

Σ K A N Δ A Λ O N

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"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.

BEYOND CONTENTION, WHAT?

Dr. Frances L. Colby

Dictionary definitions of blasphemy and pornography are easily come by. What no such definition will precisely fix is their applicability to specific materials, for that clearly rests with the susceptibilities of the reader. Hence sincerely vehement charges represent primarily the "fact" of authentic response rather than primarily a "fact" inherent in the stimulus. To the pure all things are pure; to the corrupt the most innocuous data prove titillating; the blasé (genuine or affected) may profess indifference to all moral distinctions, or the rigorously clinical may find them meaningless.

Most of us, however, feel our position to be somewhere well within such extreme boundary points. We are, we say, "normal"; and we appeal, properly enough but less humbly than we might, to "norms" of definition by which we avoid recognizing how broad is the scope of normalcy and how subjective is our concern to defend our own imprecise and perhaps variable stand within that range.

A spokesman feels offended (and also, I am confident, feels a protective responsibility for others whom the offense wounds) and leaps to combat with flat charges. The unnamed accused, readily deduced by observers, identify themselves and attract defenders by the hurt anger of their equally flat denials. Ecclesiastical and legal pronouncements are appealed to in support of increasingly entrenched positions. Some voices risk stridency as they attempt to gain a hearing for a "fair" or "balanced" comment,

wholly commendable in itself. But hurt deepens as words multiply, and human feelings get bludgeoned with "issues" which, ironically, owe their initial relevance to a tender respect for humanity, its reverences, its decent reticences and its free integrity. And nowhere sounds the word of love or reconciliation.

In this last statement must be the chief reason why almost the only publication as yet unimplicated and silent should choose to speak. Not that what I have called "the word of love" is easy to articulate or certain to be understood. Unlike the word of fairness, which aspires to detachment, the word of love accepts involvement. Hereby Skandalon enters into the implications of its name--the scandalous impropriety of an involved God who so loved the world, the whole incongruous devoted, profane, fastidious, obscene, tender, brutal, frightened, wounded and wounding mess of it (loved it--not got a kick out of it, but cared about it) that He underwent the full ordeal of human life and death for it. That the Infinite and Eternal should behave like this was, and is, the incredible absurdity, the "skandalon."

The person who believes all this finds himself set free and committed in several directions. He is freed from worried protectiveness of so catholicly involved a God; freed from fear of the world God has entered and overcome by love. He is committed altogether to the God who loves (with the certain concomitant that he must suffer when God is degraded, by whomever in whatever manner--Hollywood sentimentality, partisan appropriation, callow flippancy); and finally committed to loving what God has loved with the same total involvement, suffering with the offended and bearing the guilt of the offender, accepting in God's name the whole human condition, including its disposition to exploit itself and to deny God.

It is easier, of course, to affirm such a creed than to initiate Utopia by some spectacular local application of it. But to enunciate it at this juncture may have value, and what some of Skandalon's

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"AMERICANISM, PROPERLY DEFINED"

by Jan Dyckman

In any discussion of a distinct American culture, one point must be recognized: the American culture is made up of various and diverse patterns of thinking and living. America is pluralistic and has been pluralistic from its beginning.

The main reason that pluralism has taken such a hold on America is that a great amount of freedom is allowed. I mean freedom and not license, for license is defined and limited by law. Freedom, as I would like to use it, is the will to assume responsibility for oneself.

The specifications of our freedom are most explicitly stated in the Bill of Rights. The main freedoms are those of speech, the press, and religion. These should need no comment, but today many so-called "democratic Americans" have perverted them. These people say that you may speak freely as long as you state only their views and say only "good" things about America. They say that you may write freely as long as what gets published and circulated conforms to their standards both in content and expression. They say that you may have freedom of conscience as long as you belong to an organized Christian religion. Also, in all of these, Congress, for such is the wording of the first amendment, must aid and protect their ideas and not allow them to be openly attacked. The grossness of the perversion of freedom these "Americans" suggest is clearly seen when the effects of freedom and its offspring, pluralism, are traced through the formation of America and its culture.

America has taken much from many. That is, there was no distinct American culture, as we know it, prior to the immigration and settlement of our country. Other cultures contributed what they had, both things and ideas, to help form the present American culture. "Americanism" is a mixture of many "isms" and so is almost impossible to describe completely. Therefore, nothing is "foreign" to Americanism, but only "new" and classified under "to-be-examined." After examination, the good is incorporated, and the bad, we hope, is rejected. But to give an "ism" a just hearing, we must have unperverted freedom, one form of which is academic freedom or the freedom to examine all

sides, both pro and con, of any issue. Only then may we choose, democratically, what to accept and what not to accept.

America and Americanism, then, cannot overlook their pluralism, and in accepting it, must remain open in all facets of life. To close ourselves now to new "isms" would be to reject our heritage and to lose the benefits of new ideas. Without freedom for all, America has surrendered her "Americanism."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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

Wed., Dec. 12, 12 noon: Advent Chapel Service according to usage of Episcopal Church for Morning Prayer.

BEYOND CONTENTION, WHAT? (continued)

readers may hope to do can surely have far more. Without fanfare, but pervasively, with humility, honesty, and the patient sensitivity called love, they may begin to create a community of acceptance where cliques dissolve and chips fall from shoulders, where the uncertain may relax from the compulsion to prove something, those who wince through confusing devotion with convention may find a healing courage, and the creative innovator may receive not coterie applause for his every experiment but full acceptance of himself. Such a community comes to know and cherish its own, but not by striving for group identity. It is open, invisible, therefore certain to be ignored by many, denied or dismissed by some, misunderstood, even attacked, by others. But like yeast, its own identity lost in the mass that contains it, it does what only it can do.

Readers will be happy to know that the French people have followed Ross Dunn's advice (see Skandalon, Nov. 19) and have initiated a five-year period of political stability through their recent elections. Hence the fears of political instability that Ross expressed appear to be negated by the new-found political sense of the French people. Vive la France!

TRIBUTE TO A POET
by Guy McBride

One of America's most popular poets, E. E. Cummings, died last September. There have been a wide variety of discussions and dissertations as to his style and philosophy. Critics have referred to him as an anachronism, an anti-culturist, and, more kindly, a romanticist. His verse, more fickle than a woman's moods, has been alternately labelled iconoclastic and traditionalist in nature. Cummings denied the significance of the intelligible, and he glorified all that he could not understand. Perhaps for this reason love was his diety. He invariably protested through not-so-gentle satire against what he considered the over-encroachment of society

upon the rights of the individual. Yet, despite his incorrigible sentimentality and the unpopularity of his philosophy among the "intellectuals" of our day, Cummings was loved by the people, both for the beauty of his poetry and for the uniqueness of his sincerety in our rather superficial world of phonies, imitators, and status-seekers. Perhaps there is more to be gained from Cummings' poetry than the sheer pleasure of reading his verse, and perhaps the world has experienced a far greater loss than it suspects.

The following poem, printed here in his memory, is sufficient justification for the accolades Cummings has received.

i thank You God for most this amazing
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
b eathing any--lifted from the no
of all nothing--human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

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RECONCILIATION AND REALITY
by Kathy Glass

(This is the second part of the article which appeared in the November 5 issue of Skandalon.)

Although our planned activities included Bible-study three times a week, we found ourselves forming a "theology on the streets". Terms we've heard all our lives began to take on new meaning as we applied them to things we saw happening around us. We saw the Bible as a record of man's alienation from God and from man, and we saw the life and death of Jesus Christ as the revelation that reconciliation has been acheived and that men are called to express that reconcilia-tion in their dealings with other men.

This made possible a kind of acceptance which had never been possible before and freed us tremendously from some of our earlier notions as to how a Christian should live. We began to develop what we called a "theology of presence"--we felt that our very being in the situation we were in was expressing reconciliation, without our being forced to talk to people about it all the time.

Since our emphasis had been on communi-cation, and this communication had become more meaningful in light of our theology of presence, we centered our evaluation around what we felt we had communicated to people and what they had communicated to us. Certainly, some of the things we had communicated to people were made pretty clear to us. We had opened a

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RECONCILIATION AND REALITY (cont.)

place for teenagers, as well as spending a great deal of time just walking around meeting people. The teenagers with whom we spent our time were mainly kids who didn't participate in the activities of the social agencies--since they're usually kicked out. By giving them, and any others who wished to do so, a place to spend their time, we communicated naiveté to the owner of the liquor store next to "The Hole in the Wall" (the name of our place, coined by one of our earliest acquaintances as we stood looking around the two barren rooms, wondering what to call it). He tried, but didn't succeed in, convincing us that the kids we were dealing with were a bunch of animals who should be kept on a leash. We communicated an unrealistic attitude toward sex to our young friends, whom we told that the girls slept on the third floor and the boys slept on the second floor of the former community center which served as our residence (one boy's comment was typical - "Yeah, but you got stairs, don't you?") We communicated downright stupidity to the teenagers in The Hole in the Wall when we continued to open night after night, in spite of stolen pop, records, wallets, and record players, harassment by the police, and a table smashed by one of 'our kids' who had come under the influence of cheap wine. We communicated recklessness to our "respectable" neighbors because we had no rules barring boys with liquor on their breath, and even permitted a young "wino" to be in the place. We communicated a lack of responsibility to another group of college students in the area who didn't understand our theology of presence and constantly accused us of being ashamed to be associated with the churches because we did not choose to work through conventional church programs.

Perhaps we began to communicate something more. Some of our most exciting moments came when we had the feeling that the kids understood that we weren't social workers, cops, or disinterested observers. It wasn't until the end of the summer that some of them finally began to come to us, sit down, and ask what we WERE doing, and the fact that we had been with them all summer made us able to talk as honestly as we could with them about acceptance, and communication, and just wanting to live without some of the traditional barriers. And yes, we even talked with them about love. We communicated something about our race--one young girl expressed

surprise to the Negro girl in our group that we could be doing what we were, since most of us were WHITE. We think that we communicated something about acceptance to the boys we visited in jail when we told them we hadn't come to find out if they had fired that shotgun into the crowd at a party, but to find out if they were being treated properly, if we could help with a lawyer, or with their families. We think that we communicated acceptance to the little kids who lived in the neighborhood when we spent time playing and talking with them. We think that we communicated acceptance to older people sitting on park benches when we greeted them with a smile, a "hello", and a comment about the joys of soaking up sun on a park bench, the drum corps practicing nearby, or the Pirates' chance of winning the pennant.

We had many things communicated to us in turn, acceptance being the greatest of them. We were amazed at the warmth of our reception in the neighborhood, and in the churches we attended. In both instances, the fact that we lived in the neighborhood was an important factor. One woman introduced us to a white caretaker at a housing project with the comment, "They're different from you. They live here."

What were the results? The change in the people in the group became more apparent to each of us as time passed. We were excited by the experiences as they happened. We continue to be excited as we realize that we exist with a new kind of freedom. We have been able to show that reconciliation is possible.

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CHOIR BEING FORMED

Jan Dyckman is organizing a choir to sing at the Christmas Vesper Service to be held on Tuesday, December 18, and volunteers are needed. The choir will rehearse on Monday, December 3 and 10, at 9:00 p.m. in Bru and on Saturday, December 15 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at First Lutheran Church.

If interested, contact Jan (HO 5-5105) or show up at the next rehearsal. Plans for the vesper service are proceeding apace and, in addition, a string ensemble will play Corelli's "Christmas Concerto".