

PROFESSOR'S CORNER

The truth of the few

by Steve Smith

Who's got the truth? I mean, from whom will one obtain the knowledge most worth having? A long and widely held view would have it that wisdom is the exclusive possession of a few highly intelligent and disciplined men and women who are often hated, sometimes revered, but never fully trusted by the ignorant mob. Let us call this the Socratic view. It is immortalized in Plato's parable of the cave, which tells how one wise man, Socrates, slips free of the chains of common prejudice, which holds all others captive in a firelit cave. All they see in the cave is shadows of things on the cave wall. But Socrates climbs out of the cave, up to the sunlight, where real things may be seen. If you would learn the truth, then, seek out the philosopher, the illuminatus, and let him patiently conduct you towards the light.

Other people have reacted against the Socratic view. They tend to regard philosophies as eccentric or deluded and the common folk as already loaded with wisdom. Even in their prejudices the masses are wise, for those ingrained opinions of theirs have been filtered through the test of long folk-experience. One of the notable recent champions of the anti-Socratic view was Leo Tolstoy, whose novel *War and Peace* contains a wonderfully profound peasant named Platon Karataev. This Platon, who is really an anti-Plato, speaks almost exclusively in proverbs and "old sayings," but he knows a million of them and applies them to life with great facility and tact. He is a fountain of folk wisdom. Writers like Tolstoy lose no opportunity to show the common man to his best advantage, and to make fun of the intelligentsia, i.e. the self-styled philosophical elite.

The opposition between the Socratic and anti-Socratic views of truth, when applied to problems of political order, produces the debate between democrats and aristocrats. Will we be in better shape (or in the least trouble) if we are in the sway of the masses or if we are ruled by the elite? When applied to the life of the

mind, however, the face-off is between so-called common sense and the knowledge of the learned intellectuals. And that, I hope you will notice, has some bearing on a college's reason for being. Colleges and universities are the places where a number of this society's most highly educated members, its "intellectuals," are rounded up so that high school graduates can be exposed to them. We do this, I trust, in the expectation that knowledge worth having will thereby be effectively transmitted. Evidently, then, we have adopted the Socratic view of truth; otherwise we would send our truth-seekers out into the pastures and shops and factories of America, to get an education in the "university of experience."

Well, there is much sentiment in favor of this, after all--and much distrust of the value of what is taught in colleges. But the trouble is that if you stay away from college and go looking for Platon Karataev, you will be very lucky to find even one person who resembles him. Platon is a fraud. He is not an ordinary man at all, but a freakish concentration of all the wisdom that would be found if you thoroughly canvassed an entire society. And the sort of wisdom he purveys has its limits.

But the intellectuals, among whom we include our learned professors, are also frauds. They are not, as a class, massively wise, if the sign of wisdom is living happily; they may, actually, have a greater-than-average tendency to be out of touch with certain of life's practical realities, since they spend an unnatural amount of time reading books; they are certainly more prone to holding odd opinions. The average member of this class (say myself) resembles Socrates about as little as the average farmer resembles Tolstoy's Platon. So the student who seeks a professional guru in college may well be let down.

Still, there is a sense in which we professors are all at least trying to be like Socrates. Society has instructed us to get hold of the truths that require specialized

research and then disseminate them.

Presuming to be a spokesman for the truth of the few, and having admitted that there is another truth, no inferior, of the many, it behooves me to say a few words in praise of "our" sort of truth, the truth that is taught in college. First of all, it is a little out of the way, not an obvious part of ordinary experience (else it would be the truth of the many), but has desirable properties on that account: it has the appeal of the exotic, and it is meat and drink for curiosity when curiosity is really hungry and thirsty. The truth of the many, on the other hand, excels in stating and reminding us of the familiar and obvious. The truth of the few is very rich and full of novelties, having the general tendency to advance and explore, and this distinguishes it from the truth of the many which tends always to be the same. (The truth of the few may be more prone to fads for this reason.) It is found, offered, and received according to rational methods, which is to say that it is civil, specially excellent at what should be a feature of all thinking and talking done by human beings. It is thus tolerant and diplomatic, whereas the truth of the many, less flexible, does not open itself to criticism or give-and-take. When opposed prejudices collide, two variants of "common sense," look out. The truths of the few can be changed and even abandoned at a moment's notice, if better truths appear. They are fragile. This prevents the gatherers of these truths from becoming unreasonably attached to them, and from having an unreasonable dislike of being found out in a mistake. The "illuminati" rejoice in being fallible. It means they still have something to learn--and learning is what they like to do.

May quality go on and on

by Tony Pierce

Around this time last year I wrote an article for *The Decree* voicing my opinion against trashy "Blood and Gore" movies. Since that time, I have cheerfully noticed that not only have movie industries been turning out better movies, but that the majority of them have been reaching the Rocky Mount movie theatres.

Movies like "The French Lieutenants Women" and "Rich and Famous" offer us much more to look at than some half-nude girl's blood gushing from her open throat. If you wanted to laugh and have a good time, movies like "Arthur" did more than its part in assisting you. And movies like "Tribute" brought tears to your eyes, but wasn't the plot and acting better than in the average horror film.

Now don't get me wrong, I love horror movies.

One of my favorite movies of last year was the horror movie "American Werewolf In London". This movie gave you music to listen to, made you laugh, and it scared the pants off you. This is just one example of a quality horror film.

OPINION

Christmas already?

by Chris Bragg
Decree Staff

"Ho, Ho, Ho Merry Christmas," yes it is that time again. Christmas is that annual event loved by children and dreaded by parents.

The perversion of Christmas by big business is not what I am concerned about in this editorial. Attending a Methodist affiliated college, I feel it is my right, almost my duty, to use *The Decree* to bring forth the Christmas message.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you all: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men." Luke 2: 10-14.

"Glory to God," "Peace, good will toward men," this is the Christmas message. I know it is 1981 and it might be a bit too much to ask, but on Christmas day close your eyes and thank God for the most beautiful, precious gift of all--Jesus Christ.

This message may seem familiar to those of you who read the last issue of *The Decree*. I am not trying to shirk my duty by reprinting a previous editorial but I would

like to make an important point. Christmas is over until next year. All the lights, trimmings, and trees are taken down and put away. Our new gifts that sparkled under the tree on Christmas morning are now broken-in and somewhat used. But what about the Christmas spirit? Did we also put our peace and good will in the closet to be taken out again next Christmas?

Each year around Christmas numerous good will stories break into the news. This year was no exception to the rule. There is so much good will and charity around Christmas but where does it go on December 26? Some countries at war even declare a "peace" and stop fighting on Christmas. It seems that the average man only shows concern for his fellow man a week or two before Christmas. If warring nations can put down their weapons for Christmas why can't they do the same every day?

When the multitude declared "Glory to the God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men," I do not think they only had December 25th in mind. Luke 2 verse 14 is a verse for all seasons not just Christmas. Let each and every one of us take the initiative and bring out in every day the true meaning of Christmas: "Peace, good will toward men."

Interfaith News

by Rusty Styron

Welcome back to another semester here at NCWC, we in Inter-faith Commission hope that each of you had a much needed and restful vacation. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Inter-faith we would like to explain our various activities on campus.

First of all we have Wesleyan Christian Fellowship, or WCF, which meets Wednesdays at 5:30 in the cafeteria private dining room. WCF is a non-denominational group of extremely enthusiastic students who get together once a week for an open Bible study. Many topics are discussed and new faces and ideas are always welcome. Tuesdays at noon, also in the cafeteria, the Baptist Student Union, or BSU, meets to discuss ways of overcoming problems which not only Baptists but other students as well are faced with.

Another major part of Inter-faith is our highly active chapter of Fellowship of

Christian Athletes, which meets Wednesdays at 6:30 in the T.V. room of the Student Union. Of course a person does not have to be an athlete to be a member of FCA. FCA is currently working on their annual "Dogpatch Olympics" where local high schools compete against college students in a day of field activities.

Also, Dr. Ken Finney holds daily devotionals on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 12:30 until 12:55 in the Inter-faith Lounge. This semester Dr. Finney will be discussing various Christian issues.

The FCA and WCF are currently working on "The Up and Down Party and Dance" to be held Friday, February 12 from 9 until 1 in the cafeteria. The purpose of the dance is to raise money to benefit these campus organizations. Admission is \$1 and refreshments will be served, also there will be dancing with a live D.J.

THEATRE NEWS

by Virginia Evans
Decree Staff

The Theatre Department is already hard at work on two shows for this semester: "Kennedy's Children" and "Godspell."

"Kennedy's Children" is a two-act play about five people who relate how the sixties affected them. This is a special show for the department, because it is the senior project. The five graduating theatre majors all have important tasks to perform with show.

Jane Marshall is the director. Anthony Pierce has a leading acting role. Evelyn Ford is doubling as technical director and set designer. Cathy Ballou is the stage manager. And Becky Marshall is the lighting designer and property mistress.

The cast for "Kennedy's Children" is as follows:

Anthony Pierce as Mark, Jeff Hartzog as Sparger, Nancy Johnson as Wanda, Christie Oglesby as Rona, and Earl Roberson as the Bartender.

"Kennedy's Children" will be performed February 16-20. Please make reservations in advance to be assured a seat.

"Godspell" is the second show of the spring semester. It is being directed by Susan Marrash Minnerly. Steve Wilson is the musical director, and Judy Rawls is the choreographer. "Godspell" is a two act musical based on the gospel of Matthew.

The cast is: Rusty Styron as Jesus, Anthony Pierce as Judas, and Bruce Springle as John the Baptist. The disciples are Hank Hardy, Cathy Ballou, Isaac Hodge, Lisa Humerickhouse, Christie Oglesby, Amy West, and Virginia Evans.

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