

LETTER 86
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THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

Dear Dr MacRae,

I am writing to you at the suggestion of my friends at ... Church who feel that you are in a better position than they to offer advice relating to my academic career at Cornell. As a graduate student in English I am one of the few representatives of the Humanities at the church, which tends, as you probably know, to attract scientists in general and engineers in particular. As a result, no one there shares my academic experiences, or feels qualified to help me with my dilemma.

It might be helpful for you to know a little of my background. I came to Cornell last fall with the intention of working for a Ph.D. in English primarily because I enjoyed the study of literature as an end in itself. I had no specific career goals, but my values and priorities were determined by a humanistic, pluralistic view of the world. To me, literature, as the collective expression of intellectual thought throughout the ages, was the embodiment of all that is most enduring and valuable in man's life. I looked upon it as the framework of meaning within which I evaluated the world and formulated my philosophy of life. It seemed that one could do nothing nobler or more worthwhile than devote one's life to developing a greater knowledge of, and expertise in, the great writings of the world.

Nearly three months ago, however, as the culminating point of a long, slow religious conversion, I began attending ... Church. My brother has been a Christian for more than two years ... so I had ample exposure to the truth of Christianity. As he grew in his knowledge he became a more effective witness to me. Finally, the Lord started to change my heart while I was home during my Christmas vacation, as I found myself vaguely dissatisfied with my life, despite the fact that I had just spent a semester doing what I thought I loved best and wanted to spend the rest of my life pursuing. After more discussions with my brother and more