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New Yale Chaplain, Ex-CIA Agent, Believes Soft Life Hurting U. S.

William Sloane Coffin, Jr., new chaplain of Yale University, is a forceful young man with a down to earth approach to religion. A former CIA agent who had close contact with the Russians after World War II and again in the early 1950s, he believes that America is being dangerously weakened by soft living and the reluctance of most people to take an unpopular stand.

A sturdily-built man of five foot 11, the Rev. Mr. Coffin at 34 could easily be mistaken for an undergraduate. With close-cropped hair and horn-rimmed glasses, he favors jackets and slacks and moccasin type shoes. He has a deep speaking voice and is a pipe smoker.

He walks briskly around the campus making his calls, or, if he is making longer trips, such as to the Medical School, he rides a motor scooter. Many of his close undergraduate associates are uncertain whether to call him Mr. Coffin or Bill.

No conformist, William Coffin seems to have carefully avoided any set pattern in shaping his own career. Before World War II he planned to be a concert pianist and entered the Yale Music School. After the war, in which he served as a liaison officer with the French army in Europe, he returned to Yale to study political science. In 1949-50 he studied for the ministry at Union Theological Seminary; from 1950 to 1953 he was in Europe with the Central Intelligence Agency, and in 1954 he returned to Yale to complete his preparation for the ministry.

Although he is the nephew of the late Rev. Henry Sloane Coffin, Yale '97, who was president of Union Theological Seminary, he says his family had little to do with his decision to become a minister.

"It's not so hard to understand," says Bill Coffin, "when you realize how many of us are afraid to stand up for what we know is right. Haven't we had examples in this country where demagogues have won wide support and few people have had the courage to fight for just but unpopular causes?"

Born in New York in 1924, Mr. Coffin is the son of the late William Sloane Coffin, Yale 1900, who was president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and vice president of the W. & J. Sloane Co., New York furniture firm. His brother, Edmund Coffin, was in the Class of 1943.

His family traveled extensively when he was young and he has lived in California, France and Switzerland. He attended Phillips Andover, before entering Yale. His mother now makes her home in New Haven, living at 189 East Rock Road.

Mr. Coffin is married to the former Eva Rubinstein, daughter of the pianist, Artur Rubinstein. She is a ballet dancer and actress who toured Europe in the musical "Oklahoma!" and appeared in the Broadway production of "The Diary of Anne Frank." They have a small daughter, Amy, and a second child is expected.

While an undergraduate at Yale, Coffin was president of the Yale Glee Club and chairman of the Yale Chapter of the American Veterans Committee. He was also a member of the Undergraduate Board of Deacons of Yale's Church of Christ, of the Elizabethan Club and of Timothy Dwight College.

"We've got to be real tough with ourselves to keep up with Russia," he insists. "We can't be satisfied with just mediocrity. We'll have to decide what we want and be willing to sacrifice some of our comforts in order to attain the goal."

Although Mr. Coffin sees little chance in the near future of a revolution in the Soviet Union, he does see hope that the government may be forced to grant the people more freedom. In order to make economic progress, it has been necessary to educate the masses and improve living standards.

The Communist leaders face a dilemma: how to grant economic freedom without giving up political control. The desire for freedom can never be suppressed, Coffin is convinced.

He got to know many Russian soldiers and officers during the two years after World War II when he was a liaison officer, first in Czechoslovakia and then in Germany.

"At first we had very friendly relations with them," he recalls. "The soldiers of the two nations celebrated victory together and it seemed that we would always be friends."

FRATERNIZATION STOPPED

"But then the Communist leaders became alarmed about this fraternization and took measures to stop it. I heard a Russian colonel, a political officer, tell a three-star general who was criticizing Soviet bureaucracy to shut up. The Communists quickly got things under control and our friendly relations were ended.

It was very frustrating to see this happening and be unable to do anything about it."

How can a relatively few Communists, dedicated to totalitarianism, control the natural inclination of the Russian people to have

the ministry again," he says. "The only answer I can give is that some of the most idealistic, dedicated men I know are working for the CIA. It was during the Korean War, a very critical period in our relations with Russia. I had served as a liaison officer with the Russian army after World War II and I know the language well. I felt that I was needed in Europe and that it was important work."

Because of the cloak of secrecy which covers CIA operations, the Yale chaplain does not discuss this phase of his career. His experiences, however, have left him with deep concern about the ability of the West to compete with Communism.

WAS A SKEPTIC

"While I was an undergraduate," he says, "I was skeptical of organized religion and the value of many church activities. It wasn't until my senior year when I attended a conference at Union Seminary and saw some of the work being done by young ministers in East Harlem, that I realized that church programs can be relevant to the issues of the day."

Coffin was graduated from Yale in the class of 1949 and the next Fall he entered Union Theological Seminary. But the following year he interrupted his ministerial studies to serve three years in Europe with CIA.

"I'm constantly asked how I could switch from the ministry to intelligence work and back to

OPPOSITES

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While a divinity student he was assistant chaplain at Yale and also served as minister to Pres-

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HARD-hitting sermons on controversial subjects are packing chapel.

cepting dirt." On July 10 a debate was held to decide the question: "Which is the strong-

byterian students. He worked closely with his predecessor, the Rev. Sidney Lovett, who retired last June. The youthful and aggressive Bill Coffin made quite a contrast to soft-spoken and genial "Uncle Sid" Lovett who now is serving in Hong Kong with Yale-In-China, but they got along fine together. While a divinity student, Coffin won the Daggett Scholarship Prize.

In 1956-57 he was chaplain at Andover and last year was chaplain at Williams College.

He believes that college students today are more receptive to religion than students of less troubled times. "They're concerned, but not committed," he says. "They feel that the various 'isms' have failed to solve our problems and that religious faith may provide the only answer, but they take a show-me, no-nonsense attitude. We have to show them that Christianity and Judaism have a great deal to say in every area of human life — student problems, marriage, domestic issues and international affairs."

To stimulate interest in religion among students, the chaplain is starting study groups and forums in several schools of the university. A group at the medical school is discussing the moral and ethical problems that must be faced in the medical profession. A similar group at the law school will consider religion and the law. One of the student organizations is sponsoring a talk by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Negro leader of Montgomery, Ala.

In his first few weeks in the pulpit at Battell Chapel the new chaplain made it plain that Yale students will be given something to think about in the weeks to come. In his inaugural sermon he lashed out at both Communism and America-firstism, atomic war, segregation and "phony religion." At Williams College he aroused some students by his open criticism of the fraternity system.

His vigorous sermons on controversial subjects drew attention in a recent issue of "Ivy Magazine," an undergraduate publication which contended that Mr. Coffin has "created something of a sensation with his radical approach to religion." Ivy predicted that the new chaplain will probably succeed in "nailing" quite a few of the non-com-

mitted religious drifters at Yale and "fill the back rows of Battell for quite a few days as well."

The Chaplain's duties cover a wide area of activities. There are daily services at Battell Chapel, Sunday worship, undergraduate courses in religion, counseling of

students and many undergraduate activities in social work and religion. The Yale Chaplain frequently is asked to preach at other campuses.

Despite his busy schedule, the Rev. William Coffin finds time to relax with his family and to continue his interest in music and the theater. He enjoys sport and plays tennis with David Schimmel, the director of the Hillel Foundation at Yale.

"I'm sorry to say he beats me," says Yale's chaplain, a keen competitor.

