

# SKANDALON

Vol. 2, No. 1

September 19, 1963

## An Introduction to "Skandalon"

"Skandalon" is the journal of Campus Christian Council and as such seeks to relate the Christian faith to the life of the academic community. The name comes from a Greek word which means "stumbling block" or "that which causes men offense", as when St. Paul refers to the message of the Cross as a "skandalon" to the pious of his day (see I Cor. 1: 21-25). The obvious translation might appear to be "scandal" but this runs the risk of missing the point. It is not the sensational which is the "skandalon" but the word of God's judging and redeeming love in the life, death and resurrection of the Christ. It is that constellation of event and meaning we call the "Cross" which men find a "stumbling block."

"Skandalon" welcomes contributions dealing with a wide range of political, cultural and theological questions, whether in the form of articles, cartoons, poetry or fiction. Contact any member of Campus Christian Council: Linda Clawson, Nancy Keith, Guy McBride, Clifford Rugg, David Simington, Dr. Kendall Birr, or the Rev. Frank Snow; or mail contributions to "Skandalon", 166 Central Avenue, Albany.

\*\*\*\*\*

## A Post-Mortem on the Washington March

A paper called "Skandalon" ought, by virtue of its name alone, to put before its readers some thoughts on the Christian significance of the "March for Jobs and Freedom" in Washington, D. C. on Last August 28th.

The March on Washington was a scandal!

It was a scandal in the root sense of the word (Gr. "skandalon") i.e., it was a stumbling block. It was troublesome, uncomfortable, offensive, disturbing. In short, it was exactly what we Northern so-called "Christians" needed to trip us up and wake us up from the comfortably dreamy sleep-walking we've been doing as far as the race issue is concerned.

The March was a scandal from its very inception. As soon as it was announced it struck fear in people's hearts. Newspapers sworn to defend the cause of civil rights counseled caution and warned of the risk of violence. More disturbing still, some (though by no means all) of the great denominations of American Protestantism apparently were not sure how far to commit themselves. Of course they were for Civil Rights in the abstract. But the March on Washington was an uncomfortably particular and concrete historical event with all the attendant risks of such events: people--thousands of them, unpredictable; issues--explosive issues around which no American consensus has evolved from the dawning of our Republic to the present day; above all, the lurking spectre of violence--a violence that could set the civil rights movement back. In the face of such risks, the safest "out" was to be uncommitted.

The March was a scandal in its execution. The whole event was a beauty to behold: the weather was beautiful; the people were beautiful; the speaking, the singing, the marching, the picnicing, the press coverage--all were beautiful. The turnout was beautiful--twice as large as had been expected! Even Lincoln Rockwell and his paltry following behaved beautifully by comparison to some of their past escapades. So beautifully did everything go that it was described, and rightly so, as a "Sunday school picnic." But the very beauty of the March was scandalous: the victims (and their allies and supporters) of a deep-rooted social injustice, some having been imprisoned for their cause and others having been bitten by police dogs or bombed out of their homes and churches or jabbed by electric cattle prods or attacked with fire hose and all other manner of abuse and ridicule--marched quietly, sang peacefully, spoke eloquently, and listened attentively. This quiet "Sunday school picnic" was a Judgement Day for our Christian conscience which has for a full century permitted--either through indifference or outright hostility--a prejudice to fester and grow and pollute our nation and its institutions.

The March was a scandal in its effect. It held before a self-declared Christian nation a glaring contradiction that has torn and divided our nation. Martin Luther King illumined the contradiction best in his eloquent address from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial when he repeated the words of the Old Testament prophecy:

Every valley shall be exalted,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low:  
and the crooked shall be made straight,

(cont. on p.3)

## It Really Is

We are in the midst of a highly engaging educational experiment, designed by Sue Murphy and her colleagues, using The Scientist vs. The Humanist as text, that brings the class of '67 together, before they have gathered in their first class, about a group of intellectual, social, and educational problems. Somewhere near their center is the problem of translating the broad objectives of liberal education into the intellectual life of this college generation, situated as it is between two academic worlds, one of which calls the other dead, while the second says the first is too ignorant to live.

In the University College at Albany every student puts in at least a fifth of his time at science and math courses, a fifth at history and social sciences, and a fifth at humanities, in the expectation that this breadth of course-work will afford a breadth of perspective commensurate with the aims of liberal education. Liberal education is the kind of thing Matthew Arnold was talking about: "the criticism of life"; "to know the best which has been thought and said in the world"; "to see the object as in itself it really is." It is the education of a free man, the education that enfranchises one to the company of educated men and women, that throws open all the doors of knowledge. These are exalted phrases and it is an exalted idea. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free". Just now it is the fashion to seek this ancient idea through the agency of course requirements in the first two years of college that enforce a wide range of study and prevent a specialization too narrowly professional.

For someone who is just finished reading the essays in The Scientist vs. The Humanist none of this will seem simple and straightforward. There has been a great deal of "best" thought and said in the world. Even if we could have it all separated for us we'd be hard put to know it in a lifetime, let alone two college years. H. J. Muller tells us that it is no slight trick to tell how "it really is". "Real," he says, "is not an observable property. . . Scientific laws are not chips off the old block Reality; as interpretations of sense impressions they take after the human mind as well . . . The universe is 'not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose.' "

It is said that students of the humanities need to learn how to talk with scientists about science. They do not find the lesson easy, for they have not only their own lassitude to contend with but the scientist's ignorance of how to talk with them. Most scientists approach students of arts, letters, and philosophy not as a human approaches a fellow human of a different culture, but as one approaches a fine horse or a handsome poodle--all very well in his way, even admirable, but however noble the horse he belongs to a species unlikely to comprehend the finer intellectual flights of homo sapiens. As to teaching a literary type of science, not much can be hoped; but by keeping him at simple tasks like washing test tubes and memorizing generalizations, tasks that do not call the ratiocinative faculties, into play, and by being patient with his dullness, a teacher can at least give the student some appreciation of the scope and difficulty of scientific pursuits.

Things are not much better the other way around. Teachers of the humanities despair of conveying much more to science students than the structure of a simple, declarative sentence. They will settle for less, for the students' memorizing generalizations of the construction of such a sentence. But an imaginative scientist can read philosophy and poetry comprehendingly without having to do courses in them, while an English major, no matter how bright, is lost at scientific reading unless he's been schooled in mathematics at least.

What we teachers really want for our students is not that they should have memorized a particular group of facts and opinions about mechanics or medieval literature, but that they should have developed a measure of intellectual sophistication through their minds and imaginations can be brought to play creatively in any region of the arts or sciences. But we have particular learning projects for our students because there has to be something "we say" to hang the process of education on. We just wish we were sure that we got it right.

The science and the humanities departments are at one in recognizing the necessity of educating each other, but neither quite knows how it's to be done. We all recognize, rather sadly, that if a student of physics has gotten all the way to college without learning how to enjoy philosophy and the arts the odds are all against his ever finding time to. The physics students who tell you how much they enjoyed English 2 are almost always one who have liked to read. English majors and philosophy majors are in the same boat. The best chance is that the fellow who comes to college with both humane interests and scientific curiosity--or with humane scientific curiosity or scientifically sophisticated humane interest--will really educate himself. He can. None of the blocks that are thrown his way as course requirements need dismay him. He will find ways of getting around his professors' preconceptions of what he ought to learn and show them, but learning more and more wisely than they suspected a student could, that a curriculum committee's masterpiece can no more prevent the process of education than it can insure it.

The great thing about a college "perhaps particularly a great college such as ours may be becoming" is that despite all the academic scenery; despite the difficulty of getting orientated to an educational process so much like the South Pole, where every way is North; despite the pressure of ambiguities that crowd between us and seeing "the object as in itself it really is"; despite all these it really is possible for a bright, determined imaginative, somewhat whimsical student to educate himself. It really is.

Dr. Thomson Littlefield

and the rough places plain:  
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together:  
for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

This prophecy not only promises a future fulfillment but calls our attention now to the present woeful lack of fulfillment. The terrain now is crooked and rough. God's glory still awaits revelation to the stiff-necked and hard-hearted bigotted minority. And still more does his glory need to be revealed to us--the indifferent, uncaring, sleeping majority of Americans. The scandal for us Christians is that we had to be reminded in forceful Biblical language how far we must let God go with us before we begin to measure up to His dream of what we are to become.

The March is proving to be a scandal in its aftermath. It hasn't changed probable Congressional votes; it hasn't converted the non-believers; it hasn't brought in the Day of Brotherhood or peace on the racial scene. Just eighteen days after the March, a church was bombed, four children killed and two teenagers shot in the ensuing riot. The enemy, though surely ultimately vanquished, is waging his last desperate war of hatred. Many more, no doubt, will suffer.

What a scandal! Peaceful resistance hasn't served the civil rights movement any better than it did Jesus. In fact, it's taking us right where it took him. This, if you will permit a pun, is the crux of the matter: for it is at the Cross that evil is uncovered and dealt with by God. He will continue to goad our consciences until we begin to write our Congressmen. He will not rest until we pull out the weeds of prejudice in our own backyards. And still He will not rest, not until His glory is revealed to all flesh, together.

Wendell H. Elmendorf, Jr.  
Pastor, St. Luke's Methodist Church,  
Albany

\*\*\*\*\*

#### The Cave, Free Thought and the Quest for Truth

Our new student handbook, "Campus Viewpoint", defines the "Cave" as a "room off the main cafeteria inhabited by many of State's free thinkers and liberals." Now, putting aside what Socrates might say about this, my hope is this particular cave is "home" for only a small percentage, and not "many", of State's free spirits. All who know the room in question will understand why: it is much too small to accommodate more than a few dozen men and women, seated or standing.

You see, I would hope almost everyone at State considers himself a free thinker of sorts. What's the point of being part of a university community otherwise? And, at the very least, all who are members of the household of faith, all who bear the name of Christ, should be candidates for the Cave.

This may come as something of a surprise to some for the Christian faith is perhaps more often equated with "dogmatism" and "orthodoxy" (to use but two familiar prejeratives) than free inquiry and a genuine openness to the world. Of course, all too often such labels have been deserved. But every attempt to shut off discussion and settle the issue once and for all represents a betrayal of the tradition and not its fulfillment. Christians are committed to the quest for truth and, speaking here of man's intellectual life, nothing else really matters. And so they by definition are called to be "free thinkers and liberals."

Not everyone will be happy with such a claim. To some it will seem pretentious in view of both past and present performance. To such apologies are due and we plead only that this is an affirmation as to what should be and not of what has been or what is. Others, however, will be frightened, lest "the faith once delivered" be jeopardized. To these the proper reply must be, "Oh ye of little faith." If the truth is in Christ, as Christians have long maintained, the quest for truth will lead men at last to Christ. Otherwise, all in the University who know themselves as "men in Christ" had best hand in their badges (whether Ph.D., sheepskin or freshman beanie) and go home.

All this is to say the Christian faith belongs in the University and Christian men and women are to be full and responsible members of the same. It may be that innocent children and even tender youth must be protected from dangerous opinions and noisome influences but the University is not for children. Here there are no illegitimate questions and no forbidden subjects. All that is asked of everyone (of whatever persuasion) is honesty, industry, and, of course, since we're dealing with people and not disembodied intellects, charity.

There was a time when the Church knew all about caves. (They called them catacombs then but what is a catacomb after all but a kind of cave?) So it should not be too difficult to adjust to this modern cave. (The ventilation is probably little worse and there is coffee of sorts.) We are not saying men come to the Christian faith through the exercise of reason or as a result of patient scholarship. That would be to deny the scandal which is at the heart of the Gospel (see "An Introduction to Skandalon" on page one). Faith always understands itself as a "gift" (to hint at the dynamics of the matter). Not everyone in the University may choose to be a free thinker and, alas, we all know those who don't. But the man of faith is always a genuinely free man and, indeed, remains a man of faith only as long as he remains genuinely free.

Freedom of the Press at State

Academic freedom and the question of administrative supervision or censorship together pose an ominous future for State publications. During this past year questions have been raised on several occasions as to the good taste, morality, and responsibility of our campus literary publications. "suppression" and the controversial "Student Course Guide" have borne the brunt of these attacks.

A panel discussion on "Academic Freedom and Civil Liberty" held last spring established several points with which we must concur. Basically the panel tried to establish limits and definitions on the nature of academic freedom both in its ideal sense and in relation to the university as a community. The "Student Course Guide" and "suppression" in several cases were pointed out as having not only ignored certain moral standards but perhaps legal ones as well. Perhaps the most valuable point raised during the entire evening was that academic freedom like all other freedoms entails responsibility. It was pointed out that we have a moral obligation to the truth as we see it. On the other hand a legal responsibility exists as well.

It has been suggested that the very nature of the university permits more freedom than perhaps the outside world. We do feel that these acts of irresponsible criticism represent a two-fold menace. First, to the party victimized, and second to the entire body of student publications themselves. We fear that unless the campus publications can assume the cloak of responsibility which is so much a part of both their moral and legal obligations, the very freedoms under which they operate will be lost. This does not mean to say that we should not criticize at all. Nor does it mean that we should have virtually free license to write whatever we please.

The administration's point of view is a careful and discerning watch. Unless the campus publications can use their freedom responsibly, the administration will be forced to have to take steps to make sure they do. Surely neither the administration nor the publications desire this form of supervision, which so easily could become censorship. Without responsibility, our freedom becomes chaos just as surely as without freedom only tyranny will exist.

Clifford J. Rugg

\*\*\*\*\*

In black bondage my heart cries out  
 for freedom's sake.  
 My voice echoes its pleas endlessly  
 within this mortal frame.  
 I hear the screams of those who are afraid  
 but I am not.  
 My spirit screams but not my mouth  
 my words are slow and careful-drawn  
 My steps are slow and forced in place  
 I cannot turn away and from this bondage  
 I flee not--my path is marked--  
 my goal ahead  
 My whole spirit rebels and cries out in  
 utter anguish for my brothers lost  
 I plead for the destruction of this  
 system of immoral hate  
 help me oh God to break my chains  
 and free my soul.  
  
 "Hear my prayer, oh Lord, and give  
 ear unto my cry;  
 Hold not thy peace at thy tears  
 For I am a stranger with thee  
 And a sojourner, as all my fathers  
 were  
 Oh, spare me that I may receive  
 strength before I go hence and  
 be no more."

Clifford J. Rugg

Calendar of Events

Wednesday, September 25 12:15  
 Chapel Service  
 sponsored by C.C.C.  
 Held at the Unitarian Church  
 Washington at Robin  
 All students and faculty welcome  
  
 Tuesday, October 1  
 Panel Discussion  
 "What Next for Albany's Negroes?"  
 7:30 p.m.  
 Brubacher Private Dining Room  
  
 Wednesday, October 2 12:15  
 Chapel Service

---

Staff:  
 Clifford J. Rugg, Editor  
 Linda D. Clawson

---