Novak Questions Role Of Religion In Society Which Lacks Tradition

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Dr. Michael Novak, the leading Roman Catholic layman in the United States, attacked 19th century American religion as "familiar sentimentality," last Thursday in the Rice Chapel.

According to Dr. Novak, since the beginning of this century conservative religion has become less and less plausible due to the introduction of the urbanization process in modern life. The leaving of provincial "childhood ghettos" has caused believing Americans to see that their fellow city-dwellers who are non-believers are "persons as whole as they are."

Dr. Novak, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Stanford University, was Time magazine's correspondent to the recent Ecumenical Council at the Vatican.

Tradition Questioned
In his lecture titled "Belief and Unbelief," Dr. Novak noted that many traditions, especially religion, are being seriously questioned in modern society.

That hundreds of thousands of Europeans have died in wars since 1900 has brought the beliefs of Western Civilization to the test.

At the same time that believers are taking atheism with new seriousness, many non-believers are looking upon religion with new interest, the speaker noted. These non-believers are not the fervent anti-religionists of a few decades back; the younger group has begun to examine their non-theist principles in the light of modern liberal activism.

Both believers and non-believers find themselves equally committed to working for order and justice, notably in the area of civil rights. These young people were discribed by Dr. Novak as having a "principle of vision." They are attempting to reduce the amount of human suffering found today.

Compassion
What is disturbing to believers and non-believers alike is the "deep compassion for those who suffer" and a sense of awareness for other men.

Dr. Novak went on to say that there is no real division today between these believers and non-believers, as they both work for human dignity. Rather, the cleft exists between the group of these believers and non-believers and the majority of Americans who go to church for familial sentimentality.