sell. The Administration has deemed this second condition necessary on fairly pragmatic grounds:

1. So that a pledge shall not have passed through some or all of his pledge period without realizing what he shall be called on to affirm at the time of his initiation.
2. So that a pledge shall not be placed in the position of having to resign from the house because of reasons of conscience; and, as the Wesleyan rushing rules now stand, to be debarred from pledging another house for a considerable length of time.

Recently, these representative have claimed that they have met with all the conditions set up by President Butterfield, including that relating to the contradiction between the exoteric and the esoteric manuals. Such a claim simply cannot be substantiated. No modification whatsoever has been made to the wording of the main body of the ritual. Instead, AXP has attempted to “redefine” the terms and symbols used in the ritual, supposedly to allow the individual postulant freedom of interpretation. A newly revised first landmark proudly proclaims that:

Alpha Chi Rho believes in a God whose moral law is the guide and law of the universe, and looks up to Jesus Christ as the supreme exemplar of this law. However, it neither formulates nor requires acceptance of any theological definition of the person of Christ. As used within the Fraternity of Alpha Chi Rho, words, signs and symbols of Christian reference do not require theological connotation. Membership in Alpha Chi Rho is not denied to anyone because of race, color, or religion.

In a document entitled “Esoteric Preparation for Initiation”, the following terms used in the ritual of “defined.”

“Our King” – these words refer to God or to Jesus Christ, at the election of the individual.

“Christ” – literally, “The Anointed One”; a title of respect or of divinity, as the individual may choose to believe.

“Jesus Christ” – a particular man and great teacher, Jesus of Nazareth; whether or not divine is a matter of personal belief.

“Precepts of Christ” – the ethical teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

“Christian” – when used as a noun, this word means anyone who believes in a God whose moral law is the guide and law of the universe, and who looks up to Jesus Christ as the supreme exemplar of this law.

-- when used as an adjective, this word means conforming to the ethical teachings of Jesus.

“Our Lord” – refers to God or Jesus Christ, as the individual may interpret it, and is used as a term of profound respect.

“Faith as a Christian” – means belief that the ethical teachings of Jesus express the moral law of the universe; whether or not such faith embraces the divinity of Jesus is a matter of personal definition.

“The Lord’s Prayer” – a formal prayer to God which Jesus urged his disciples to pray.

“The Cross and the Crook” – symbols of mercy and human kindness.

“Labarum” – an emblem composed of the Greek letters Chi and Rho; historically, the monogram of Christ, associated with the conversion of Constantine to Christianity.

“Door”, “Crown”, and “Blazing Star” – poetic images to suggest ideas of immortality.

The positions of the sincere Jew and the sincere Christian illustrate the grave difficulties and theological impossibilities inherent in the very attempt to redefine. That this attempt is inherently impossible is made obvious in the statements below. Words do, in fact, have a meaning. The meaning of the theological terms of the AXP ritual have the force of two thousand years of interpretation and exegesis. And, in addition, they have a social context which, while admittedly broad, simply does not permit the reinterpretation which AXP attempts to make.

Statement by Bruce Kirmmse

It is impossible for myself or for any serious and thoughtful Christian to find common ground with Alpha Chi Rho. The inconsistencies between the exoteric and esoteric rituals which President Butterfield cited several years ago still exist. In fact, the half-hearted and equivocal attempt which Alpha Chi Rho has made to gloss over these inconsistencies now makes the act of joining Alpha Chi Rho an act of religious cynicism and intellectual and moral dishonesty for thoughtful Christians as well as non-Christians.

A brief comparison is in order of the contents of the Alpha Chi-Rho Exoteric Manual, the esoteric ritual (esoteric is defined as “secret” in the Exoteric Manual, p. 21.) and the “Esoteric Preparation for Initiation” to be read to postulants. The first Landmark of Alpha Chi Rho Fraternity is contained in the Exoteric Manual”

Alpha Chi Rho believes in a God whose moral law is the guide and law of the universe, and looks up to Jesus Christ as the supreme exemplar of this law. However, it neither formulates nor requires acceptance of any theological definition of the person of Christ. As used within the Fraternity of Alpha Chi Rho, words, signs, and symbols of Christian reference do not require theological connotation. Membership in Alpha Chi Rho is not denied to anyone because of race, color, or religion.

Although this Landmark betrays a rather ethics-centered conception of religion, and although only the ethical and moral rather than the divine and redemptive aspects of Jesus are mentioned (because the Fraternity does not require “any theological definition of the person of Christ”), it is clear that Alpha Chi Rho, in this exoteric statement, leaves open the possibility that a serious Christian will be able to maintain his theological position as a member of Alpha Chi Rho.

If the possible member of Alpha Chi Rho were able to look ahead and discern the actual esoteric initiation ritual of Alpha Chi Rho, he would soon discover that there are indeed many references to Christianity in the ritual. These references may not necessarily have been offensive to a Christian postulant several years ago, but they are extremely obnoxious today. This is because, in its attempt to “liberalize” and water down the articles of Christian reference in the ritual without actually changing the ritual (which has not, in fact, been changed at all), Alpha Chi Rho in its new (1960) “Esoteric Preparation for Initiation” has re-defined many basic Christian terms in such a way as to render them theologically neutral. It is a plain and obvious fact that many of the religious terms in the esoteric ritual, as re-defined in the “Esoteric Preparation for Initiation,” are totally unacceptable not only to non-Christians of integrity, but to sincere Christians as well.

The word “Christian” appears many times in the esoteric ritual, but the bland and crass definition in the “Esoteric Preparation for Initiation” assures the pledge of Alpha Chi Rho, that “when used as a noun, this word means any one who believes in a God whose moral law is the guide and law of the universe, and who looks up to Jesus Christ as the supreme exemplar of this law.” A Christian definition of the word “Christian” could not possibly be complete without stressing that, above all, a Christian is a person who believes that Jesus Christ is the divine, the living Son of God who suffered and died on the Cross to redeem the sins of mankind. The attempt by Alpha Chi Rho to neutralize and de-theologize the definition of “Christian” is characteristic of the almost insidious

nature of the “Esoteric Preparation for Initiation” is, by Alpha Chi Rho’s own definition, secret, and is not to be read to the postulant until about three weeks prior to his initiation and until after he has fulfilled certain of the more mundane requirements of the ordinary pledge program. It is not until a Christian pledge has made a substantial commitment to Alpha Chi Rho that he is permitted to discover that the terms in the ritual by which he is initiated into Alpha Chi Rho have been defined in such a non-Christian way as to make the ritual and Aloha Chi Rho itself entirely unacceptable to him as a Christian. It is not until the pledge has become emotionally and intellectually involved with Alpha Chi Rho and until he has rendered himself ineligible to join any other fraternity for the remainder of his freshman year that he is forced to make the painful and difficult moral decision to withdraw from Alpha Chi Rho.

Other non-Christian, indeed anti-Christian definitions in the “Esoteric Preparation for Initiation” of terms which appear in the ritual include the definition of “the precepts of Christ” (to which the pledge must give affirmation) as “the ethical teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.” This is clearly unacceptable to the Christian postulant who believes and has always believed that the precepts of Christ transcend the merely ethical and have theological and divine significance. “The Cross and the Crook,” terms which also appear in the ritual, are defined in the “Esoteric Preparation for Initiation” as “*symbols of mercy and human kindness*” (italics in the original). Here again, in its attempt to make the ritual acceptable for all, Alpha Chi Rho has made it unacceptable for all, especially Christians, who by definition are unable to interpret the Cross as signifying anything other than the divine sacrifice of the Son of God.

The substitution of “comfortable,” ethical, non-theological meanings for words which carry and have always carried religious and theological connotations is a gross insult to Christians and non-Christians alike. But the injury which more than compounds this insult, is the fact that, by masquerading as a Christian-oriented fraternity, Alpha Chi Rho systematically misleads the unsuspecting Christian into pledging himself to become a member of an organization from which he soon learns he must disaffiliate himself if he intends to remain a sincere and believing Christian. The discrepancy between what is esoteric and what is exoteric in Alpha Chi Rho still remains, as does the violation of the letter and spirit of President Butterfield’s stipulation that this discrepancy must be removed before Alpha Chi Rho can return to this campus.

(signed)

Bruce Kirmmse

A Statement by Norman Daniels

Language is an act of speech, and, in so far as it is an act, it serves to define the character of the speaker. Acts that violate societal contexts of acceptability define the actor as having 'bad character.' Language is a social act. The meaning of an act of language is defined according to the societal contexts of the act. The relationship of language as an act in a society is symbolized in the use of language in ritual contexts. In this use, the small society symbolizes its acceptance of common meanings. In this sense, all speech that is to be meaningful is a ritual act. I would insist that the formulation of acts of speech into ritual ceremonies requires the retention of the standards of societal meaning that exist outside the ritual if there is to remain the significance of a social act. This is all to say that words and statements of a language, if these words are being used as significant acts, must be used according to the social or societal context from which they originate. To elevate, or deflect, words from the social significance by assigning them special meanings, or instituting language rules that provide for multiple or ambiguous meanings, is to corrupt the significance of the social act of speech involved. To use words so elevated out of their public significance, words defined out of significance, is a bad act of speech – for it remains a public act, nevertheless. In so far as it remains a public act it must be condemned as a vile corruption of the social use of language.

The rather abstract argument for the social significance of language-acts acquires poignant concreteness for the Jew, Moslem, Hindu or Humanist who is expected to elevate, or deflect, such socially meaningful words as 'Christ,' 'Christian', 'Cross', and 'Jesus' out of the context they publicly have for the individual. Such a person, if he is expected to disregard the connectedness of act with language by arbitrarily assigning whatever meaning he desires, significant or insignificant, to a publicly announced word or group of words. Such a person is being forced into 'bad character,' into public deceit. I take my stand against rituals that demand the individual to perform such an act.

As a Jew, I am confronted in the ritual of Alpha Chi Rho with many words which that fraternity desires to be elevated out of social significance. To pronounce the words in the way the ritual demands would be, for me, an act of deceit. I would be uttering words which have a public meaning with the suppressed understanding that I am not using them with that social meaning. The word 'Christ' has a social meaning involving the deity of Jesus, whether or not I or the ritual agree to suspend that meaning for the period of the ritual. As a Jew, I cannot support the deity of Jesus and cannot affirm my acceptance of the word Christ, which has theological significance, and justify such acceptance by privately agreeing to suspend its theological significance for the duration of its utterance. The person of integrity cannot violate the trust of language in any manner whatsoever, let alone in so bald and flagrant a one as Alpha Chi Rho's ritual and exoteric explanation of that ritual demands.

The point might further be made that ethics are not so simple or simplistic as is assumed in Alpha Chi Rho's statements about them. A Jew cannot affirm the ethics of Christianity, or agree to accept Jesus as the supreme moral exemplar. To do so is contrary to the context in which ethics acquire meaning for the Jew. Just as there are points of agreement when we make abstract references to the common concepts in Jewish

and Christian ethics, so also are there points of disagreement. The Jew must deny the existence of such points of disagreement if he is to affirm the ritual of Alpha Chi Rho. It is a gross violation of personal and intellectual integrity to be asked to agree that all the world's great religions divide the 'good guys' from the 'bad guys' and that is all I am affirming when I affirm the ritual of Alpha Chi Rho.

(signed)

Norman Daniels

A Statement by Stephen D. Crites

I wholeheartedly endorse the stand taken by EQV in rejecting the experience of arbitrary redefinition as a way of getting around the difficulties caused by the use of Christian terminology in the ritual of AXP. Whatever may have been the value of a Christian-oriented ritual for this fraternity in the remote past, it is clear that its effect, intended or unintended, on a pluralistic campus such as Wesleyan today is to exclude adherents of other religious faiths and people who profess no religious faith from membership in a campus social organization. If such exclusion is not intended, the only honest way to deal with the problem is to revise the ritual so that it will only represent the actual aims and values that actually unite the members and potential members of the organization. Expression belonging specifically to Christian creed or tradition should be expunged.

Instead, the attempt has been made to “redefine” such expressions in a way that would, in effect “de-Christianize” them and render them innocuous. The purpose of this redefinition, I suppose, is to make the ritual as it stands acceptable to everyone. Instead, it makes it impossible for everyone, the serious Christian as well as the serious non-Christian.

It is not in the power of the officials of a college fraternity to remove by their fiat the denotations and connotations which have developed around words and phrases through 2000 years of Christian history. To expect young men to indulge in a fantastic act of double-think when they use these expressions in the fraternity ritual is to make sheer hypocrisy a requirement for membership in the fraternity. Such an expectation shows, in the first place, no respect for language, since the power to use words is debased when people say one thing and mean another. It shows even less respect for the convictions of the young men, either Christian or non-Christian, from whom such double-think is expected: the non-Christian because he is asked to make affirmations in language which, in its tradition meaning, he rejects; the Christian because he is asked to use his Christian affirmation as though it meant something else.

Finally, this proposal shows no respect for the college and its most basic purposes. For although the college is rigorously non-sectarian, it belongs to the very heart of its purpose that people should mean what they say, not say what they do not mean, and understand the meaning and implication of both what they are determined to say and what they are determined not to say.

(signed)

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