

# Σ K A N Δ A A O N

Vol. 1, No 4

November 19, 1962

## WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

Dr. Paul F. Wheeler

For most students the world is bounded by Western, Ontario, Washington and Robin. Outside lies terra incognita. If, occasionally, they evidence an awareness of Albany their judgments are naive, second-hand, and destructive. Pronouncements are made on "the machine", "the slums", or "the streets", as though these items were peculiar to the city in which they find themselves temporarily resident.

A minority are tremously concerned about the world outside--but not Albany, not New York State, nor even America as a whole. The Bomb looms in the world to which they relate, the Population Explosion threatens, segregation in Mississippi and The Chinese Question agitate their days.

Another small group views the city as a New Frontier. Out they rush to solve its problems. Back they bounce, too often disillusioned, bruised by contact with an organized society they failed to anticipate or adjust to.

A few, perhaps, recognize the city for what it is: a potential for contributing to their education. These take time to learn about Albany, to grasp its history, to study what it is and who it is that makes it tick. Already they anticipate for themselves membership in a community, participation in a community, identification with a community.

All these positions are "normal," in the sense that they are to be expected. There are valid arguments for the Ivory Tower, if, within its secure walls, the search for truth goes on; every society needs men and women whose concerns transcend the parochial and immediate, whose consciences are, in fact, the conscience of us all; and every city profits from new ideas, spoken by fresh voices, even though it may initially reject the voices as immature.

But between fear of the Bomb and plans for a blast, between those who withdraw and those who challenge, there is room

for more of those who seek. If a university education is to have meaning it must eventually involve the individual in some commitment to the world in which he lives, whether it be a commitment to the status quo or creative hostility towards the Establishment. Only the posture of indifference is immoral.

## GETTING BACK AT DR. WHEELER

Anyone seriously interested in the life of Albany, and in particular the so-called "inner city", is invited to consider any one of these three openings where volunteers are needed:

1. A released time religious education program for children (mostly white) from School #2, meeting at Welcome Baptist Church (mostly Negro), Chestnut near Dove. Classes for grades 2, 3 and 4 meet on Tuesday from 2:30 to 3:30, with the first session scheduled for November 20. If interested, see the Campus Minister, Mr. Snow (phone HE 6-9275) or Mrs. Helen Henes (HO 5-1214).

2. A "Language Arts Program" for children from Arbor Hill in need of help with their reading, pronunciation and the like, meeting at Temple Baptist Church. Volunteers are needed for any of three periods, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 4:00 p.m. See Linda Mattison (Pierce), Joan Webber (490 Hudson), Pat Peairs (South Park), Gary Luczak, Bill Kushner, or George Larabee (Waterbury).

3. A "Coke Shop" for inner city teenagers. This project is still in the planning stage. For details see Kathy Glass or Linda Kolts (16 Benson, HO 5-7101), Ed Hoag or Norm Shartzner (Waterbury) and read Kathy's article, "Reconciliation and Reality" (beginning in the last issue of "Skandalon").

There are other ways of proving Dr. Wheeler wrong (on his first point, anyway) but any of these should serve nicely.

A Report on "Christianity without Religion"  
by Guy McBride

On November 11 Hellmut Cramm, Campus Minister at Brown University, spoke at Brubacher on "Christianity Without Religion--the Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." The questions and challenges brought forth by Bonhoeffer from the confines of a Nazi concentration camp are as meaningful to Christians of today as they were then.

Pudgy Dietrich Bonhoeffer hardly fitted the common stereotype of a martyr, yet he died for humanity in the conflict between the ideologies of "the twisted cross" and Christianity. Living in safety in England during the 1930's, Bonhoeffer soon became opposed to Hitler on political and ethical grounds. When it became evident to him that war was near, he felt it to be his duty to return to Germany. Originally a pacifist, he soon grew to regard absolute pacifism as an "illegitimate escape." He became active in the Resistance Movement and in the Confessing Church. (The latter, which found its theological leader in Karl Barth, was a reaction against the Nazi attempts to do away with the Old Testament, to integrate German folklore into religious teaching, and to use the German churches as an organ by which to disseminate ethnocentric doctrine. It called for the rejection of Anti-Semitism, certain Germanic myths, and the concept of Jesus as simply a teacher of a particular ethical system.)

Mr. Cramm brought out three major points in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's philosophy. First, Bonhoeffer re-emphasized the fact that God revealed Himself and spoke to mankind through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christianity is more than merely a religion or a set of ethics and moral values. Christianity is a way of living in harmony with God. Next, Bonhoeffer described what he felt to be a common degeneration of Christian thinking, the division of the world into two worlds: good and evil, moral and immoral, real and unreal, religious and secular, godly and ungodly. He said these concepts were relative conditions, not absolutes, that they were based on a unitary foundation, and, again, that Christianity transcends the realm of morality and religion. The world, Bonhoeffer felt, should then be regarded as a whole, in all of which God plays an important part.

Articulation in the church was also an important issue, Bonhoeffer felt. Religion

becomes meaningless when it is not articulated through the words and actions of the people. He felt lack of this articulation in the German churches had been one of the prime reasons for the success of the Nazis in their subordination of the German people.

Perhaps the greatest argument for Bonhoeffer's views lies in the conviction with which he accepted his own fate. Despite his incarceration and suffering, he always found time to write words of encouragement and love to his relatives and friends. On Sunday, April 8, 1945, Bonhoeffer delivered an inspiring sermon to his fellow inmates. At the close of the service, two officials approached him and ordered him to accompany them. As they were preparing to depart, he said to a friend, "This is the end. For me the beginning of life." The next day he was hanged, only days before the Allied troops liberated the camp.

Mr. Cramm felt that the questions Bonhoeffer present to us are burning ones: "Where do we stand? To what extent is our faith an articulate faith? And the challenges are universal: "What should we do? What should we not do?"

Bonhoeffer once wrote, "Death is the supreme festival on the road to freedom." More important, Bonhoeffer was willing to live and suffer for his faith in God, humanity, and liberty.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### CHOIR TO SING AT VESPER SERVICE

Volunteers are needed for a choir to sing at a Christmas Vesper Service for State University students and faculty to be held at First Lutheran Church on the evening of Tuesday, December 18, under the sponsorship of the Campus Christian Council. The choir will be directed by Jan Dykman and Dr. Carl Odenkirchen is organizing a string ensemble which will play at the service.

The choir will rehearse on Monday, November 26 at 9:00 p.m. at Bru. Faculty are welcome as well as students. If you are interested, please be on hand or contact Jan Dykman beforehand for further details (465-5105).

This service represents the first attempt to set up a specifically religious service for the academic community in connection with the celebration of Christmas, and the hope is that there will be sufficient interest in such an undertaking to make it a success.

Why died I not from the womb? . . . Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?"

Job 3:10

Often we lament these sentiments. With the complex nature of twentieth-century life, we are finding it most difficult to live. Existence and its meaning are beclouded by the existential dilemma of our times. Loss of identity and purpose pervades the very core of our existence, our ultimate commitment. Our very faith appears to be threatened by this onslaught of personal problems and world crises.

As we proclaim the wonders of our age, we try to ignore (unsuccessfully) the threat of imminent destruction as posed by our nuclear armaments. Where can the man of faith escape to? Some try to flee to the security of religious orders through complete devotion to God. True, this may be an act of faith, but it is not the solution for everyone. Can there be meaning for the Christian in his contemporary setting? Is it feasible to be Christian in these tenuous times?

To define one's faith as being centered around the church is begging the question of what faith really is. The act of faith is one that deals with our ultimate concern (as Tillich says) and is the essence of our very existence. To have faith in God is not to hold true to a set of values with grim determination.

One of the insights to be drawn from Murder in the Cathedral is that Becket is compelled to face his tempters. By overcoming them and himself, he is able to become affirmed in his faith. The man of faith does not ignore reality nor does he try to flee from it. His faith must be tried and not allowed to glibly assert itself. He cannot ignore himself or his problems or those of others.

The Christian has broad concerns for others because his faith is dynamic. One becomes spiritually myopic if he allows his concerns to become oriented around the church. We must accept God's gift of life with gratitude. Whatever the circumstances are we should gratefully accept them. Many times we try to attribute to God human standards and values. We often accept our lot as a curse and attempt to live in a hazy past or an ill-defined future. By doing this, we ignore God's gift of life.

Life, with all the problems implicit with it, should be lived with joy. If

we realize the blessings of our existence instead of the pitfalls; if we live life with joy and faith, instead of resignation; then we can live life with meaning as Christians.

The Christian faith offers the absurdity of our age--purpose. It also proclaims a paradox--the reconciliation of the finite with the infinite. It offers security and constancy--the love of God. In the attempt to improve our minds we forget Christ's message of love. If we realize that all men are given grace by God, then our concerns will broaden. As we affirm our concerns for others, then our love will increase.

In any time or setting, the cross stands out to mankind. We acknowledge the setbacks in life, knowing that God will return them in kind at some later time. It is when we live life, ignoring the temporal and the finite, that we can live happily and in joy.

Kierkegaard in Fear and Trembling says, ". . . (we may) live joyfully and happily every instant by virtue of the absurd, (we may) see the sword hanging over (our) beloved, and yet (we may) find repose in the pain of resignation, (and even) joy by virtue of the absurd--this is marvelous. He who does it is great, the only great man."

Joy is not only possible but is a necessity in the framework of the Christian faith.

O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation . . . . . Psalm 95:1

Alan Minarcik

\*\*\*\*\*  
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mon., Nov. 26, 9:00: Choir Rehearsal, Bru

Tues., Nov. 27, 7:15: Study Group;  
Student Center

Wed., Nov. 28, 12 noon: Chapel Service;  
Unitarian Church

Sun., Dec. 2, 7:30: Meeting for Faculty:  
Langdon Gilkey at Madison Avenue Pres-  
byterian Church on "Myth and Symbol in  
Religious Discourse."

Tues., Dec. 4, 7:15: Study Group

Wed., Dec. 5, 12 noon: Chapel Service;  
Unitarian Church

THE FRENCHMAN AND HIS POLITICS  
by Ross Dunn

I remember having several conversations with my French friends about France's perennial political problems. Unfortunately, my part in these discussions rarely lasted more than ten minutes. It usually took no longer than that for my companions to fire up a lively argument among themselves, and, as the debate increased in volume and velocity, I would realize the limits of my lingual comprehension and quietly steal away to the nearest "Americain."

Spontaneous political debate is a national pastime in France, be the topic Algeria, the Common Market or De Gaulle's authoritarianism. So it appears a bit paradoxical that a people so outwardly concerned with their political problems should be unable to handle them satisfactorily. France is now going through a period of severe political crisis. The people appear to be faced with two alternatives in their present constitutional dilemma, neither of which offers a lasting solution. They can either continue along the present road under an increasingly powerful presidency or return to the mishmash and confusion of the Third and Fourth Republics. Frenchmen question the desirability of the former course, fearing a sort of government-by-president dictatorship. (Since the recent referendum approved the direct election of the president, there is now little check on any successor to De Gaulle who would attempt to abuse his office.) Yet the French people loathe the thought of reverting to the kind of parliamentary supremacy that left France in a state of political chaos in 1958.

Then why don't the French work out a governmental structure more along the lines of the American or the British system? Why don't the citizens unite in a common cause to end political instability and replace it with a more responsible government? But then let's ask if the population is politically responsible. Despite the fact that most Frenchmen are imbued with a great deal of democratic spirit, they are still sadly out of practice in the practical experience of governing themselves.

Americans generally have no idea how little the average Frenchman need concern himself with his own local government. French government has been marked by a high degree of centralization even before the Revolution. Most of the nation's

affairs are directed by the great bureaucracy in Paris; there is a lack of any kind of regional assembly system. In the "departement" or province the French elect their deputy to the National Assembly, but he often doesn't represent a majority of the constituency due to the plethora of political parties. Paris sends a prefect to each province, and it is he who directs local affairs. After visiting a meeting of the Municipal Council in the city of Nantes, I learned that the popularly elected councilors themselves elect the mayor of the city. And both mayor and council are under the guiding hand of the prefect.

So it hardly seems surprising that a nation which gets so little opportunity to conduct its own local affairs cannot successfully manage its national government. It is said that the French refer to their central government as "they" not "we". The great administrative machine in Paris seems far away, beyond the control of the citizens in Nantes or any other provincial town. Until the man in the street ceases to view his own government as nothing more than an excellent subject for lengthy debate, France will not see the end of her perpetual governmental crisis.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Skandalon", a bi-weekly journal of news and opinion published by Campus Christian Council, invites articles, essays, poems, drawings on political, academic and theological questions. Contributions can be left at the Student Center, 166 Central Avenue, or with Linda Van Buren or Alan Minarcik.

NOTICES

The second half of Kathy Glass' article, "Reconciliation and Reality", will appear in the next issue.

The Student Center is open for individual and group use, 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. See Bill Rushby, Resident Director, for further information.