Comment

Feet of CLAE

In a recent letter to alumni, Vice President De Wit states that, “a renewed spirit of excitement and dedication pervades the Calvin College Campus this fall. Already during registration several persons on campus commented that the students and staff seemed to be approaching the new year with an unusual degree of eagerness and optimism.” Last year in an article published in the Calvin College Spark, Chaplain Pekelder expressed similar sentiments about the situation early in that school year.

I was baffled then and I am baffled now in an attempt to find some substantiation for these claims. Some things may have changed for the better over the summer, some things may have become worse. For the most part there has been little change at Calvin College. And this lack of change is in itself most serious.

Even if Rev. Pekelder was correct last year, I do not think that spirit of optimism bore much fruit last year, and, pessimist that I am, I do not foresee any products of Mr De Wit’s “spirit of excitement.”

This is not written as an attack on Messrs De Wit and Pekelder. This is only a different perspective upon an admittedly complex subject, namely the state of the college. But I feel no optimism exuding around Knollcrest Campus when I walk through the halls. True, the administration is busy proliferating programs, but these in themselves are quantitative changes, hardly indicators of any qualitative change in the college.

However, the present quietus in the life of the college is serious. When a community destroys its traditions, as American society has systematically done for the past century, that community’s institutions acquire new sociological requirements. Calvin has also destroyed its traditions in the past decade with the new 4-1-4 curriculum, the transfer to Knollcrest, the rapid growth of the student population, and the increase in pre-professional training. Once traditions have been destroyed, a community can no longer depend on traditional patterns to insure accomplishment of its community goals. Institutions can hardly create traditions out of whole cloth to replace the old. They rather enter an era of almost continual upheaval as they must revise and eliminate old structures and inaugurate new ones to cope with the bewildering changes within the community. Calvin’s Christian commitment does not eliminate the need to meet such necessities.

Calvin is in danger of believing that the partial and superficial changes that have been instituted or that are being proposed, such as FOSCO, will be sufficient to satisfy its new sociological requirements. We must not mistake the apparent quietus of the past year and this present semester as marking the welcome end of the turbulent 60’s. Rather, we must realize that the basic changes in the Calvin College student body have not been followed by appropriate changes in the institutional superstructure of the college.

The Calvin College catalog makes bold, broad assertions as to how it is implementing its institutional goals: “The college attempts through its rules, its organizations, and the counsel of its personnel, to show the student how a life of commitment is lived...” (p. 11). The question facing the college here is whether its rules, its organizations, and personnel have changed sufficiently to accord with the bewildering confusion which is the Calvin College Student Body.

Twenty years ago Calvin students came from a very homogeneous background. In addition, a greater percentage of students aspired to occupational patterns similar to those of their professors. The sheer increase in the number of students at Calvin, especially in the pre-professional programs, and the presence of a sizable group of students living in another culture from that of their teachers, have made the traditional academic life-style and values foreign to most students.

The homely interaction of faculty and students on which Calvin prides itself has been interred along with the Testament of Vision somewhere on Franklin Campus. The college must decide whether it should strive to revive this interaction or whether some other process will fulfill the college’s aim to guide its students to live the life of commitment.

I see among my fellow students an unstemmed trend toward privatism. If there ever was a day for student activism at Calvin, that day is past. Dave Dekker, KIDS director, is cited in Chimes as giving “abating student activism, the re-emergence of traditional classroom attitudes” as major reasons for the decline in student volunteer work. The college has assumed that the personal energy of Calvin students will be enough to propel them into “confrontation with the secular world.” It must now be the college’s responsibility to encourage the apparently declining energies of its students.
In the 1971 *Prism*, Marv Meyer characterizes the past year, 1970-71, as "a year of relative flaccidity. Much cynical apathy replaced communal activism." Most students and even most Student Senators have difficulty seeing Student Senate in any more responsible role than overseer of the Concert Entertainment Series. The possibility of students working with faculty members in pursuit of a better education is functionally irrelevant to most students and most faculty members. Students with leadership capabilities are decreasingly enthusiastic about participating with aloof and bureaucratic faculty and administrators in the government of the college. Unless the college willfully decides to leave the talents of these students unchanneled, it must re-orient its institutions "to show the student [with leadership capability] how a life of commitment is lived" at Calvin College.

Calvin is unsure of itself, unsure of how its parts fit together and unsure of how to accomplish any of the broadly stated aims of the college. It must not mistake the sighs of relief as signs of optimism, but as a short breathing spell. It must realize that an educational institution producing apathetic students is failing its task even more seriously than one producing rebellious students.

The college as a whole must take a deep examination of itself, and this process of examination must begin soon, lest the atrophy of complacency creeps too far through the college to ever allow a revitalization of its spirit.

We must ask ourselves whether the increasingly private student, the increasingly purely academic student is not, in actuality, deferring the matter of being a total Christian until graduation, or even permanently. Is the student who mocks Student Senate and the Administration as irrelevant and meaningless today being given any guidance in how to manifest his Christian commitment tomorrow in his congregation, in his denomination, in political life, in society? Why is the college failing its task of preparing its students to lead lives of Christian service?

If the instituting of the 4-1-4 is to remain the "grandest hour" of the faculty community as President Spoelhof has claimed it was, I think the history of this college will show that its "grandest hour" fell far short of making Calvin College the community that God has called it to be.

Robert Strickwerda
And Here's to You, Danny Orliss
by Phillip Blosser

When I was a kid, my mom read me Danny Orlis stories. Danny Orlis was my childhood hero. The perfect GOOD GUY. He was brave, strong (a "he-man"), respectable, honest, polite to ladies, he always wore a tie, he had a super-jock crewcut, and above all, he was a SINCERE CHRISTIAN!!!

The Ultimate GOOD GUY, Danny Orlis was a clean, smiling Jesus-boy through and through.

Wherever he went, Danny was a shining evangelical witness to the Jesus-Truth, and by his testimony he struck Jesus-Fear into hundreds of Sinner-Souls. All he ever had to do was grin, quote a Bible verse from memory and then ask, “DO YOU KNOW JESUS CHRIST AS YOUR PERSONAL LORD AND SAVIOR?”—and people all around would fall down on their knees in contrition before him, crying for God’s mercy and repenting of their sins.

Danny-boy would tell them to give up sex, dope, alcohol and tobacco, never to cuss anymore, and to immediately start a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by reading from the King James Version and praying for 5 to 10 minutes every day.

After growing up, I learned that “Danny Orlis” was an Evangelical Conspiracy to saturate America with Fundamentalism. Education wouldn’t allow me to remain blinded by Danny’s paternalistic, emotional tactics of evangelism. That was the primary ingredient of his religion: emotionalism. Moreover, Danny was a bigot. He was an ignorant, provincial, bourgeois, male supremicist. Without a question, Danny always accepted everything his parents and teachers spoon-fed him: all his puritanical values, the mentalism. Education wouldn’t allow me to remain blinded by reading from the King James Version and praying for 5 to 10 minutes every day.

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I knew it was only a trick to keep us kids all over America “in line,” a Conspiracy of Mothers, Uncle Sam and Big Brother Fundamentalist.

I reacted strongly against the asinine stupidity of the “Danny Orlis” mentality. I felt like such an ass for believing all that crap I was fed as a kid that I joined a philosophy club and decided to become an intellectual. I received a white button with a red “Intellectual” written on it and proudly wore it on my lapel wherever I went.

The philosophy club met once a week in a top floor room of an ivy covered university classroom building. We all sat around a long table smoking pipes with an air of subdued intelligence. Between puffs, we objectively discussed logical proofs for the existence of God and whether or not we could even be certain of our own existence. Hour after hour we deliberated over the problems posed by Anselm, Descartes, Leibniz, Norman Malcolm, and Alvin Plantinga. From the windows we often cast condescending glances down at the ignorant commoners outside, contented in their world of hopeless illusion. How naively they confided in their assumptions about existence! They knew virtually nothing of the questions we were struggling over, problems so basic to existence itself!

Having raised my level of consciousness of the world about me, I saw that there were many injustices in society. I saw that the poor were continually exploited by the rich capitalists and that Christians themselves were often the most oppressive members of bourgeois society. I guiltily saw that it was only my being a product of capitalist society that gave me the leisure to sit about philosophizing in the first place. I was disgusted with my memory of Danny Orlis and his bourgeois values.

Therefore, I decided to become involved. I would be socially radical as well as intellectual. So I sold my bourgeois sportscar and my bourgeois clothes and became a Revolutionary. I bought pre-poor-boy’s proletarian clothes, steel rimmed glasses (plain glass, because I had 20/20 vision) and applied for membership in the Underground. After receiving my credentials from the Kremlin, I became a legitimate Communist Revolutionary.

I attended meetings where we smoked hand rolled cigarettes and talked about the coming Revolution, the abolition of private property and the overthrow of capitalist society. We discussed the Hegelian dialectic, the Marxist dialectic, Leninism, Trotskyism, Revisionism, and read from Russian translations of Marcuse. Everyone knew that the Revolution would never get beyond the dictatorship of the proletariat and that the final historical transition to pure Communism would never take place, but that didn’t decrease our revolutionary zeal in the least: at least we were on the right side.

I soon tired of the monotonous revolutionary debates on political-economic theory and “dialectical materialism,” so I decided to become skeptical. I decided that I would fall into existential rebellion and mock the absurdity of life. I therefore majored in Existentialist Philosophy at the university and learned how to despair over the vacuity of existence. Having studied Dostoyevski, Kafka, Camus, Sartre and all the other experts on meaninglessness, I was able to obtain my degree in philosophy. This placed me in the delightful position of being able to legitimately laugh at those who lived under the illusion that life was meaningful.

So I purposefully went to churches to laugh at the preachers and the absurdity of their sermons. I laughed at the stupid people sitting dumby in rows listening in meaningless reverence to meaningless words. I grinned at them as they took their communion glasses and drank
down their wine in ceremonial seriousness. I remained gleefully seated as they all stood to sing “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow.” I stripped naked and stood at the door rocking with laughter at their unbelieving terror.

The alternatives were very plain to me: To commit suicide or else to impose meaning on a life that was meaningless—as did Danny Orlis. Except that Danny did so without knowing that life was meaningless. The poor fool always really thought that life was ultimately meaningful. His simple naivete was all the more disgusting now that I knew the truth of which he was so pathetically ignorant.

Suicide never really attracted me. It seems that it should have, seeing that I didn’t have any reason for living; but somehow I never found it too appealing. In a certain way I did admire Ernest Hemingway and Yukio Mishima for their gutsy sort of death-defying self-annihilation, but it just wasn’t the thing for me.

So I dropped out.

I abandoned both meaningfulness and meaninglessness; they were equally meaningless.

I stopped cutting my hair.

I stopped shaving my beard.

I stopped guiding my thoughts (Brains don’t need government!).

My mental dialectic ground to a shuddering halt.

Mental anarchy overthrew the Systematic Establishment of my thoughts and my head went wild with freedom!

I flushed my “Intellectual” button down the toilet.

I burned my Revolutionary Underground membership papers.

I threw away my college degree.

I quit looking for the right slot to fit into.

I became a MAN WITHOUT A SLOT, and consequently started imagining other people that way; soon I saw that everyone lives under the illusion that they have to live in slots when there’s not the slightest reason in the world why they shouldn’t be FREE instead! MAN IS BORN SLOTLESS AND EVERYWHERE IN SLOTS. I dreamed of a world where everyone would be slotless and no one would think it necessary to imagine his brothers in slots. As it turned out, I became a round peg in a square hole. They called me a “Hippie.”

I first discovered that I was a Hippie while walking through a shopping center last Christmas with my bosom buddy, J.B. As we walked along in the religious atmosphere of the crowded mall, a little girl tagging along beside her Christmas shopping mother pointed at us accusingly and squealed, “Hippies!” “J.B.,” I said, “We’re Hippies! Society has excommunicated us! We’re orphans of Amerika!”

Later that evening, J.B. and I dropped acid to celebrate the occasion. We sat around talking and laughing until we got tired and dozed off to sleep. I had a dream.

I dreamed I got a super-jock crewcut and put on a tie and carried a Bible under my arm. I walked up to a full-length mirror with a smile and asked myself if I knew Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior.

My knees suddenly gave way from under me, and I fell in contrition before my reflection, begging God’s forgiveness and repenting of my sins. I and my reflection both broke into tears and cried with joy.

Jesus Christ! I didn’t believe for a moment what was happening in my dream. It was so unreal and so completely removed from real life that I couldn’t possibly believe it. Moreover, I would consciously refuse to believe it! But in my dream my reflection and I went on crying and mumbling about my “new meaningful life” and the beauty of “personal fellowship with Christ.” I felt a wave of nausea sweep over me. My head was spinning and I felt like I was about to puke.

I woke up with tears in my eyes; I reached over and nudged J.B.

“Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?” I asked.

He stared at me in disbelief.

“Come on,” I laughed, “To believe or to be offended, those are the only alternatives.”

Sonnet on Creation

From formless clouds of darkness He makes light
Come out from blazing gems implanted in
His crown. He sews the velvet sky and pins
Their orbits, as the thread inscribes the night
Above a fecund sphere made warmly bright
With undulating heat from brilliant, golden sun.
Of that blue-streaked, incubated globe the Son
Makes of water and of land a breathless sight
To God and angels, and to man as well
As he matures to draw his orbits, too.
When as an egg it seems to strangely swell,
God, with ingrained youth, comes to view
The new-born earth-life break its tightened shell
With man its master, crowned with nascent dew.

Donald Mulder
Is a Historical Fall Necessary?

The questions of evolution and orthodoxy in a new perspective

by Herman Bouma

Although accepting the figurative nature of the first chapter of Genesis, many Christians still assert a belief in an historic space-time Fall. The theory of evolution has convinced them that God did not create the universe in six literal days, yet they find room in evolutionary theory for a Fall. Of course, this is possible but it is a highly contrived and awkward attempt to reconcile science and scripture. Realizing this, H M Kuitert, Professor of Theological Ethics at the Free University of Amsterdam, has expressed his belief that, like Genesis 1, the account of Adam and Eve is figuratively written. The historic Fall, which has for centuries been thought of as an integral part of theology, is then rejected. The message of the Genesis account, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all," is now emphasized rather than its historicity. However, Francis Schaeffer, evangelical theologian from the L'Abri Fellowship, deeply believes that an historic space-time Fall has an extremely important part in any truly Christian theology. An evaluation of its significance is thus in order.

For years the historicity of the Fall has been called into question not because of any all-encompassing theory of the origin of living things but simply through a literary analysis of the actual Biblical account. One finds therein a style similar to that of many Greek myths. For example, not only does the Fall seek to explain the origin of sin in man but it is also used to explain why snakes creep along on their bellies, why women have pain in child-bearing, and why man must work to stay alive. Genesis 3 also has strong anthropomorphic references to God. God is said to have walked through the garden calling out for Adam. Clearly if God is an omnipresent spirit it is contradictory that Adam and Eve could have hid themselves from the presence of God. In this passage God has more the characteristics of the Greek god Zeus than of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Spirit. Thus the strong anthropomorphism in the Biblical text is alone strong reason to doubt the historicity of the story of Adam and Eve.

Within the past one hundred years, however, a new development has occurred which has raised even more speculation about the first few chapters of Genesis. Instead of merely raising questions about the Genesis passage's being a literal account of a Fall, the theory of evolution casts doubts on whether there was a Fall at all. That is, although a literary critique of the Biblical text does not necessarily preclude that there was a Fall of some kind (and, therefore, a real Adam and Eve), the theory of evolution makes an historic space-time Fall highly improbable. The theory, of course, asserts that man is the culmination of a long series of events consisting of the interactions between molecules, resulting first in organic molecules, then coacervates, and "progressing" to euglena, ape, and finally man. Clearly then, the simple, direct creation of man by God is ruled out by evolution. Many Christians, admitting this, go on to assert that there still could have been a first man and a first woman even though they resulted from an evolution from preceding life forms. Of course, the theory of evolution allows plenty of room for a first creature of any kind (provided there are criteria for distinguishing that first creature from its progenitor). That first creature of a certain species, however, may not necessarily be the ancestor of all members of that species. That is, another creature of the same species may have evolved independently of the first creature although later in time. Thus, there would be members of a species who developed from one line of evolution and members of the same species who developed from another. In the field of physical anthropology one finds that such seems to be the case with the origin of man. The total aggregate of mankind is the result of independent lines of evolution. To a certain extent the individual races can be identified with these various lines. There was not one man, therefore, who evolved and gave rise to all other men but rather several men who evolved independently of each other in various locales of the world. The descendants of these "first men" thus bear certain characteristics in common so as all to be classified as man.

It has been noted by some that the word "Adam" in the Bible can refer not only to an individual man or to all men, but also to a group of men. They then assert that Adam's fall refers to a group of men falling into sin, that group of men being those first men of each separate line of evolution. Such a theory, however, is very contrived and awkward and still leaves one far from the true Biblical meaning; for in Romans Paul clearly refers to Adam as a single individual man. Thus, any semblance to an historic, space-time Fall as portrayed in the Bible is ruled out by the theory of evolution.

When faced with the implications of the theory of evolution a Christian is forced to reconsider just how significant an historic, space-time Fall is in his systematic theology. For some Christians an historic Fall is so important that they reject the theory of evolution not on scientific grounds but simply because it conflicts with their pre-established doctrinal framework of thought. Francis Schaeffer is such a person. In his tape "The Absolute Limits..."
of Christianity” Schaeffer asserts that belief in an historic Fall is one of the main tenets of Christian faith. If one does not hold to this belief, he has gone beyond the “absolute limits” and no longer retains a Christian framework of thought. Indeed, Schaeffer dramatized his strong conviction on this point when he stated in a question-and-answer period that if the Fall were somehow “proven” to be simply a myth he would give up on all his endeavors and reject Christianity.

To some extent one can sympathize with Schaeffer, for the Fall does appear to fit into a neat, consistent theological system which can be summarized as follows: God created man perfect in a perfect world, man sinned against God and wrought God’s judgment including not only his own condemnation but also the fall of nature, God sent salvation to man in His Son, Jesus Christ, which salvation depends upon man’s acceptance of Christ. In this system Schaeffer strongly emphasizes the necessity of man’s making a choice for or against God. He says that if God had not given man a choice in the garden of Eden, God would then be characterized as a ruthless Being arbitrarily condemning a creature for that for which he is not culpable. That is, in explaining the existence of sin in the world, if a Fall is not allowed, then God becomes the author of sin and consequently, in condemning man for sin, He is in reality condemning that which He Himself created, i.e. sinful man. Upon a closer examination of Schaeffer’s compact theological package, however, several inconsistencies surface. For example, in the first two chapters of Romans Paul discusses man’s relationship to God and how all men fall under God’s condemnation. Now this condemnation could result either from Adam’s Fall (“In Adam’s fall, we sinned all”) or from each individual’s own choice against God. If Schaeffer affirms the former explanation he is implying that one is being judged for something with which he had nothing to do; he is being condemned for someone else’s sin. Such indeed appears to make God into a ruthless, despotic Being. If Schaeffer takes the latter position, that each person chooses for himself whether or not to obey God, then there is no need for a Fall. Thus in either case the Fall is dispensable. Moreover, assuming Schaeffer takes the latter position, he would also maintain that all are judged to be guilty, thereby asserting that even though everyone has a choice, there is no one who will choose to obey God. Such an assertion tends to cast doubts on the truth of the word “choice.” One might infer that the composition of all men is such that it is in each man’s nature to choose against God. Thus, this situation reduces to one similar to the former explanation in which by Adam’s Fall man’s nature became sinful. In either case then God appears as ruthless, arbitrary, and unjust, and the postulation of a Fall does no good in extricating one from this theological perplexity.

Another difficulty with Schaeffer’s package is the relation of Christ’s salvation to sinful man. Adam’s punishment for eating of the tree of knowledge is death; not eternal punishment but simply death. God then sends Christ to save mankind from its punishment. If he believes in Christ as his Saviour he inherits eternal life. This seems fair enough. But then the Bible says if one does not believe in Christ he shall suffer eternal punishment. Consider the following analogy: A man has been sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering his wife. The governor of the state then says to him, “If you say you’re sorry, I’ll let you go free. But if you don’t, you’ll be executed.” Now obviously this is unjust since the man could receive a worse punishment if he does not repent than for the crime itself. Thus, in this respect, the Fall does not synchronize well with Christ’s message of salvation.

Perhaps the most direct attack on Schaeffer’s insistence on the necessity of man’s making a choice is the assertion that such a choice is theoretically impossible. That is, given the nature of God, man can not possibly make a truly free choice. One must ask why Adam chose to eat the fruit. Clearly, there were certain external circumstances so acting on Adam’s nature that he chose to eat. Adam’s choice depended on his nature and circumstances both of which are controlled by God since He created all. God, therefore, indirectly is the cause of Adam’s choice and such is to be expected. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Since God is God, nothing happens against His will. When God created Adam He knew that Adam was going to sin because He has foreknowledge. Thus, if He did not want him to sin He would not have created him so. That is, everything that happens in the universe (including man’s actions) can be foreseen by God. If God did not desire something to happen He would not have instantiated it in the first place. Therefore, whatever happens (whatever is instantiated) is according to His will. Rather than being Adam’s choice, his fall was the will of God.

One may ask what is left of any theological system after bringing so much havoc on such an important element of traditional dogma. Actually, a figurative interpretation of the Fall has little if any effect on the message of Schaeffer’s theological system. The Bible does not intend to be a textbook for a course in systematic doctrine. To the contrary, its purpose is to present the type of relationship man should have with God. Relationship is the crucial issue here, not assent to a unified code of propositions. Like the literal, the figurative interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3 still sets the stage for this relationship. The message of these chapters is that man is sinful. The cause of his predicament is not important. A sick man does not sit and ponder the cause of his illness but rather seeks a physician to heal him. Mankind, likewise sick, must seek its redemption in God through Christ.
Commitment to Non-commitment

at Oberlin has some pitfalls

by Gordon VanHarn

For two years (1968-1970) I taught biology at Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio. I thoroughly enjoyed it and found Oberlin an impressive college. My students were good students, my colleagues were capable and pleasant, and my work assignment was enjoyable. Inevitably, though, I was led to make comparisons between Oberlin and Calvin College, where I have taught for nine years. Many of the comparisons were of the trivial and whimsical kind, such as students. My colleagues were capable and pleasant, and my work assignment was enjoyable. Inevitably, though, I was led to make comparisons between Oberlin and Calvin College, where I have taught for nine years. Many of the comparisons were of the trivial and whimsical kind, such as dress habits, food service, physical plant maintenance, etc. However, one comparison seems more important to me, and I want to share it with readers of Dialogue.

But first let me tell you a few things about Oberlin College, so that we can put a comparison with Calvin College in proper focus. Oberlin is known for its academic excellence, leadership in higher education, and a liberal social and political stance. One index of its academic excellence is the unusually large number of prestigious scholarship awards (Wilson, Rhodes, etc.) given to Oberlin students. Oberlin's leadership in higher education began early in its history. It was the first college to declare its instruction open to all races in 1835 and the first institution in America to award the A.B. degree to women in 1841. The liberal social ethic has continued from the time the college community played an active role in harboring runaway slaves as one terminal point of the "underground railroad."

The specifically Christian emphasis of the college has disappeared. The college was founded in 1833 by two Yankee missionaries with the intention of fostering Christian community and Christian piety. This emphasis flourished under the influence of Oberlin President Charles G. Finney, one of the nineteenth century's great revivalists. With time the college changed its goal and de-emphasized the religious commitment until in 1966 the Oberlin Theological School departed, symbolizing the demise of religious emphasis on Oberlin's campus.

Oberlin and Calvin colleges are similar in some ways: both are committed to academic excellence, both emphasize liberal arts education, both have very competent faculties, both have good facilities, and the two institutions are of comparable size. Since comparisons at these levels would tend to be superficial, I will discuss a matter I consider to be of greater significance, the institutional or community commitment of the two colleges. An understanding of the institutional commitment is essential if one is to properly evaluate programs and policies. I will not discuss other factors which influence the nature of the college except to mention that Oberlin has greater financial resources. The Oberlin College budget is two to three times greater than Calvin's although the Calvin student body is larger. The budget is met by very high fees (approximately $2600 for tuition and $1500 for room and board) and a large endowment. While this difference in financial resources does not guarantee a better educational program, it does decrease student-faculty ratios, increase the number of administrators, and provide a superb concert series, an elaborate athletic program, and a distinguished speaker and seminar program.

The commitments of the two colleges are very different, and an understanding of these commitments is necessary if one is to evaluate the two colleges properly. Calvin College's institutional, commitment is to provide an educational community based on a faith perspective which considers God's revelation authoritative. With this perspective, the personal life of faculty and students should be a response to this revelation and a liberal arts education should consist of "teachers and students together engaging in the various scholarly disciplines, directed and enlightened in their inquiries by the Word of God." (Christian Liberal Arts Education.)

In contrast, Oberlin College claims an institutional neutrality, which is more properly a commitment to noncommitment, and this has some surprising implications for important facets of college life. Matters of commitment and conviction are limited to the private life of the individual and the institution is free from the obligation or right to shape values (other than the value of excellence in scholarship). This commitment results in no demand for conformity to any creedal confession, theological orthodoxy, political party, national goals, or social structure. This neutrality is in the name of freedom of inquiry and with the assumption that academic excellence cannot be achieved in an environment of commitment to a creed, party, theology or policy. Even so this commitment to neutrality is reflected in the philosophy, procedures, and policies of the institution. I will present a few examples of how this commitment is applied to student recruitment, student affairs, speaker policy, and curriculum. The reader should recognize that other factors may also be involved in formulation of institutional policies.

Student recruitment should be easy. In an atmosphere of freedom of inquiry and in the absence of any requirement to conform, in principle there should be no limitation on admission, and the student body should be fairly representative of college students in the U.S. This is not continued on p10
realized because of at least three selective factors: 1) Oberlin College is expensive. It admits only students who can afford $4000 per year or make arrangements for financial aid. 2) Oberlin is committed to excellence, and it therefore accepts only students from approximately the upper fifth of their high school class. 3) Oberlin has a reputation for a liberal stance on social, religious, and political issues. Therefore it tends to attract students who have similar views, who, in turn, perpetuate that image. A few students recently accused Oberlin’s admission office of not admitting certain political activist students and favoring instead admission of more varsity athletes. The charge was not substantiated, but the accusation dramatized the dilemma of whether the college should deliberately work at achieving an ideologically representative student body or judge prospective students imply on intellectual ability and the ability to pay. The present student body at Oberlin is diverse but it simply is not representative of college students of the 1970’s. On the average the Oberlin students are brighter, richer, and more liberal.

In the area of student affairs and services, a college committed to being uncommitted has very little basis for regulation of student housing or social affairs other than convenience, good order, and protection of the freedom to follow individual conscience. In housing, coed housing, as reported in Life magazine last year, is the pattern in response to student demands. Cohabitation, although not sanctioned by the college is largely ignored where it exists. The dilemma for the college occurs in attempts to protect the freedom of individuals to follow personal convictions when these convictions cause conflict within the student population. There is no authority to protect one conviction over another. The area of student services also provides occasion for conflict when the college is forced to either condone or condemn a particular practice. Medical services are contracted with a local clinic. This relatively recent innovation resulted in improved health care and also removed the college’s responsibility in controversial health services such as dispensing birth control materials and abortion. This procedure leaves that question to individual conscience of student and physician. This policy could become a pattern for housing and other services.

Another service provided by the college is a placement office where graduate schools, professional schools, industry, governmental agencies, and other institutions can contact and interview students and provide them with information in an attempt to recruit students for their organization. In theory, an educational institution committed to neutrality would allow all agencies to be represented at the placement office, with the possible limitation that the recruiting agency should offer career opportunities for students with the type of education available at Oberlin. This broad representation creates another dilemma. The presence of army, navy, and air force representatives in the Placement Office has triggered demonstrations and confrontation on more than one occasion, the result being that these agencies were not represented for a period of time. This example illustrates that a commitment to being uncommitted does not embody the authority to enforce that commitment and that either confrontation results or consensus rules. Oberlin places no restrictions on the type of speakers, entertainment, or extracurricular activities. This policy coupled with adequate funds results in a calendar of events which rivals that of large universities. Distinguished artists, including the faculty of Oberlin College Conservatory and the Cleveland Orchestra, present twice weekly concerts and recitals. Speakers of national renown such as Ralph Nader, Paul Ehrlich, Noam Chomsky, Julian Bond, and George Wald appeared within the same year. The visiting speakers also represent diverse convictions and interests. Jerry Rubin of Chicago seven fame returns to his Alma Mater with the inflammatory rhetoric of the radical left. Le Roi Jones, with personal bodyguards at his side, reads angry black poetry.
American institutions of higher learning respect this freedom, but at Oberlin College the real test of this freedom is not whether Jerry Rubin, and Le Roi Jones can speak, but whether Spiro Agnew, George Wallace, Barry Goldwater, and Billy Graham would be permitted to speak their convictions freely. The institutional neutrality would permit and should encourage it but the community consensus would oppose it. Even though the institution is committed to neutrality, the liberal social and political consensus within the community results in a bias in favor of liberal and radical speakers.

In terms of curriculum, it would be consistent with the institutional philosophy that each student have considerable freedom in determining his own course of study. At Oberlin the student has some freedom in molding his own education, but the college is not neutral on whether a student should obtain a liberal arts education. The basis for core liberal arts requirements is obscure, other than the principle that a general education is a familiar idea and that it is a prerequisite an understanding of contemporary culture.

Course requirements exist in the natural sciences (2 courses); rhetoric (competence); foreign language (2 courses); literature, fine arts, music (3 courses); social sciences (2 courses), philosophy and religion (2 courses); physical education (4 semesters). Freedom of choice within these areas is extensive but the curricula are rather traditional with some exceptions. Beyond these basic requirements the student has opportunity to shape his own education. An experimental college run by students offers a variety of courses, some of which are offered for credit. Independent study is also freely available, and the Interim consists primarily of independent study and student initiated courses. The absence of highly structured professional curricula places emphasis on liberal arts education but also restricts the student to that type of education. Pressure for curriculum reform has been minimal because students interested in pursuing their own interests do so within the freedom of existing course structure and independent study.

Grading systems are diverse at Oberlin. Students elect conventional grading if they desire evaluation of their work with a letter grade. If a student elects the conventional grading system, he also has the option to take one course each semester on a pass-fail basis which does not influence his GPA. Under the credit-no entry system the grade of "credit" is earned if the student does not fail, in which case no grade is entered on the permanent record. Motivation for using a diverse grading system is difficult to assess. Certain faculty have described it as "all things to all students." It is true that some students exploit the system to obscure mediocrity and avoid failure or raise their GPA. However, generally speaking, the Oberlin student is highly motivated and interested in academic excellence and performs well without grades being the primary motivating force. A few students, emphasizing the right of a student to determine his own education, advocated the credit-no entry grading system as a challenge to the authority of the faculty to evaluate the student's work. Thus misuse of the diverse grading system does exist, but the high motivation of the majority of students makes it a workable and desirable system.

In summary, I feel Oberlin College, as an institution committed to being uncommitted, has many inherent tensions to which means of relief are not readily available. There have been only minor challenges to its liberal arts education and academic admissions requirements. Tensions regarding housing and social life have been resolved in a manner consistent with the institutional neutrality. Tensions which resulted from challenges to the neutral stance of the college, such as the recruiter issue, have been more difficult to resolve. The professed neutrality of the college made it difficult to issue statements on the Vietnam war although the administration was confronted with many requests to do so. Authority for assuring some students the opportunity to visit Marine Corps recruiters in the Placement Office was lacking. The tensions which result from challenges to the college's commitment can result in confrontation and are usually resolved by consensus. These challenges and the consensus solutions, if extended, soon force the college in the direction of a new commitment.

Calvin College, in contrast, is committed to a faith perspective which we profess directs our actions and systematic thought. The biblical perspective is authoritative for the Calvin College community. Each member of this community is under an obligation to make it his perspective. This perspective should also directly enlighten the institutional policies and procedures regarding student recruitment, student housing, social affairs, and services within the college community as well as any discipline which may result from behavior inconsistent with the stance of the college. The existing curriculum as presented in the Christian Liberal Arts Education is an expression of one concept of the Christian's intellectual task. The biblical perspective on life and learning is the authority on which policies at Calvin College are based.

I feel the single most important difference between Oberlin and Calvin colleges is in the nature of their commitment. It is true that members of the Calvin community feel certain injustices occur and disagree regarding implementation of our commitment in policies and curricula. However a college with an authoritative commitment can develop community if its members show compassion and concern for all members. A college committed to noncommitment practices its own brand of tyranny and in terms of specific issues, experiences challenges to its neutrality as well as admonitions for its failure to be uncommitted. Community based on this commitment to noncommitment is difficult to achieve.
The Dam

There was only one dam on the crick
And that was put there by the grownups;
A cement affair that cradled a rusty pipe
Over which the water ran with a sluicing sound.

During Spring when the crick was drunk and
Peeing over its banks, crossing the
Dam became our badge of courage.

(The water was cold as March’s wind
And a half-foot deep on top the dam,
While rockweed clung by its underside
And trailed its tail in the melted snow.)

The trick was to cross the pipe without
A slip to either side, where the cold
Was three feet deep, or over our heads,
Depending to which side we’d fall.

I always stepped it barefoot so my
Toes could mingle with the watered slime
And grow numb raw red so I felt like
Some abstracted movement that slid without
the aid of courage across the danger
Of the iron gap that bridged from bank to bank.

Richard Prins

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Life 1

The crick a little stream
time the water and all
of us stand on the dam
tensely now withstanding
the rush of the water
stream time and all of us
against our instant feet
that linger quickly on,
friends in opposition

Life 2

Life is
a
series
of
superimpositions
which
stack
up
in
structure
somewhat
like
this
poem
is
incomprehensible
when
viewed
as
a
singularity
and
void
of
meaning
when
any
single
word
is
seen
alone
you
must
add
it
to
the
others
until
a
meaning
forms
keep
trying
buddy
until
the
thing
makes
sense
Communal Life at Calvin

by Delwin Nykamp

That contemporary American life styles often fail to meet human needs has become almost a truism. Essays bewailing our impersonalized, dehumanized, computerized institutions have appeared with increasing frequency. To indict contemporary social structures is easy; to construct significant, workable alternatives is more difficult. But perhaps would-be revolutionaries attempt too much. Perhaps our insistence that we change the social structure to the exclusion of changing within the social structure keeps us from seeing genuine possibilities. To change family structure, to provide completely new and better types of universities, to bring about the great revolution will require prodigious effort. Indeed, to attempt such massive changes is a glamorous enterprise, especially when compared with trying to change small parts within the current system. Although such a massive revolution may ultimately be needed, at this time there remain reforms within the social structures that have merit and should be attempted.

Consider, for example, Calvin College. It does not require a professional observer to discover loneliness on this campus. In spite of our homogeneity and our professed common goals and values, many of us stand alone, seeking love and friendship. It does not require a radical student revolutionary to show that perhaps too frequently faculty treat students impersonally, that some students treat faculty disdainfully, and that faculty and students could improve their relationships with the clerical staff, professional staff, the administration, and other citizens of this community. Whether Calvin is better or worse than comparable academic institutions is not the point, nor is it profitable to determine what Calvin "really is." Calvin is many things to its various inhabitants; it is at once both hostile and friendly, caring and contemptuous. That the relationships among members of the Calvin community could be improved is evident to anyone. This brief essay is provided as a stimulus to discussions and written response about ways to improve relationships in our community. No attempt is made to provide a comprehensive, scholarly analysis of the situation. These thoughts are neither original nor profound. But perhaps their commonness and simplicity keep us from being aware of important facets of life at Calvin. Accordingly, this essay is intended to increase our awareness and to elicit further analysis, judgment, and proposals.

Clearly the Calvin community is not a utopia. It is unlikely that paradise will be developed in this sin-bound world. But the Word does provide intelligent, intelligible goals for human relationships—goals which members of the Calvin community must pursue. Those goals may be summarized as Christ did in one statement: we must love our neighbors as ourselves. We all readily affirm that goal. We comfortably assert that we are responsible for our brother, that we must show love and concern, that we must be involved. But our behavior often denies that goal as we give our own interests primary stress.

We have many understandable reasons for not attaining that goal. Showing love for one's neighbor creates many difficulties: the neighbor may not wish to be helped; it may be difficult to determine which neighbors need help; and helping one's neighbor entails risks for oneself and risks for one's neighbor. Genuine though these difficulties are, they are not acceptable as excuses for inaction as the subsequent paragraphs indicate.

One's neighbor may not wish to be helped. Many persons claim that their chief desire is to be independent, to be left alone. They strongly resist personal interaction with others. When this desire is genuine, it must be respected since each person has different needs for close relationships. But my experiences have revealed that the asserted independence is occasionally a facade which covers a fear of strongly desired close relationships. Clearly, when asserted independence is a cover for fear of close relationships, there is need for a compassionate neighbor. But to distinguish between the fact and the facade is difficult. Difficulty in fulfilling God's demand, however, is not an acceptable reason for ignoring the demand.

Many persons display an appearance of happiness and well-being, while having strong desire for increased manifestations of love and concern. Conversations with such persons often reveal that they have found their relationships superficial and insubstantial. They long for a deeper, fuller experience of Christian love and friendship. Again, distinguishing between appearance and reality is difficult, but the difficulty does not negate God's command.

Helping another entails risks for oneself and for the one being helped. To offer love to another is to accept the risk of being rejected. Moreover, some ways of giving love may injure the one receiving it. Providing crutches when vigorous exercise is needed is neither useful nor loving, no matter what the motive. Assisting another human being may make him dependent upon you rather than to help him live as a mature Christian. Helping another may make excessive demands on one's time; schedules can sometimes be disrupted by the need to respond to others. It is not easy to fit one's efforts in Christian brotherhood into a nine-to-five routine.

Our reasons for ignoring the goals which God established for us in his Word cannot stand. The mandate to accept the responsibilities of Christian brotherhood was given by Christ. No member of the Calvin community can escape the necessity of assuming that responsibility—within the limits of his opportunities and talents. The command to respond continued on p14
with love to one's neighbor was not given to a talented few; it is a moral demand on all who confess Christ.

The opportunities to exert Christian responsibility are extensive for members of this community. We share classrooms. Some of us share rooms and suites in the residence halls, or we share carpools. Most of us share an occasional cup of Saga coffee. Our talents for fulfilling our responsibility are diverse. We are not all capable of being "father-confessor" for others, but neither are we allowed to be the priest who walks by on the other side.

You may agree that there is a need for warmer, more obvious expression of Christian concern in this community, that some of our reasons for inaction are not air-tight, and that God has given each person opportunity and talent to fulfill his responsibility. Still you see no way to change your actions. What can be done? Perhaps we need to begin by acknowledging that the Calvin community does possess the resources in time, skill, and compassion which are needed to transform this college into a community that daily and consistently reflects Christian love. To deny this potential is to deny the presence and power of the Spirit of God at Calvin. To affirm it is to commit oneself to trust in the Spirit's presence and power—and thereby to commit oneself to further efforts.

More specifically we need to commit ourselves to a more judicious use of the time we have been given, to develop understanding and skills that will allow us to be more effective in our efforts, and to grow in Christian maturity. A more judicious use of time may be attained by first systematically examining our current time use. How much time do we devote primarily for self-service? Is there no more room for fulfilling our responsibility to the neighbors God has given us? When a lack of understanding of human nature increases our difficulties in determining who needs help and prohibits us from making a knowledgeable serving response, we need to increase our understanding and skill. Many courses and activities on this campus are designed to give fuller understanding and ability in the field of interpersonal relationships. A deficient Christian who neglects responsibility in a situation where he could have corrected his deficiencies is a disturbing sight. Growth in Christian maturity is less easily planned and executed. There are no succinctly identifiable steps to be taken. But we can begin by recognizing that we frequently are satisfied with noting our weaknesses and confessing them before God. Confession is needed, but it is not the last step. We must continually seek ways to grow as Christians.

The suggestions offered in the preceding paragraph may seem naive and overly general. They do not provide escapes from the dangers that may inhibit us now. But if we would deliberately commit ourselves to seeking better use of time, increased understanding and ability, and growth in Christian maturity, we might be able to express our often stated concern for others in more tangible, observable actions. These actions might reform Calvin's community, perhaps lessening the need for a more drastic revolution. Working diligently through Christ's Spirit within residence halls, classrooms, faculty offices, and wherever people congregate at Calvin would make this community a more effective witness to the effect of Christ's love on human lives. If we do not work more effectively and consistently to give tangible, observable expression to our commitments, we may continue to be faced with the irony of loneliness, bitterness, and individual and institutional coldness within a "Christian academic community." A revolution might then be needed.

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Biggy Wiggy or the Moustache SoupbowI

I am
I am an enormity
fire, issue from my throat
there, high beyond, across the lillied moat
she, cryer of the prowling armoured beast
he
sign Sun, will you set in the East?
sigh, for in the pond's eye the Sun sees golden fish
and sign,
for in my lover's eye shimmers Thine serpentine kris.
ha ha
oh fishke, oh fishke oh mama, what a shikse!
Me - noble hero
Me - Adolf
I am, I am.
I am an enormity.

Herbert Vander Zwaal
A J Muste: A Life of the "American Gandhi"
The second of two parts ; 1924-1967
by Steven Dieleman

This article continues the biography of Rev Muste which was begun in the October issue.

The Brookwood College was near the height of its existence as a training school for labor leaders when it faced a serious blow from the labor world. Brookwood sought to be an environment in which all political and economic theories and practices were subjected to discussion and analysis. Naturally, communist theories were explored and held by some students and staff, but were in no way the official position of the college. In fact, the school sponsored numerous workshops for the benefit of some unions with very limited goals. But the thinking which was stimulated at Brookwood seemed quite subversive to those in middle-class or higher income brackets in 1928 as those citizens "enjoyed" the boom of the Hoover administration's "new capitalism."

Much of the labor market also fell into this deceptive materialistic trap, as the American Federation of Labor began to talk of "class collaboration," and moved further toward its narrow interpretation of the role of labor. In the same year, the AFL urged its locals to withdraw financial support from the Brookwood College and to discontinue financing youth scholarships to the school. According to Muste...

...it appeared that the charges were that "doctrines antagonistic to the AFL were taught at Brookwood," also that "anti-religious doctrines" were being promulgated, and that "pro-Soviet demonstrations had occurred there" (Muste, p 127).

This action of the AFL typified a general sentiment prevalent in the nation toward radical political action by labor. This encouraged Muste to stay at Brookwood and become increasingly involved in the organization of workers in the mass production industries which were ignored by such bureaucratic groups as the AFL.

Since Brookwood could no longer function as the educational center for progressive laborites within the AFL, Muste was forced to build a more progressive organization for which the school could train leadership. In May, 1929, Muste participated in the Conference for Progressive Labor Action. Initially the group had five objectives: to form the American equivalent of the British Labor Party, to organize the mass production industries ignored by the bureaucratic unions, to end racial, political and economic discrimination which barred entrance into major unions, to legislate unemployment benefits and social insurance, and to bring about the recognition of the Soviet Union by the US, in order to achieve the abolition of an antagonistic attitude toward the problems which communism tried to solve and to make possible increased cultural cooperation (in contrast to the actual later recognition of the USSR which brought, according to Muste, cooperation with Stalinism, the nuclear arms race, and cold war).

In 1929 the CPLA proceeded to implement its ideals with the assistance of some of the Brookwood faculty, graduates, and students. One example of their efforts also merits mention as an illustration of the conditions faced by labor. The incident occurred in the lovely mountain tourist town of Marion, North Carolina, which, unfortunately, contained some not so lovely textile mills with nearby shacks for workers. In 1919 the workers became restless; the AFL local discouraged the idea of a strike, but the fervor created at the union meetings (which sounded more like religious revivals as union songs were sung to the tunes of Gospel hymns) was too great to be discouraged by the AFL officials. The CPLA and other organizations assisted with financial help for the strike fund and worked with a few CPLA millworkers on strike strategy.

After a few weeks an agreement was reached with the owners and it appeared that no union discrimination would occur in the rehiring process. But the workers soon discovered that not all would be rehired; thus, one evening, the night shift workers walked off their jobs. Early the next morning, the mill superintendent, backed by the sheriff and his deputies, called all "loyal" workers to return to the mill. Since none stepped forward, the lawmen sprayed tear gas to disperse the crowd and, without warning, the deputies fired into the crowd. Thirty-six workers were wounded and six died as a result of the deputies' gunfire; none of the deputies were injured.

Soon after the incident, the owner of the mill reportedly issued the following statement:

I think the officers are damn good marksmen. If I ever organize an army, they can have jobs with me. I read that the death of each soldier in the World War consumed five tons of lead. Here we have less than five pound and these casualties. A good average I call it (Muste, p 146).

Muste has reflected on the event, noting,

Those of us who have learned not to trust or condone violence as a means of resisting oppression and achieving social change must not fall into the trap of having our attention diverted from the violence, and the provocation to violence, which are perpetrated by those who oppress and seek to prevent such change which endangers vested interests (Muste, p 145).
The Marion incident demonstrated the cooperation between the CPLA and the people from Brookwood. This type of activism on the part of faculty and students would soon lead to a tremendous split in the school. The Brookwood controversy occurred during 1932-33, and marked the beginning of Muste's "detour" in his thinking and life.

On the one hand, Brookwood opposed the more moderate tendencies of the AFL; on the other hand, it wanted to remain independent of communist control. Therefore, Brookwood was forced to help build a bridge between those stances for a progressive labor movement. Throughout the previous four years the Brookwood community had tried to work closely with the CPLA; the Marion incident had demonstrated this cooperation, the school providing the educational emphasis of the movement and the CPLA concentrating on the area of organization. Muste, however, thought that both the educators and the students ought to be involved in the day-to-day struggles in the mining, textile, steel, and automobile industries. As a means of achieving this involvement in the face of depression-related financial problems, Muste proposed the sale of the Brookwood site and a reduction of the resident academic work as the school moved to more humble urban setting. Finally, as the CPLA and Brookwood each began to demand a greater share of Muste's energy, the issue regarding the commitments of the staff at Brookwood was forced to a crisis.

The result of the controversy was that A J left the college along with a number of other prominent faculty members and students. Muste remarked that even if the school had been able to compromise on the issue in 1933 he soon would have left the college, due to the direction of his political thought. The college never really survived the split and within a few years the experiment folded. Most of the faculty later found positions within Roosevelt's New Deal.

During the 1930's Muste viewed the economic scene as a potentially revolutionary situation; he saw unemployment, starvation wages, the nonrecognition of bargaining units, and the presence of hostility to labor, problems similar to those he had faced in 1916. Muste was again frustrated by the existing regime that offered no prospect except the continued betrayal of the worker. Searching for an answer in 1933, Muste considered, and rejected, American Protestantism because of its former persecution of pacifists and its staunch middle-class, status quo basis. In the misery of the depression, Muste sought out those who had a religious commitment and vision for the future, as well as a concern for the worker's problems and life in the present.

Muste's vision required a classless society and warless world. It was a vision rooted in the Judeo-Christian profession, for which Christian liberals could not discipline themselves, and which orthodox Christians thought possible only beyond this world. It was finally the communist movement, with its religious commitment to a better world and its concrete action in the labor movement, which appeared to be the only organization committed to Muste's goals.

By December of 1934, "Musteites" of the CPLA joined with the Trotskyites of the Communist League of America.

The Rose

a yellow rose bloomed one year in their backyard
his mother couldn't remember it ever blooming before
or if it was called Peace or Queen Elizabeth
it had grown there for years before
its delicate layered blossom burst forth
curling outward

like the rose bush the boy

grew up quietly, holding his peace
until one summer (surprising all)
singing down sidewalks he appeared smiling

but died in the fall
(the rose's green branches stiffen
thorns harden into brown nails-
the yellow flower crumples to ground)

petals caught by earth

wait for the gardener

Glen Fennema

The Musteites joined under the assumption that the CLA would not merge with the Socialist Party, a move which A J maintained would be detrimental to a revolutionary labor party. Muste later discovered that the leadership of the CLA had accepted Trotsky's advice and joined the Socialist Party. Union of the two was short-lived, as Trotskyites tried to take control of the Socialist Party and convince the more conservative socialists to accept the leadership of Trotsky. Muste considered this move poorly timed and mishandled, resulting in hours of intra-party struggle in which he would have no part. Muste doesn't regret the experience, however, as he writes that

. . . I have to experience ideas, rather than think them. I have to learn what they mean in practice, have to act them out. Also, as I have indicated before, life, or at least responsible living, means to me being involved in the struggle against injustice and tyranny. It means acting "politically," trying to help build a new world, or new social forms (Muste, p 136).

Muste saw the Trotskyite organization as one of the few truly revolutionary units at that time but soon learned that Trotsky controlled his followers just as Stalin did, but with slightly less crude disciplinary tools. Throughout his years as a Trotskyite, Muste no longer considered himself a pacifist and therefore no longer a Christian. Even though he was aware of the Trotskyite's permissive attitude toward violence, Muste could virtually ignore those attitudes at this time since they were not being employed.

Despite the turn which the organization made, Muste remained with the movement for a short time. In 1936 he made a trip to Europe as a delegate to an international meeting of Trotskyites and was invited to a short confer-
Taking Out the Garbage

I have been surrounded by garbage pails and by my text books.
And I have been surrounded by uncles who matter,
but what will you be?
I shall be a fireman, I say,
and shut up and eat the potatoes,
rest your souls and take a laxative.
But even into the night
eyes burning in the television’s white glow
they stop to insist. But what will you be?
I shall be a missionary or a preacher
or a Sunday School teacher
in Kingdom service to God Almighty,
I cry in anger but in truth.
And they are all happy and proud,
and I am sad that they are happy.
I wish they all would die,
life would be easier for us all.
Then I would empty the garbage pail
and turn it over to sit on it,
teaching and preaching, to be pulled by a sled
all the way to Jerusalem
or until the snow stopped falling.

Hubert Van Tol

ence with Leon Trotsky who was living in Norway. Muste records that ‘. . . Trotsky seemed anxious to have me stay within the party. ‘Perhaps,’ Trotsky said rather surprisingly at the end of our talk, ‘an American version of the “French turn” was not the right tactic, but it has been done, and you should not let it drive you out of the party. You have
within the party. ‘Perhaps,’ Trotsky said rather surprisingly
(Hentoff, p 95).

The European excursion was a depressing business for
A J as he saw military maneuvers, preparation for war, the
possible overflow of the Spanish Civil War, and a labor
movement which had suffered a great defeat as power
struggles and disagreement destroyed the idealism it once
offered. Feeling a sense of loneliness, Muste sought to
reestablish his severer relationship with the Christian
pacifists. His European experience made him realize that
there had been a relationship between his Marxist faith and
the Calvinism of his early years.

The noblest participants in the revolutionary movement,
it occurred to me, are inspired by the faith that historic
forces make the triumph of socialism inevitable. But the
force which makes for an invincible world of righteousness
to which the individual must surrender himself utterly was also a pretty fair definition of God, and of a
Calvinist God (Hentoff, p 98).

While still in Europe Muste became convinced that he
was a “Calvinist Socialist.” He now recognized that the
main problem in the world was war, and that neither
socialism or communism would offer an alternative to
prevent conflict. No system of socialism and pacifism could
hope to function without a basic change in the character of
mankind. Muste returned to America to spread the message
and activity of Christian nonviolent agitation to bring social
change. Once again Muste returned to active work as he
became the Industrial Secretary of the Fellowship of
Reconciliation.

At this position in FOR Muste and his assistants involved
themselves in numerous labor disputes in an attempt to
convince the workers to employ Gandhian techniques of
nonviolence. In 1937 Muste also assumed the position of
director of the Presbyterian Labor Temple in New York, an
ideal place for a man of Muste’s background. His work
consisted of a relatively light load of pastoral activities in
addition to lecturing and moderating forums and debates
on major labor theories and activities. In 1940 he left the
Presbyterian Temple and assumed the task of Executive
Secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He had the
immense task of chief policy writer for the American FOR
program; Muste was also given an opportunity to use his
full talents as a reconciler between diverse members of the
organization.

For those thirteen years, says another former FOR field
secretary,

Muste was the FOR. At the staff meetings, he seldom
said anything until the rest of us had finished. Then he
formulated his own position from what he considered
had been the most astute points we made (Hentoff, p
111).

Nat Hentoff observes that,

John Nevin Sayre . . . was and is more conservative than
Muste. Sayre usually led the opposition. He recalls that,
‘Not only would A J speak last in a meeting, but ninety
percent of the time, he’d swing everybody else his way
when he did speak’ (Hentoff, p 111).

One major project which Muste undertook during World
War II was the support and assistance he gave to the Civilian
Public Service Camps for Conscientious Objectors. Muste
writes that

The work was to have offered a special kind of pacifist
witness and was to have been creative social work
planned in large part by the religious groups adminis-
tering the camps. Soon it became evident that government
control of the camps was quite real, and that the creative
work was in line of raking leaves and carrying stones
from one place to another. Moreover, the original
concept was for the CO to work freely under no
discipline but that of religious organizations adminis-
tering the camps. We wound up, however, simply adminis-
tering conscription for the government (Hentoff, p
120).

Toward the end of the war Muste admitted that his
position had been wrong and he adopted the position of
non-cooperation and non-registration with the draft.

Dave Dellinger, a nonregistrant in the war, had served in
prison and had opposed the CPS from the start . . . “AJ
continued on p18
Muste wrote Dellinger and a group of hunger-striking prisoners in Lewisburg, but the nonregistrants refused to have anything to do with him. Dellinger wrote that Muste came to visit them even though they had rejected him. "It was the damnedest thing when he did arrive. We stood there and attacked him, and he kept smiling back at us. Our hostility didn't seem to reach him" (Hentoff, p 122).

This was the type of behavior representative of A J in verbal or physical attack; during direct action projects, this ability to refrain from bitterness was an essential attribute of his pacifism. Shortly after the war, Muste helped found the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, a group which today provides draft counseling offices with perhaps the most accurate legal advice available regarding Selective Service classifications and procedures.

Muste's advocacy of civil disobedience in relation to the draft system soon spread into a number of other areas. Muste writes that

I have refused to pay Federal Income taxes because I felt I had to find every possible means to divorce myself from any voluntary support of the crowning irrationality and atrocity of atomic and bacterial war (Hentoff, p 122).

After 1948 Muste refused to pay his taxes, for which he was finally brought to court in 1960. The tax court found him innocent of fraud for following his conscience; the tax was still due, but Muste refused to pay. Since Muste had no bank account or property, the IRS had no way to collect the money and apparently never prosecuted him again.

In 1949 Muste became involved in another organization which stemmed from the World Pacifist Meeting which he attended in Sevagram, India. He became an American member of the international committee to form units of people dedicated to the use of moral force in place of violent method; these units, called Satyagraha units, signify insistence and reliance on Truth or Soulforce. In 1950 Muste added to his agenda a series of speeches throughout the United States calling for unilateral disarmament.

He had been one of the first leading anti-communists to adopt that position. "Threatening to use nuclear weapons if we mean in some circumstances to use them," he has written, "is one form of preparation to commit an obscene atrocity. If, on the other hand, we really mean never to use them, then keeping up the threat is deceitful. It contributes to confusion and distrust in a tense and troubled world (Hentoff, p 135).

When asked what one could do in the event that a militarily powerful state attacked a disarmed nation, Muste replied that

A nation which had disarmed would not in that event abjectly surrender and let an invader overrun and enslave it, as is often alleged. On the contrary, it would open to it possibilities of nonviolent resistance that offer more prospects of a creative, genuinely victorious outcome than is the case with violent resistance under modern conditions (Hentoff, p 139).

The above examples of the work of Muste as the FOR general secretary are only a smattering of the projects which he undertook. In the late 1950's A J pursued his career as the nation's "number-one" pacifist in the role of the chairman of the Committee for Nonviolent Action. Most of the committee's work was in the area of direct action projects often involving civil disobedience at nuclear test sites. The most famous program involving this committee was the Omaha Action project at Mead, Nebraska, where A J led a group of fifteen fellow pacifists over the fences at the missile site. On this occasion, as always, Muste made it clear that his protest was a witness stemming from a religious motivation; quoting from Isaiah, he said:

For thus said the Lord Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved: in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. And ye would not; but ye said, No, for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee; and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue ye be swift (Hentoff, p 156).

Muste's desire for reconciliation between people was also extended to the communists in America as he was active throughout the 50's, trying to achieve the release of those imprisoned under the Smith Act until it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Always maintaining an attitude of love but non-cooperation with the communists during this period, Muste recognized that the way to deal with those of different persuasions was to allow them to discuss their ideas in a free atmosphere. Muste comments that he

... tried to keep communication open between radicals and nonradicals, between pacifists and nonpacifists. It goes back to something very fundamental in the nonviolent approach to life. You always assume there is some element of truth in the position of the other person, and you respect your opponent for hanging on to an idea as long as he believes it to be true. On the other hand, you must try hard to see that truth actually does exist in his idea, and seize on it to make him realize what you consider to be a larger truth (Hentoff, p 251).

Throughout the first half of the sixties Muste continued his actions in an effort to point out the immoral approach toward nuclear armament which the US and other nations were following. He was also an early, staunch opponent of the Vietnam War and sought to build a peace movement in the country in response to the situation; Muste was continually active until his death in 1967.

The enthusiasm which Muste had for the peace movement was never naive. After leaving the Trotskyite organization, Muste grew increasingly sceptical of patterns for a new society and no longer had any confidence in the theory of change through class struggle. He understood as well that most labor unions and socialist-oriented parties had become a part of the economic system rather than a revolutionary force against the scheme. Muste had now sensed that the root of economic and social repression is war and the way of life which produces that phenomenon; he accepted the idea that great alterations are necessary on the economic and social order, but maintained that essential to the transformation of society is an underlying commitment to peace. Thus, Muste looked for the peace movement to
begin to form new political forces and organization which neither labor or the socialists could provide. Muste insisted that these groups must break from the pattern of coercive politics and power. Muste observes,

We are not engaged in seeking power, in taking over the institution and the instruments of power, not even in order to use them for our own supposedly noble ends. We are truly committed to organize life on the basis of love and not power . . . It is a new kind of society, not a change of government that we seek (Hentoff, p 232).

Although Muste's career after he left the Reformed Church brought him into contact with few people from his own reformed background, his Calvinist upbringing and theological training exerted a powerful influence on his development as an activist and a theologian. This training provided the basis from which he initially developed his commitment to non-violence as an essential element of Christianity. And during the crisis of his disillusionment with the Trotskyites, it was the heritage of his reformed faith that led him back to a role in the church.

The faith-commitment and radical life-style of A J Muste undoubtedly seem strange to many of us who come from the same ethnic, geographic, and theological background as Muste. But it is perhaps we especially who must feel a special responsibility to face and respond to the witness of Rev Muste; if we fail to do this, we have not done justice to the rich heritage which produced "The American Ghandi."

The wind sang me a weed,
a soft brown air:
composed of death
but never-the-less
quite
stirring
as I brushed
the peace-full
lyric through my face.

Joan Malda
King David Comments on His Poetry

In this small room I sit weary, stiff with pain, fat with war. I am tarnished as an old sword, dull red with the slaughter of thick blooded heathen, the vengeance of a merciful God I do not understand.

At first, it seemed a birth correct. I grew green toward the sun, properly erect, fresh on the edges of this iron, stupid giants at my feet. Returning now, feet in the sand and helpless, to water, to the memory of Uriah. Did he die ignorant of his King’s treachery? Was his death slow as his wit? Struck down by a pagan’s vicious courage, ambushed in an alien land, blood escaping on the dust, ransom for a ruler’s lust.

Bathsheba enters, her body shaped as a poem. She eats lightly off her spoon, turns, and slowly leaves the room.

My child, spawn of purple murder, his ripe eyes blind to the sin of a father. I held his innocence in arms once thick as a horse’s legs. They were useless against his dying, he whimpered, then vomited his bowels on the marble, the bloody debt paid. So many deaths.

Bathsheba again. She feels the pull of dreams in her womb a second time, her pain masked behind her royalty. A strong queen trapped between a lost son and a shuddering husband.

What then? I was able but to lift a pen. Wasted with repentance, staring at the outrageous monotony of loneliness, fuel for vacant eyes straining to see beyond the ragged grip of depression, past a martyred child, the empty wine glasses, the dull ashes of faith.

Now, a dry king in a desert kingdom, beginning finally to move beyond the mere recognition of death to its understanding. That was the beauty, the seed to thankfulness. I began to note with care the frail movement of forest deer, the eyes of God, the stature of light, leaving the stuffed face of death behind for psalms dancing off the Galilean night to interline this torn garment of authority with poetry, the only freedom from blood.

David DenBoer
Correspondence

Dear Sirs:

Since the publication of your last issue I have been saddened by the number of people who have claimed that Herbert VanderZwaal, author of the perceptive poem on page 11 of the October 8 issue, is an entirely fictitious character. To these benighted ones, all I can say is “My Herbert VanderZwaal is alive, sorry about yours!”

In the truth that binds us

Mrs Jennie VanderZwaal

Dear Sirs:

This is a little story about a country not so far away, and about a time not so long ago, and — oh, yes — about you and me, let’s not forget ourselves.

Once upon a time there lived a people called the Fat Feather Merchant People. They were fat, which is why they were called “fat,” and they were merchants, which is why they were called “merchants.” They were called “feather people” because they were about, oh, thus fat with hearts and stomachs and all the other peoply ingredients; and they were about oh so fat with feathers, which they customarily stuffed inside their shirts.

Now, surely such a burdensome and self-vitiating custom wants of an explanation, so here one is:

It seems that at the outset, in a time that, even in the days of Fat Feather Merchant Land, was all ready long, long, long out of mind, the people were not merchants and did not stuff their shirts with feathers. And if, incidentally, they were fat, that, then as now, was certainly due to an excess of hearts and other peoply ingredients, but especially of hearts. The people soon discovered that this, the uncomplicated life, involves complications. Suppose, for instance, that one of the people was a breeder of armadilloes and that he always exchanged his armadilloes to a farmer (who fancied them greatly) for beans. Now suppose that one day our breeder lost his taste for beans and acquired a taste for corn. But suppose he could not find a grower of corn who fancied armadilloes greatly. Well, the breeder needed was a medium of exchange: an easily transportable material of limited quantity which is universally recognized as being of a certain value. The breeder, and others like him, decided to adopt feathers as their medium of exchange. Once he had done so, the breeder found that he could exchange his armadilloes for feathers, and that his feathers, in turn, would buy him anything: beans and corn, which he needed; but also things like art works and books, even though such knew nothing of them and was related to them in no way but through feathers. Well, this was fine and everyone in the land became merchants to one extent or another and all grew fat with feathers. In fact, the people grew so fat with feathers that at last, their faces and stomachs and other peoply ingredients could hardly be seen anymore.

Then, a prophet came to Fat Feather Merchant Land. I think he came from God. He stood up in the town square and said, “Fat Feather Merchant People, you have emptied yourselves of peoply ingredients and you have stuffed yourselves with feathers and grown full of that which is immaterial. Yes, you are very full of it.

“In the first place, you acquire things with feathers, you are accustomed to this and take it for granted. But actually, this is a most peculiar way of acquiring things. Feathers represent labor and effort in an abstract form; not necessarily my labor and my effort, since I can have acquired them by inheritance, by fraud, by luck, or any number of ways. But even if I have acquired them by my effort, I have acquired them in a specific way, by a specific kind of effort, corresponding to my skills, while, in spending, the feathers are transformed into an abstract form of labor and can be exchanged against anything else. Provided I am in the possession of feathers, no effort or interest of mine is necessary to acquire something. If I have the feathers, I can acquire an exquisite painting, even though I have no appreciation for art; I can buy the best phonograph, even though I have no musical taste; I can buy a library, although I use it only for the purpose of ostentation. I can even destroy the painting or the books, and aside from a loss of feathers, I suffer no damage. Feathers can transform loyalty into vice, vice into virtue, the slave into the master, ignorance into reason; and reason into ignorance. He who can buy valour is valiant although he be cowardly.

“Now,” said the prophet, “I propose that we return to the long forgotten human method of acquiring. The human way of acquiring would be to make an effort qualitatively commensurate with what I acquire. The acquisition of bread and clothing would depend on no other premise than that of being alive; the acquisition of books and paintings, on my effort to understand them and my ability to use them. Assume man as man, and his relation to the world as a human one, and you can exchange love only for love, confidence for confidence, etc. Every one of your relationships to man and to things must be a definite
expression of your real, individual life corresponding to the object of your will.”

The people grew angry as the prophet spoke, and before he had finished, he was seized. He was tarred and run out of town on a rail. ( Needless to say, he was not feathered.) The prophet was forgotten, completely, and quickly. An indication of how completely and quickly he had been forgotten came a few days after his departure, in an editorial that appeared in a Fat Feather Merchant Land College newspaper. The editorial concerned an overture from members of the college’s constituency to the college administration to “reverse its permissive policy with respect to campus programs and entertainments and student publications which leaves what is to be presented on campus or printed in the school paper to student control.”

One of the grounds given as justifying such a suggestion was that “The church owns . . . the school.” The editorialist apparently agreed with the overture on this point because he wrote, “It is properly admitted that the church owns the college and thus has a valid interest in what transpires on campus.”

In other words, though the church members did not, when they walked, walk on college ground as the students did; and though they did not, when they spoke of general affairs, speak of the affairs of the college, as the students did; and though they did not, when they breathed, breathe the air of the college, as the students there did; yet, because the church members were related to the college, by feathers, therefore, it was their delegates and not the students who might rightfully determine matters of campus importance.

Most of the people in Fat Feather Merchant Land did not even think to reconsider the overture’s words. But the odd part, the disturbing part, oh, I mean the ripper, was that those who did reconsider the overture’s words felt only a ripple of distress in the lower feathery tract, saw only a flashbulb vision of the prophet, before sighing a long deep sigh, smiling a long deep smile and thinking, reassuringly, “Ah . . . feathers.”

Well, that’s the end of the story, and it’s also the end of the letter. So, thank you for listening to my story about the people of Fat Feather Merchant Land and about the prophet and, oh yes, about you and me—let’s not forget ourselves.

Sincerely,
C. Fred Exoo

Wyoming Pines

twisted by
winters’ torques.
veterans hunched
by the wind’s constant
harassment.
impatient with
timid spring
they wait
this march
for a gentle summer’s comfort.
winter battle weary
they stand
knee deep
in sage.

being nineteen
is much like
march.
answers are
as elusive as
spring.
i must be up
to my knees
in wisdom.

John Bakker

Dear Sirs:

Someday I’ll poem
Write I think.
It make not sense,
Whole, incomplete.
It very free,
It never terse;
I not bounded,
Use free verse.
I follow not
Or rules I should
O, that O.K.
It must be good.

Daniel Hoebeke
"—one glance will give you the whole message.
This is real art and a challenge to the type..."

The Banner, January 2, 1970