

ΣΚΑΝΔΑΛΟΝ

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SKANDALON

March 17, 1966

SECULARIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

by Benjamin Sharpe

Religion is an important and integral part of human life. Indeed, it is a social phenomenon which is found in all societies. Even the states which forbid religion create for themselves a god called "the state." A classic definition as stated by Emile Durkheim said that religion is "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, to things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community... all those who adhere to them." This definition is valuable in that it is very flexible, applying to all world religions as we understand them. It also applies to my definition of secularization.

The ordinary citizen of the United States is protected from questions and problems concerning faith and God by custom and primary groups. Mr. Citizen (as I shall call him) goes to church every week, sees the same people, and usually avoids religious controversy unless in time of crisis. In fact, religion to Mr. Citizen seems to be simply a way to meet his obligation to society.

However, the university presents a challenging obstacle to Mr. Citizen's children. To the university come the students fresh from home where their beliefs and thoughts were held by everyone else. For them, it had never been thought to challenge what their parents and friends believed. But university life forces him to reckon with others of different beliefs. Questions are posed by professors, famous philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, and most searching of them all, other students. Often Mr. Citizen's children are confused and lost; they have nowhere to turn for comfort.

This difficult period for Mr. Citizen's children is due to an apparent failure of religious leaders to show the practical and personal relevance of religion. Students are bereft of a religious and moral heritage. As Richard Butler, O.P., says, "The vast indifferent majority... simply do not care about anything transcending self." This conclusion is very similar to the definition of secularization given by Harvey Cox: "...secularization is the liberation of man from religious and metaphysical tutelage, the turning of his attention away from other worlds and toward this one." To clarify this, we must recall that ancient man in hunting and agricultural societies was bound to religion. If he wanted good crops or a successful hunt, he asked one of his gods. He had a constant view toward "the next world" where life was sure to be better. This concept continued on into the Middle Ages where the average peasant looked beyond his world of pain to the next one. As evidence of this, one has only to view the magnificent cathedrals of the period. In modern society, everything to a large extent has come under man's control. When he wants a better crop, he uses fertilizer. If he wants animals, he raises them on large farms. In other words, life here on earth is improving generally for all men in the occidental world. The next world slips out of focus, and attention is directed to improving this one. Examples can be seen in the civil rights action, the peace corps, and right here in Albany, the Trinity Institute. This change in outlook is a change in religion itself, not only on the campus but in the world. It is a time, shall we say, of "no religion," when man no longer looks to religion alone for moral rules.

As a result of a study done on campus, I have concluded that there exists at least five groups. The first is made up of poorly informed students who are susceptible to group association such as fraternities, sororities, or religious organizations (Newman Club, Church of the University Community, etc.) serving the school. The second group is convinced and dedicated. They naturally gravitate toward a religious center seeking not confirmation, but only affirmation of religious validity. Nonaffiliated students make up the third group. They, up to this point, have needed no firm faith or sanctioned code of morality. The fourth group is made up of social seekers who participate in religious functions to improve their own appearance. And fifth, the zealots who thank God they are not like the others. All of these groups show secularization because each is related to this world in the same way, rather than to the next. The believers hold that there are more important things than to die for the faith.

Placing the interviewed into categories was extremely difficult, because several seemed to fit inot more than one group. One stands out as being an ideal member of group three. His chief concern is this world (secularized). He

SECULARIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY, cont'd.

dismisses questions as unanswerable, and maintains he has the same faith as before he came to college.

Family influence can be noticed from the fact that all interviewed came from families where the parents had been regularly practicing their faith. Consequently, students came to college with this faith, and it was this that was challenged and in some cases proved not sufficient.

To back this up, it is interesting to note that in a Vassar study, seniors score higher than members of the other three classes on a well-proved personality measure (Minnesota Multiphase Personality Inventory). Higher scores are indicative of greater psychological disturbance. This seems to indicate that freshmen repress those thoughts which are not consistent with existing attitudes and opinions. Each year, the student thinks more and more about these things. On the Religious Program Evaluation of 1964, taken at Cornell University, 42% of the students had personal doubts about the Christian faith, 23% had questions about personal morals, 49% had basic questions about the meaning of life, and 39% were concerned with social ethics (poverty, racial injustice, war and peace, etc.). Freshmen were more concerned with the first three areas; seniors with the last one. Here is a change of interests from other worldly concerns and nebulous things, to that of this world, such as poverty and war.

In conclusion, I believe that the path of secularization is inevitable on the campus. Traditional religion is a private matter and plays little part in the secular university, especially the state-supported schools. Religion as was known is gone forever, and its change can be seen in the secular university.

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NOTES FROM OUR FOREIGN EDITOR

EDITOR'S NOTE: Sandra Thomson, a member of the Editorial Board and Foreign Editor of Skandalon, is spending this semester studying at the Institute for American Universities at Aix-en-Provence, France. While she has been there, she has shared with us some of her impressions of Aix and of the Institute. Aix is.....well, shall we let Miss Thomson tell the story--

"Aix is a charming town - there is no other word for it. Most of the streets are very narrow and winding and the buildings are very old. Some of the main streets are wider and lined with chestnut trees. Everyone walks in the streets, not on the sidewalks. People are never in a hurry to get anywhere; life is so slow and relaxed. One really gets a feeling of time for there is no need to hurry. One could spend years here without caring about the loss of time."

"From my apartment there is a most beautiful view. The house is on a hill and on clear days one can look across the rooftops of Aix, past the cathedral steeple, and see the high hills - almost mountains - on the other side of the valley.

"There is a whole world of experience that you have to feel. The sky is bluer than any I have ever seen before and the sunlight is lighter than you can imagine, the yellow houses with the pale blue shutters and the orange roofs: there is a certain communion between all these elements that has to be felt. It is very warm here, rather like Florida. There are palm and cypress trees, everything green, with that beautiful blue Mediterranean. The coast is mountainous and sometimes the mountains come right down to the sea. The soil is very red and here and there one sees orange trees with oranges hanging from them."

"There are many differences between the Institute and Albany. During the first three weeks of classes we can audit any course we want to. If we find something we like better than the courses we originally signed up for, then fine and good, changing is done with little effort. Classes are spread out even more than they are at Albany, one class meets in the museum of natural history, some at the Institute, a few at a school for foreign students, and some at the Faculté. That means walking all over Aix."

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ΣΚΑΝΔΑΛΟΝ

Essay Contest

FIRST PRIZE

SECOND PRIZE

#10

DETAILS ON PAGE 4

#5

THE GREEK, THE INDEPENDENT, AND THE UNIVERSITY

by James G. Ward

Last fall, this journal published an article entitled "The Greek Utopia." This was subtitled "Greek Views of Greek Life" and was just that, a view of fraternity and sorority life on this campus compiled by the Skandalon staff from comments submitted by various members of Greek groups. Although our sampling techniques may not have been the most scientific in the world, we felt that some semblance of a cross-section was obtained. At the time of publication there was, following the article, an editor's note which promised a corresponding "independent's view of independent life." Since that particular issue was published (October 14, 1965), the Skandalon staff has been trying to do just that, compile a view of an independent's life from his point of view. The only thing that could be extracted from the independents on campus were two articles by two juniors, one male and one female, explaining why they preferred independent life to Greek life. To these two, we are extremely grateful. The comments by these two people may, by no means, be exemplary of the independent view if such a thing exists, but do point out some interesting things.

Before I proceed, I would like to say that this author is an independent, but an independent who feels that he can take somewhat of an objective view on both independent and Greek life. Not that I am without prejudice, but that I think I can realize my prejudices and can compensate for them.

The ideas that are presented by the two independents who have provided my material show, I feel, not so much a reaction to Greek life, but a misunderstanding of what the supposed advantages of Greek life are. This, then, is not a value judgment on either Greek or independent life, but an attempt at a clarification of some of the issues that cloud a proper understanding and dialogue between these two groups. Greeks complain of independent hostility and independents complain of Greek hegemony in student government. Popular stereotypes seem to be the Greek who is the "power-happy snob" and the independent who is the "apathetic bum." Somewhere between these two lies an answer, an answer which I am not sure I have or would expound if I did have, but an answer that Greek and independent alike should strive together to find.

The most marked theme I seem to find in independent reaction to Greek life is the notion that the Greek, by the nature of his or her organization, limits one's friends. One independent said, "First, my friends are found scattered here and there--some in a Greek group, some not. I am free to meet new people at outside organizations." I can only ask: does membership in a Greek group limit one's friendships? Is one compelled to have no close friends outside of the group? Are Greek groups this inward-looking? These questions only a Greek could truthfully answer, but I would be led, from my experience, to reply emphatically in the negative. Along the same lines, my other source countered with, "One does not have to join a fraternity in order to have friends, in fact, I feel that those who do so join because they are unsuccessful in finding friends." These seem to be gross misconceptions of what Greek life means. On the other hand, these feelings are fairly widespread among the independents and do much to form their judgment of Greek life. I think we can hardly say that the independents are entirely responsible for this mistaken view. Are the Greeks doing a good job in public relations? Or are these the views of disappointed independents? I will not try to answer these questions; the reader must do this for himself.

One independent said that she would not join a sorority because of "the pressure of doing things to make the group productive." This brings up the larger issue of independent and Greek participation in general University activities. Why are most student government leaders and activity leaders Greeks? Is there pressure to be productive? If there is pressure, is there something wrong with it? It seems to me that the University without productivity is the University in complete stagnation. Could it be that cries of "pressure for productivity" and of "Greek hegemony" are merely convenient hiding places for the generally non-productive independent? This author can personally attest to the ascendance of a non-Greek to high governmental position, and I am sure that countless other examples could be found. If there is Greek control of University student life, could it be that it was gained by nothing more than simple default? This university needs more productivity; just consider the whole campaign or non-campaign against apathy on this campus. Should we condemn productivity because of pressures to be productive; or because certain groups are more productive than others, should we condemn them?

This article is meant to raise questions and stimulate some thought on the independent-Greek questions. There are many sides to the issue as there are in any complex issue. What is needed is real understanding of what the Greek group is, what its role in the University is, and what the role of any "citizen" of the University community is. What I think is needed is a real attempt, not the close-minded and bitter statement that one of the sources provided: "I believe that, on the average, students outside the Greek organization earn higher grades than the alleged 'students' within." (Underlining mine).

SKANDALON ESSAY CONTEST

Skandalon feels that it is time for an essay contest. The spring semester is underway and time may present itself for other activities than academics. We are offering a \$10 first prize and \$5 second prize. The essay topic will be "Is God Dead?" This topic was chosen for the contest because it presents so many different possibilities. The contest rules are as follows:

- 1) Essays shall be 750 to 1500 words in length.
- 2) The essays shall be judged on:
 - a) clarity and originality of expression
 - b) logical development of ideas
 - c) appropriateness to the announced topic
- 3) Skandalon reserves the right to withhold awarding one or both prizes if it feels that no entries merit the prizes.
- 4) Essays shall have the author's name and address.
- 5) All essays become the property of Skandalon and cannot be returned.
- 6) All essays must be submitted by Monday, April 25, 1966.
- 7) The winning essays will be published in Skandalon sometime in May.
- 8) Any member of the Skandalon staff is ineligible to enter.
- 9) Essays can be submitted to:
 - a) Skandalon, 501 State Street, Albany, New York 12203
 - b) James Ward, Stuyvesant Tower
 - c) Steven Brockhouse, deLancey Hall

SKANDALON

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