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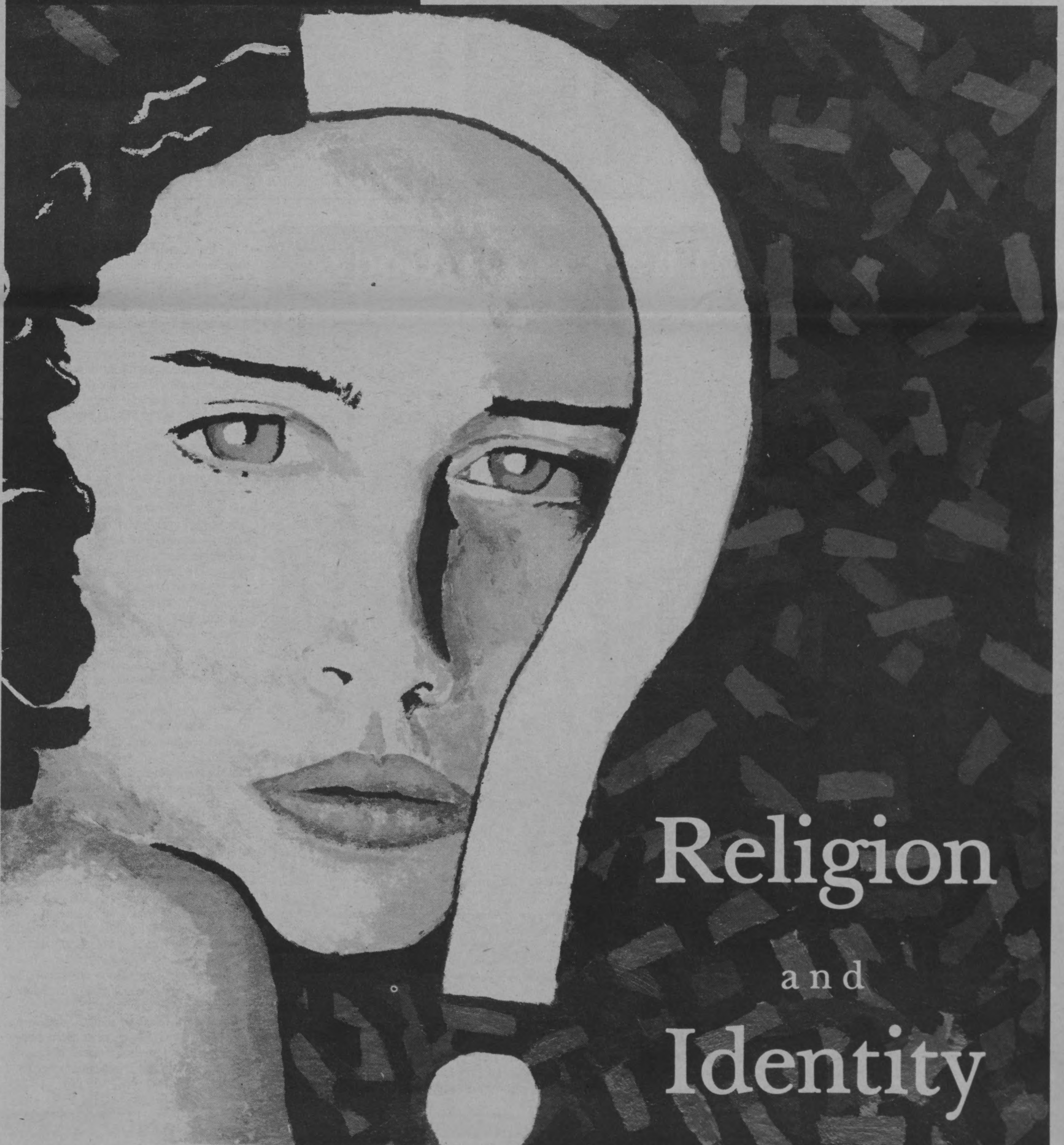
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Religion
and
Identity



Friday Magazine

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By Laurie McCullough

Standing on a Del Playa staircase, watching the high tide rushing over the third step, I am convinced that my understanding of the divine is unretrievably linked with the ineffable beauty of the natural world. Each break at the shore rolls over the back-rushing tide and I am convinced of the ordered futility of its movement.

This is God to me.

This ceaseless picture of white foaming lace; the wave's set of an engineer's explained logic. And power; an order persuasive beyond the twelfth step where I stand. Its universality threatens my inspiration; its profundity is so close to my own soul.

I am looking to the east at this pushing and pulling when I am hit by a huge ferociously invisible wave. From an unknown direction I am drenched in salt water and sand. God is playing with me again. I can't stand it. The chaotic symbolism is too perfect for even my own definitive seeking mind. You aren't order. You are everything I cannot explain.

I balk at my confusion about God. Somehow questioning gets equated with truth and my academic mind has a fundamental problem with proof. I met a man who said his name was Billy late one night at a Del Playa party. He told me of his opening Sociology 1 lecture:

"There is no God. God is man's attempt to define what he cannot explain." The possibility of the complexities of the human psychology petrifies me. Is the need to attach a greater meaning to this life so critical that our emotional mind could create such an answer?

But the attempt, however futile, to possess an explanation of what I experience as spiritual validates the very presence of some sort of divinity in this life. The existence of something other than the physical is not the problem. I feel God in a blade of grass.

It is profound to me. The pure beauty of the natural, untouched world is immeasurably profound. And we walk through that profundity every day. But what do you do with this acknowledgement in your own actions, when ultimately there is proof of nothing but your own experience?

Growing up in a Western society, I attach spiritual life to a Christian God. It is necessary for me to acknowledge my environment with my understanding of religion, though it makes me frighteningly uneasy to consider my spiritual truth to be perhaps linked with part of a created

Where Is My God?



psychology.

Had I been living in Iran when I was seventeen, the year of my so-called Christian re-birth, I might have attached the definition of Mohammed to this new existence. It wasn't that one day I had a range of new emotions that I could define as

religion.

It was that now these emotions had definition and purpose, for in a physical way Jesus Christ is a humanly tangible God. And the Christian bible professes some easily tangible answers about this life. Answers unproven by an academic life.

But the point is not that I might have found some similar truth sitting at another altar; the idea is desecrating to me now for the experiences that I have had. My sense of this profound love is my everything. I am nothing without it, for now my perception of value, of existence is defined by this God. To talk about it seems close to unholy; to be confused about it is nearly paralyzing.

The problem is that my life does not live up to my understanding of the divine. So much of this is linked with the desire for purity. How simple to treat even just the physical as divine, and yet, I am so pagan.

Beer, sex, cigarettes, joints and chocolate — I have no reverence for this temple. And it is my understanding that these things keep me not only tied to the physicalities of this world, but are like a haze my spirit cannot see through, that makes their presence in my life less than pure.

But the knowledge of what gets in the way of being closer to my self doesn't seem to make a difference and rationale is rarely considered. How can you use the faculty of judgement when choice is not thought, merely action?

Is this what evil really amounts to? The negation of your own definition of what is good, true or divine? Christianity functions on the conception that mankind is irretrievably evil.

Defective, like some Gary Larson cartoon. We certainly have a unique methodical ability to screw things up. How does such a self-destructive species exist? Perhaps little of our possible spiritual identity does. But the possibility of something better is a fundamental fuel for continued existence in this life. And the possibility of being spiritually closer to what is pure in my self, is the possibility of wholly experiencing God and perhaps, the reasoning for this life.

The only problem is that experience isn't available through AT×T. Walking on the beach earlier, searching for understanding behind these words, I found nothing. No great wash of assured sentiment, just the empty dull thud of academic questions echoing the pound of the surf. What about Darwin? What about the proven far reaches of this universe? Emptiness and insignificance feed off of my questions.

Life is messier than religion can handle. It is imperfect. And the possibility of utter futility is unbearable.

Ultimately the truth of spiritual experience is left to the epiphany. To moments uncalled upon, to those infinitely precious moments of knowing. That I can't search for it is the true expression of its holy worth.

FM Interview: Walter Capps

On The Disintegrating Right

By Doug Arellanes
Editor, Friday Magazine

Sometimes when Walter Capps talks in his kind, deep voice, his brow furrows in comfortable, well-defined lines earned through years of pondering life's biggest questions.

"What do you think?" he asks frequently enough to make you believe he genuinely cares.

It's certainly not what one would expect from the professor of the most popular course in the University of California, "Religion and the Impact of the Vietnam War," or what most students know as "Vietnam."

Capps has studied Vietnam and its results for almost eight years now, and one of his main conclusions is that Ronald Reagan's success, as well as that of the New Religious Right, is directly linked to a national desire to put that conflict behind, to "make America great again."

The rise and subsequent fall of the televangelists is a topic of great interest to Capps, who has taught a course on religion and politics here in the past. His book on the topic, has had to endure rewrites and updates; the first came after the PTL scandals, the second after Pat Robertson entered the race for the presidency, and the third after Jimmy Swaggart's confession of sin.

Every time he gets the book done, Capps confesses, another scandal comes along and he has to revise it. It's Capps' opinion, however, that we have seen the disintegration of the Religious Right, or at least this incarnation of the movement.

Capps just returned from Emory University, in Atlanta, GA, as a guest of former president Jimmy Carter. Carter asked Capps to join a number of national intellectual luminaries, including Coretta Scott King, to take part in a discussion of the links between religion and violence.

We talked for more than two hours Saturday afternoon about the New Religious Right, and about larger questions of religion and identity. It was the kind of discussion that gives one a furrowed brow.

FM: Much has happened to the Religious Right as of late, with the demise of Swaggart, the disintegration of the Robertson candidacy. Is the Religious Right at an end?

Capps: No.

FM: You don't think so?

Capps: I don't think so. I don't think it has much power any longer to decide the outcome of presidential politics. I don't think it has a viable candidate. What has happened is very disappointing to its leadership. Swaggart never had much political force anyway, nor did the Bakkers. But the key to the political success of the New Right, I think, has been the person of Ronald Reagan, and Ronald Reagan won't be around much longer. And there's really nobody coming in. There's nobody to take his place, to provide the same services to the movement called the New Right that he's been providing all these years. Even George Bush can't be very effective in that connection. He's not altogether accepted by the New Right.

What has happened to the televangelists has brought discredit to the entire movement, particularly to Pat Robertson, because Pat Robertson, after all, is a television evangelist. I think the fact that the demise of the New Right makes headlines shows how much a part of American life that movement has become over the past seven years. I don't think movements disappear very quickly. I think it's been driven into the grass roots. It won't enjoy significant political successes in the future. But I think when you go to small churches in the communities, and pastors who didn't talk this way before, describe the evils of secular humanism, you know that something has happened in this country. To that extent, I think the New Right movement has been successful in preaching its message.

FM: In the past, you've likened the New Right to other counterculture movements. How much of the New Right is a counterculture?

Capps: I really do think it's an American counterculture. If you want to describe it in specific terms, it's a form of American civil religion, but a conservative version.

FM: What do you mean by 'civil religion'?

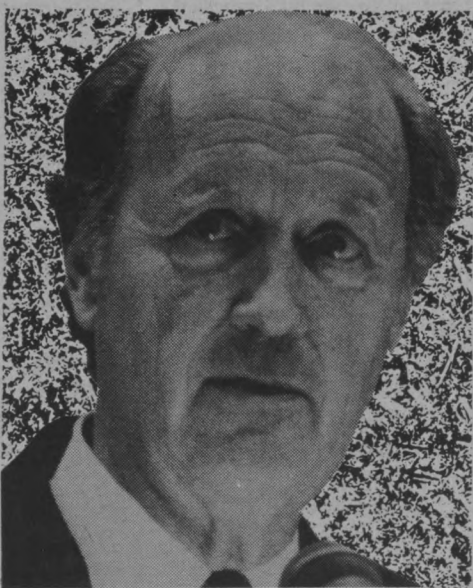
Capps: By civil religion, I mean a religion of the people. We're talking about an American religion which is based on a consensus of American beliefs and attitudes which gets celebrated on occasions



of patriotic commemorations, on holidays.

I think we can call it a counterculture because it is an alternative to the dominant American way of life. I remember the phrase I picked up when I visited Pat Robertson's headquarters in Virginia Beach. I asked some of his co-workers how they would describe their intentions, and they told me they wanted very much to 'take back the land.' When I asked them what that meant, they said they don't feel at home in this country anymore, because their highest ideals aren't reflected in the values being taught in public schools. They're not very happy with the government and the direction of the country. They're worried about immorality and the breakdown of the family, things of that kind. So they're trying to cultivate an alternative way of being human, an alternative way of being American, over and against whatever point of view they regard as being primary in our land. I guess they have been somewhat successful in that, because more often than not they have established the terms of the debate on moral values. I think these are important issues to be raised. It's very difficult to say this is one country indivisible, it's like two countries, it's really split. It's fractured into two Americas.

FM: The America of the secular humanists and



the America of Christians?

Capps: I don't want to call it secular humanism.

FM: When you say that they are successful do you mean that there are good aspects to the right? For a lot of college students, they see Bakker and think he was a hypocrite all along. They see Robertson the same way. What was good about the "new right?"

Capps: Not only in terms of accomplishments, but also in raising moral questions. I think a good way of describing that one of their main achievements is in putting the debate forward. They haven't been able to win a lot of it.

For quite a while they were able to win. During the first term of the Reagan presidency they had a number of successes. In the courts and in the Congress having to do with teaching moral values in school, there was a lot of New Right interest in voluntary school prayer, things of that kind. They

ON TELEVANGELISTS

Students ten years ago wouldn't have taken a movement like this very seriously. I don't think they'd be talking about it. I don't think a Jim and Tammy story would have gotten much attention, even a decade ago. And now it does. I have an 85-year-old father who wouldn't have very much interest in this who keeps track of all of it. He can tell me all about Robertson and Bakker and all these. It has become an interesting news story for him.

made it a little easier for people to talk about religious issues kind of openly.

I'd like to talk about success in two terms. I have to talk about their successes in terms of how they would see their accomplishments and later, secondly, whether that really contributes anything very positive or constructive to our national life. I think in the first case, they have been successful because they have gotten a hearing. Students ten years ago wouldn't have taken a movement like this very seriously. I don't think they'd be talking about it. I don't think a Jim and Tammy story would have gotten much attention, even a decade ago. And now it does. I have an 85-year-old father who wouldn't have very much interest in this who keeps track of all of it. He can tell me all about Robertson and Bakker and all these. It has become an interesting news story for him.

Whether it has actually contributed anything to the vitality of our life, I don't know. I like to work with the formula that the conservative position might be useful for diagnostic purposes but not very useful for prescriptive purposes. And I think it can show us our failings as a people, but the remedies the New Right would prescribe I don't think are very effective. I think it often happens, if you take the country's swing as an

"I remember the phrase I picked up when I visited Pat Robertson's headquarters in Virginia Beach. I asked some of his co-workers how they would describe their intentions, and they told me they wanted very much to 'take back the land.'"

WALTER CAPPS

example. Somehow a welfare society has to have something additional to believe in because it can become a little bit sterile. There have to be symbols, something that people can love. I tend to see Ronald Reagan that way primarily. It doesn't really matter how successful he is, it's more that people need someone like him, an Uncle Sam figure in order for the country to have the sort of emotional complexion it desires.

The new right has gotten in on that interest, has capitalized on it. And in the process has so thoroughly Americanized Christianity that it is hardly recognizable. Under New Right auspices the Bible applies first of all to the American experience. You can read the Bible as what is supposed to be happening to America — it isn't even the United States anymore, it's America — in its relationship to Russia and other countries. So Christianity has become Americanized and

America had become Christianized, and they have been successful in that regard. People are willing to think in those terms. And that's unusual. That's an unusual accomplishment people would not have predicted a decade ago.

FM: When is your book coming out?

Capps: I'm still working on the book because it still isn't quite over yet. I've been chronicling this from the very beginning. It started in 1979 when I read a very brief news account about the Moral Majority starting in Lynchburg, Virginia, Jerry Falwell's office, and I've sort of tracked it all this time. I've gone to the meetings of the new right and I've visited the PTL in Virginia Beach, been several times to Lynchburg and I've kept in touch with the writings on the subject.

I keep thinking that the story is about over and I can finish the book and conclude, but it wasn't over in October of 1986 when I was about finished, and I was nearly through this time last year. Then we had the whole Jim and Tammy Bakker scandal and the Iran-Contra hearings. And then Robertson runs for President. I think I'm about finished with the book now if we can keep the movement quiet for a while.

FM: In describing the different aspects of the religious right there are a lot of things I am very unfamiliar with. I'm fuzzy about Pentecostals and things like that. What is it like for an individual to be involved in one of these Pentecostal Charismatic churches?

Capps: I've never had any experience myself, but the way it's described is that one finds oneself under the spirit and it's the power and the presence of the spirit which sort of empowers or energizes the person, so you're not simply acting out of your own resources but it's the spirit of God which is dictating and compelling you to do what you do. And you have the awareness that this is how it is.

Robertson will frequently say mainly, not literally, that God told him to do this, to run for the Presidency. But he knew with full confidence that this is the will of the Lord. I don't think Robertson was ever convinced he would win, but I think he will run again in 1992. I think he will continue to run, because he now knows that he can't start that late and be very effective. He has to start earlier. Reagan tried it and was disappointed in 1976.

FM: A lot of attention has been placed on the leaders of these movements and it would seem that there have to be some compelling reasons for one to join in the first place. What are the most compelling things about New Right religion?

Capps: First of all, they know how to use television. That's no small thing, for religion to learn how to use television. They were the first ones to master that, if that's the right word. And they provide interesting programs for people to watch. They've done that. I have a hard time answering a question like that because I don't find them very compelling myself. I haven't been taken in by anybody. I find Ronald Reagan somewhat compelling, but I don't find Robertson or Swaggart compelling. I watch them because I have to study it, but I'm not attracted to it.

FM: But there are people who are attracted. Thousands of people.

Capps: Maybe it's too easy to say this on a university campus, or maybe we say it so often we don't realize how powerful it is, but they do provide rather easy answers. They reduce a lot of complexity to simplicity. And they do it all with real authority. Studies have been done about the impact of the authority of the medium itself. You tend to believe things when Dan Rather tells you something or Walter Cronkite or Peter Jennings or whoever your favorite is. If you are getting it on TV it's like reading it in a paper; it must be true. It's not an opinion. You are getting the 'truth.'

I think it is very difficult to live in this world. I think it is a complex world. Fundamentalism is an attempt to handle a whole range of problems with one solution, one answer to whatever the problem is. And that can be comforting. In a society that has become as complex as ours, clearly this is an attempt to reduce complexity, to sort of roll back the time to a period when life wasn't this difficult. And I think the reaction against a multi-cultural society is part of it. It's a real challenge to live with people who are not like you. People throughout the world are faced with the necessity of that, and fundamentalism is not very open to complexity to the international relations diversification culture.

JEWISH

But Not

JEWISH

By Christopher Scheer

I am a mongrel, the product of two ancient and competing cultures.

Which is simply a grandiose way of saying that I have both crawled around on my knees looking for painted eggs and eaten stuffed cabbage in an overheated tenement in the Bronx.

My mother is from an atheist-protestant family and my father from an anti-religious Jewish family. As you can guess, neither church nor synagogue was my big hangout. I pretty much absorbed WASPishness. It's the dominant culture in America and fairly inescapable.

(Ever noticed how many Jewish families have "Channakuh bushes"? It's essentially a concession to the massive Christmas brainwashing their kids undergo. A parent cannot deny a child who has just watched 12 hours of Christmas specials the right to his/her own bit of forest to decorate in tinsel).

But I had to approach the idea of being Jewish tentatively, like my cat approaches her water. When I was a child all I knew about Judaism was that my grandmother had a New York Jewish accent and that Jews were famous in third grade

circles for cutting off foreskins.

Since every guy I ever saw in the shower room seemed to be similarly carved I was a bit confused. Every Passover I ran and searched for hidden Matzo cracker knowing that in a couple of days I'd be out in the woods looking for Easter bunny droppings. I could hardly tell the difference.

When I was about nine, I realized I was tired of school and needed a little R[R. You know, quiet time with just me, some Captain Crunch and Hogan's Heroes on TV. It was Yom Kippur, A Jewish holiday, and I thought I'd pull a fast one.

"Dad," I said when he came to roust me from slumber, "let me stay home for Yom Kippur? I'm Jewish ... remember?" He just nodded and left with a sly look on his face.

He returned after a few minutes, straining under the weight of a huge tome with the words "A History of the Jewish People" emblazoned across the front. "If you want to stay home on a Jewish holiday you should learn something about the culture, here ... start with chapters 23 through 31."

Needless to say, I went to school that day.

What does it mean to be Jewish? It seems a simple question on the surface but nothing is simple anymore. Is it a religion, a culture or a tribe? Of course it is all of these things and more and each individual Jew must place himself in his own context.

I have been attempting it recently. In the movie *An Revoir Les Enfants* one kid asks another, "What is a Jew?" and gets this grand and sweeping response: "It's someone who doesn't eat pork."

This may have sufficed in the past when one simply fit into generalizations based on tightly-knit ethnic communities — Jewish, Armenian, etc. — and that was it. One didn't question his / her heritage too much.

What does it mean to be an atheist Jew? Why is it that I, who rarely step inside a synagogue, consider myself Jewish in several ways? Why do these titles have so much power? Is it the connection with the primeval tribe which makes humans cling to these self-identifying communities?

"Four out of five Jews said that being Jewish was very important to their lives," according to a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times*.

A few of the poll's numbers seem relevant. The ancient culture still exerts a strong pull on modern day Jews.

But what exerts the pull? To begin with, one has to separate religion and culture, two inextricably tied spheres which have their own centrifugal forces.

There is a definite "Jewish experience" which connected the diaspora and spilled into America at the turn of the century. Great writers, filmmakers, painters and all the rest. Jewish culture would not exist if there had been no Jewish religion and vice-versa. Having said this it should still be clear that Philip Roth can write great novels about being Jewish without believing in God. In my Jewish experience Woody Allen has been more influential than Jehovah.

When I was around 12, I read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and saw The Holocaust on TV and realized there was more to this Jewish thing than first met the eye. It put the lovably bumbling Germans of Hogan's Heroes in a new light. The fact that I am myself German on my Protestant side increased my discombobulation.

Later I learned that all of my Lithuanian relatives died in the Holocaust. "But I don't feel Jewish," I complained to my dad. He responded softly, "In Germany you would have been Jewish, whether you liked it or not."

Another part of the L.A. Times poll said an amazing 50 percent of Jews cited "a commitment to social equality" as being the most important characteristic of their Jewish identity, 17 percent cited religious observance and 17 percent support for Israel."

Imagine 50 percent of Catholics saying that their cultural identity mainly relied on "a commitment to social equality" and you can see what an incredible figure that is.

This squares well with my grandmother's stories. I noticed as a teen how much of her culture was based on a leftist world view. She was in the Socialist Jewish Bund in revolutionary Russia as a teen and smuggled secrets through the streets of Moscow in her hair.

After Lenin destroyed her group as being too moderate, she fled to the United States. There she continued her activism, getting arrested four times in one day during a garment workers strike, despite the fact she was an illegal alien.

It must have been a product of persecution, this sense of social conscience and activism. The example of Moses lived on and Jews saw they would have to fight for freedom. Trotsky was a Jew along with many of the Russian revolutionaries. This leftist tradition continued with the immigrants to America. The Freedom Buses of the civil rights movement were crammed with Jews.

Leftism and political conscience have an honored position in Jewish tradition, a fact overshadowed by the reactionary and brutal events in the Holy Land of today.

Often, though, when I raise questions with other Jews about Israel or the Palestinians it touches a soft spot and normally open-minded people become dogmatic. Israel holds such an emotional lock on the hearts of Jews, especially older ones, that rational discussion is often an impossibility. To question Israel is to be a sort of traitor in the minds of these loyalists, kind of like America during McCarthyism.

An extreme case of this sensitivity can be found

There Really Is a Fundamentalists Anonymous?

One Almost Expects a Five-day Program — With a Couple of Follow-ups

By Sean DeMonner

In April of 1985, a Wall Street banker and a lawyer, James Luce and Richard Yao, put an ad in the Village Voice to announce the formation of Fundamentalists Anonymous (FA). The idea of a support group for disenchanted Fundamentalists turned out to be extremely popular.

The personal experiences of Luce and Yao led to the founding of FA. The organization seeks to provide emotional and psychological encouragement to individuals who have been hurt by their affiliation with Fundamentalist groups and to provide information about Fundamentalism in general.

Luce claims that a branch of the Fundamentalist movement, the "Reconstructionists," began in the late '60s to stress the spread of Fundamentalist organizations on college campuses. This came in response to liberal student activism.

Luce attributes the recent upsurge of the Fundamentalist movement to the effort of the Reconstructionists. Subsequent involvement with these groups has caused emotional problems for thousands of individuals. This need led to the creation of Fundamentalists Anonymous.

On May 7, after more than 500 calls expressing interest nationwide, the fledgling organization was featured on the Donahue Show. Today the group's membership has swelled to over 50,000, including FA on-campus chapters designed to specifically meet the needs of college students.

Luce described the typical scenario of a college student who might find himself involved beyond control with a Fundamentalist group: "Anyone is vulnerable to it. A young man, for example, finds himself separated for the first time from his family and high school girlfriend, he has just bombed his first Spanish test and in general feels insecure in his new environment."

This insecurity might spur him to join a group that otherwise would not have such a strong attraction. The notion that the stressful college lifestyle may produce ill-conceived forays into Fundamentalism is supported by the fact that approximately half of the FA members who converted to Fundamentalism did so during their college years.

According to Luce, FA has had numerous individuals come to them seeking help in dealing with their roles in campus Evangelical groups such as the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators — all of which are present at UCSB.

To John DeWilde, a member of the Campus Crusade for Christ and previously a member of the Navigators, the idea of campus Evangelical groups as cultish traps for students is mistaken. "I read the Bible for what I can get out of it for my own personal growth, as well as looking for the original intention of the writer," he explained.

Another Campus Crusade member, Bryand Hardwick, explained, "We're not hidden, like a cult, everything is open. We are carrying out the great commission in this generation ... winning people to a saving knowledge of Christ."

FA uses group discussion to treat the withdrawal symptoms of addiction to religion just as Alcoholics Anonymous uses group therapy to help people face and control their addiction to alcohol. "We deal with religious addiction," explained co-founder James Luce, "by providing a kind of halfway house for people who have been hurt by these groups to get on their feet." FA is concerned only with "a voluntary resocialization process and does not actively recruit new members," he elaborated.

Luce is quick to point out that not all Fundamentalists are controlled by their religions or unhappy with their faith. "We only help people whose lives have been limited by their religions."

Influence

in the next
Friday Magazine

Friday, April 29, 1988

A Short Excerpt From Tammy Bakker's Autobiography

I wanted a child so very much, but Jim still wanted to wait. My two dogs Chi Chi and Fi Fi helped me for a while and took care of that mother instinct. One day while we were eating supper, little Chi Chi, who liked lima beans, ate some, and ran into another room. I had noticed that Chi Chi had been losing weight and I couldn't understand why. When the dog didn't return, I wondered. Jim had seen the dog fall over on the carpet and not get up. He went and checked Chi Chi and then gently said, "Tammy, Chi Chi is dead."

I thought my world had come to an end because that was the first time death had ever entered into me. I had never before had anyone die that I loved so much. I wanted to run out of the door but the Holy Spirit stopped me right in my tracks. I stood in the kitchen and couldn't move. I wasn't thinking about God, only about why Chi Chi was dead. The Holy Spirit began to speak through me in an unknown tongue. I couldn't stop. It helped to keep me from falling apart. God is so good. He is there even when we aren't aware of Him.

At that very moment a real estate man wanted to show our house to someone (he wanted to build a house like ours).

Jim handed Chi Chi to the real estate man and said, "Would you dispose of Chi Chi for us?"

Jim put his arms around me and I cried and cried. I said, "Jim, have them keep Chi Chi for a couple of days. Please, don't let them bury him right away because I know God can raise things from the dead. Please, don't let them bury Chi Chi."

Jim called the man and said, "Don't bury Chi Chi. Would you just put him outside in a box for a couple of days" — it was in the middle of the winter — "because Tammy needs to settle something in herself."

I prayed and prayed. "Oh, Jesus, please raise Chi Chi from the dead." I expected Jim to bring Chi Chi home any minute. I knew God could do it, and Chi Chi would be all right again. I expected to open the door and there would be Chi Chi, as usual. The fact was that Chi Chi was a naughty little dog. I loved him so much, but several times I wanted to give him away because he wet our drapes. He'd chew on everything. We never knew what he would tear up next. But you see, God knew how to take care of Chi Chi for me. God knew that if He took him, that would be the end of the wetting all over the room. One time I gave Chi Chi away, but I called the people and said, sobbing, "I can't give him away. I love him so much." They returned him and I forgave him again. But I was still upset over the wetting and the destroying of things. God knew what was best for me and Chi Chi was finally buried.

This column has been excerpted from Tammy Fae Bakker's book *I Gotta Be Me*, written with Cliff Dudley and published by New Leaf Press.

in the highly visible and powerful group of Zionists who hold Israel as the fulfillment of prophecy and have created an extreme "us against them" philosophy which can point to the Holocaust to end any argument. Everything is in black and white for this group, an obstinacy compounded by the highly vocal nature of their fervency.

At a recent Peace Now demonstration, many prominent Jews spoke in conciliatory tones about making compromises to the Palestinians. But a counter-demonstration comprising hundreds of right wing Jews began calling those on the podium "Nazis" in voices filled with hate. When Jews call other Jews "Nazis," we know that some painful cracks have formed in the tribe of Judah.

When I hear Israeli quotes like "the town of Beita must be erased!" I am reminded of the heavy handed writings in the Old Testament. The holy book is filled with God's bloody and detailed directions to King David on how to destroy local infidels. Reading it one gets the impression that God is some sort of military genius rather than the embodiment of pure love.

Every Passover I notice how much of scripture is fire and brimstone. It makes vengefully clear that the Egyptians will get what's coming to 'em.

This type of scripture makes it easier to carry out the repression of the Palestinians. Right wing Rabbi Meir Kahane (who believes the Arabs should be expelled entirely from Israel) uses all of this to his advantage by quoting commandments like "He who comes to slay you, arise to slay him first."

This Passover I found myself unable to stop laughing as I listened to otherwise intelligent adults sitting at the dinner table to chant aloud the 10 plagues that Moses called in — like surgical air strikes — against the befuddled Pharaoh: "Frogs, boils, cattle disease, killing of the first born..."

The idea of being a "chosen people" has always scared me slightly. On the good side it has given a strong sense of hope and pride to a long suffering people. On the other hand, it may help to foster the climate of racism which has led to the Palestinians' subjugation.

Of course the Jews hardly have a monopoly on such cultural arrogance, but it must be confronted

nevertheless. It is an attitude that encourages the "overachieving Jew" who was expected to be the best kid at school — because he was Jewish, of course. It gives us the myth of the Israeli super-soldier of the raid on Entebbe, a myth which still has surprising power in the Arab world.

Self-fulfilling prophecies of Jewish success have frightened a lot of the goyim over the years. Nobody tries to wipe out an entire people unless deep down inside they're a little bit afraid of them. In our very own UCSB library I saw this graffiti: "Some day the world will realize that at the root of its problem is the Jewish Question."

The idea that somewhere in some Jewish command center a bunch of Jewish bankers and newspaper editors are controlling the world is an idea which still apparently appeals to many. I get this great picture in my head of a dozen Hasidim all in black stroking their waist length beards as they stare at a huge wall of blinking lights and radar screens figuring out their next power-move.

The people that believe this crap must be the same ones who are having their foreskins surgically replaced in a forlorn effort to improve their sex lives. Hence the local I.V. song by Xion (Zion) that goes "I want it back, I want it back ... I want myyy fooodooreskin ... BACK!"

So why do we keep all this ritual and tradition? Why must the macaroons be kosher and the wine foul? More seriously, why must Orthodox women shave their heads, wear wigs and be segregated in synagogue?

At Passover, the elder leader of the ceremony, whose father was the Chief Rabbi of England, got up and gave a surprise speech: "religion is at the root of most of the evil in the world (to which one boisterous woman hooted "that's what my parents always said, that's why they were communists!"). I believe this is a tribal ceremony," he continued, "and we must stick with our tribe. We've been doing Passover for over 3,500 years, so what right do we have to stop now?"

With that, things loosened up and the dinner became what Passover should be; a time to rejoice and come together over a big meal with family and friends, as well as a good time to put our culture into historical perspective. We replaced the Maneshevitz wine with a nice Bordeaux (anybody who has not tried Maneshevitz should

thank Jesus), laughed and sang and made general merriment.

I like a good rowdy High Holy Day.

The elder mentioned tribalism. It's worth thinking about. I believe the same force which drives modern day Christians and Muslims to fundamentalism has brought us extreme Zionism.

People want things to be clear cut and they want to be part of a group. They want to know what to think and they like to have enemies of pure evil to make themselves feel good. We all yearn for the tribe and the pack, with a complete and self-contained world.

The 20th century has so alienated individuals and destroyed close knit communities that a response was necessary. Enter a rebirth of anti-intellectual, anti-science and pro-conformity religious fundamentalism which seeks to deny that the Age of Reason ever happened.

Like other forms of fundamentalism, bringing an ancient and ritualistic religion into the late 20th century can create some great ironies. For example, the other day I saw a guy in Cafe Roma wearing a yarmulke with UCSB stitched in bright thread on its side. I think it was our team colors. I just don't know, I mean how do you think those bearded Talmudic scholars poring over ancient scrolls on the slopes of Mt. Zion would feel about some guy showing his school spirit on the side of his sacred head gear?

How important is tradition? Should one keep only what he likes and respects about his culture or should he slavishly keep it whole, warts and all?

Take Hebrew school. A lot of Jewish kids spend years of after school time studying a language they will never grasp. Ask one of these kids to say something in Hebrew and you'll receive a blank stare more often than not.

One woman I know got up on stage at her Batmitzvah to read the ritual passage from the Torah. In front of the crowd she became flustered and forgot the painfully memorized Hebrew words. Quickly improvising, she began throwing out a long series of Hebrew-sounding words to the amazement of a shellshocked Rabbi who could only stare in disbelief at this heresy. The audience, who themselves spent years in Hebrew

What does it mean to be an atheist Jew? Why is it that I, who rarely step inside a synagogue, consider myself Jewish in several ways? Why do these titles have so much power? Is it the connection with the primeval tribe which makes humans cling to these self-identifying communities?

school, did not notice the gibberish and clapped tremendously at the end.

For myself, I take what seems good. The pro-intellectual social conscience side of the culture. The respect of history. The powerful sense of family and interest in children. But I can do without the heavy guilt, the apocalyptic religion and Israel's nuclear bomb. To be Jewish does not mean one must support Israel's policies or go to synagogue. It merely means that one recognize the richness of the culture and its impact on oneself.

But I still don't have all the answers or all the questions. I'm always waiting for the next Woody Allen film.

Dropping Out: One Student's Cult Experience

By Adam Liebowitz

Alex looks at the world with eyes that are as bright and eager as they are kind and forgiving. "I've always had a feeling that someone is looking out for me," he says smiling, once again comforted by the thought.

The 21-year-old psychology senior at UCLA had, until a month ago, been one of the 26 million members of Nichiren Shoshu of America (N.S.A.), one of the more recent varieties of Buddhism to attract the religious interest of Americans.

A child of divorced parents, a Jewish father and Protestant mother, Alex considers himself without any formal religious upbringing. "I've always just believed in the 'golden rule' as a way to live," he says. His association with N.S.A. has been his most formal religious experience.

The religion is a 13th century variation of Buddhism that has found new life by adopting a pyramidal corporate structure, working its way down from a president at the top to the newest converts at the bottom.

The financially successful N.S.A. gains monetary stability through the sales of its official pray equipment. A new member may spend as much as \$50 to \$75 on "prayer gifts" to start him out on the road to enlightenment.

"The focus of N.S.A. is two-fold," Alex explains, "The primary aspect is Kosen-Rufu or world peace through the propagation of Buddhism; the second is a promise of spiritual, physical and material well being." But good things don't come easy.

N.S.A. is as much a discipline as it is a system of belief. Daily morning rituals are required plus several N.S.A. meetings a week dedicated to chanting, a practice called Gohonzon. Through these rigorous formal sessions and a missionary attitude in everyday life it is believed by devotees that their personal goals and N.S.A.'s goals can be achieved.

A neatly dressed and showered Alex begins his morning ritual by chanting to a scroll that contains the basic message of the religion. The scroll is kept on an altar which also holds a candle, a plant, incense, and beads, representative of the five senses. During these prayer sessions, Alex prays for whatever he desires, whether it be enlightenment or a car.

The long ritual is not over until Alex reads two untranslated chapters of the Lotus Sutra. "The religion is the focus of your whole day; it's part of when you get up, who you talk to, what time you eat dinner, what N.S.A. terms Ichien or determining direction."

For Alex the religion was a source of love and security that he was not finding in his life. Helped by the other members who applauded his daily success in achieving the goals he had prayed for, Alex began to think he had found the way to inner peace.

"For a while I was really feeling the harmony that N.S.A. teaches. I had a good job and a love relationship. It may sound funny but it would be something as simple as going to find a parking space at school and someone would be pulling out just as I got there."



But lately Alex finds himself falling back into the traditional western belief of self-growth through introspection and questioning. "In N.S.A. I found myself going backwards, rather than developing a sense of what I wanted or what I believed was adopting the values of others."

Reading through N.S.A. literature it is not difficult to understand Alex's sentiments. Photos are shown of human pyramids and smiling crowds, giving the impression that the religion is a giant pep rally for the human race.

A basic pamphlet not only contains N.S.A. philosophy but also quotes by members, such as actor Patrick Duffy, who have found happiness in N.S.A. As with other religions that have found rising memberships in recent years, such as Dianetics, the well known actors are used to show how "successful" the religion is.

Some observers question whether N.S.A. with its "chant and be wealthy" philosophy may be only an 80s greed culture trend away from the "chant and be happy" religions of the 70s. However when asked to rate his N.S.A. experience on the whole, Alex rates it as

extremely positive.

"It gave me a way to look at the world and a language for my spiritual experiences. But I also realized that although chanting is a way to focus on the positive energies in life, there are no magic-word shortcuts to happiness."

For Alex religion comes down to some very basic personal beliefs, ranging from an appreciation of life and death to reincarnation. In fact, Alex's most important religious experience came before joining N.S.A.

"I took my first ever walk through a cemetery," he says with his voice cracking slightly, "the sight of the green rolling hills, the trees, the white tombstones and a silence you could hear, made me feel at one with myself and the universe."

When asked if he would ever go back to N.S.A., Alex says he might if it is the "right" thing for him to do. "Being in N.S.A. gave me a lot of positive feelings about myself and life. But recently I also found myself having those same feelings at a passover dinner with a friend's family."

FM Fiction: Doggie Dance

B. Douglass Wilhite

The Alphonso Lily Dance Company took center stage in UCSB's Campbell Hall last night with another notorious performance of modern dance. The piece called *Doggie Dance*, performed by the company, was only six minutes long. In view of the \$17 ticket price (\$12 for students) for such a short performance, Mr. Lily was asked if his latest work was worth the price of admission. Lily responded in his typical aloof manner with his signature gesture: he stuck his finger in his nose, gracefully removed it, and looked at the end of it.

Mr. Lily obviously knew that everyone who has followed his career, over the years, is quite aware that the price of admission in his latest artistic venture is far less than ever before. This is due to the fact that the usual costly ammunition and ballistic weaponry were not used in this new Lily, master work. However, de rigueur of the 40-year-old choreographer, his latest work is not without controversy.

Having just been released from prison in England — "The same prison," he says, "Oscar Wilde was under lock and key..." — Lily's thirst for the politico-militaristically bizarre appears to have diminished. In the past we have seen such grotesque works as *Pedophile in the Perambulator*, which featured paper-machet and chicken wire shapes, filled with pig meat and nitroglycerine, representing "the aborted fetuses of Western Man;" we saw *Punk Balanchine Balance Machine* which included extremely difficult dance combinations under machine gun fire, multiple entrechat-leaps in "cowboy spurs," and a sequence of choreography which some critics have called "tap dancing on pointe."

But the trademark of this Bronx-born, dancer-choreographer, is his "exploding ballets," or "ballistic ballets" which have demolished theatres all over the world. "It can be safely said that when Lily brings down the house," one London critic writes, "He brings down the house in a literal tour de force!" For example, in London, one of these explosive works, entitled *Impossible*, featured over forty flaming dummies, which were launched into the audience by catapult. Alphonso's lawyer, Guido, says that the dummies

were meant to represent the presidents of the United States, and were "launched in chronological order" into the audience.

Reportedly, however, Lily was charged with several counts of the English equivalent of manslaughter and arson, and was sentenced to twenty years in prison. His lawyer, Guido, managed to reduce the sentence maintaining that "it was an artistic endeavor and Lloyds of London paid up any way." Critics and prosecution barristers claim that *Impossible* was not a dance "by any stretch of the imagination" this was probably because there was no dancing at all in the two-hour performance — "Lily simply appeared on stage, dressed in riot gear, with a three-hundred pound, hand-made catapult, a stack of cloth dummies (filled with pig meat but no nitroglycerine), and a flambeau." What Lily states about his most infamous and violent works, under the watchful eye of Guido, is simply that he bought the flambeau from Loren Chaney, "It was used in the old Frankenstein Movie."

Lately, Lily has turned away from his unconventional "ballistic" ballets and now has produced this *Doggie Dance*, which is centered upon a forty year-old man's love affair with his roommate's golden retriever. Randy Bashaw plays the role of the golden retriever and the role of the man is played by Lily himself.

It is true that the number of dancers in Lily's company are dwindling due to injury and even death, and this probably has influenced the limited number of dancers involved in this work. Moreover, Randy Bashaw does very little movement in the six-minute "duet." Lily was questioned after the performance about the state of the young dancer. Before Guido, the lawyer, intervened, Mr. Lily said defensively, "He's not dead."

The first scene of "Doggie" opens with the mysteriously implied pretext that the forty year-old man's roommate is away buying tickets to a skijoring tournament in Brazil. This leaves the man alone with the dog. Bashaw expresses the hound excellently, which is lying inside a plastic life-support bubble as it has no immune system (another mysteriously implied pretext). Lily enters and asks the dog, in dance moves, if he wants to play with a tennis ball. The dog nods and Lily

bursts into dance on pointe for several minutes on his way to the refrigerator.

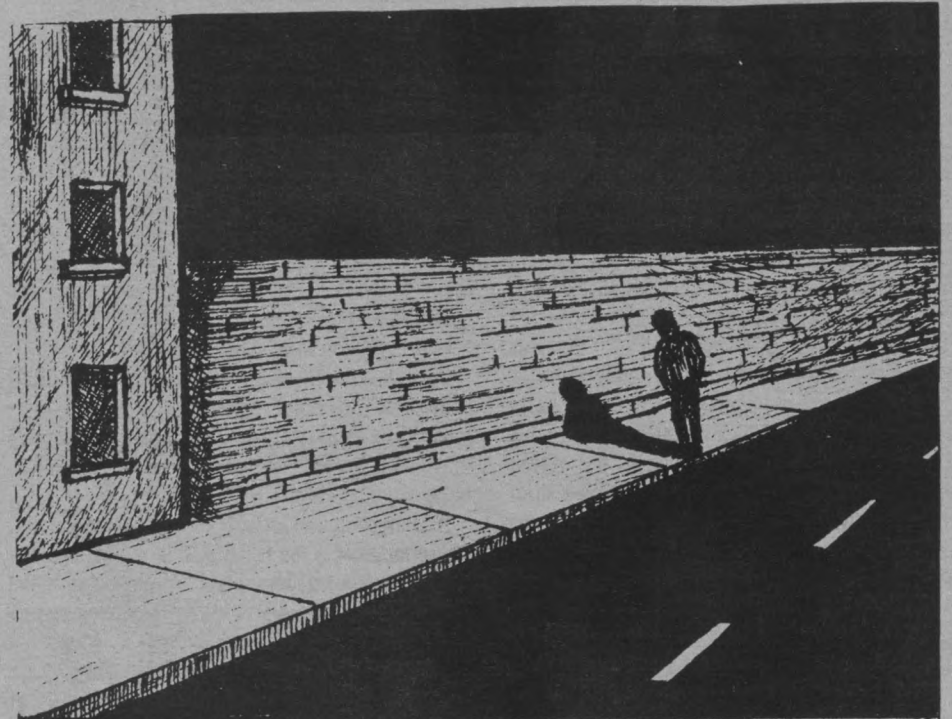
Mr. Lily displays his dance talents with multiple arabesque turns, removing the bottle of tennis balls from the refrigerator. Then suddenly the entire stage is overrun by a stampede of rhinoceros iguanas.

It was inevitable that Lily was questioned as to the meaning of this, his latest work. After consulting Guido, Lily confined his response to where the iguanas came from. "They are

trained," he says, examining something on the tip of his finger, "Trained iguanas from the old 1950s science fiction B-movie *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, they were also almost used in a scene in the old television serial *The Mysterious Doctor Satan*."

Lily is now in New York auditioning for the American Ballet Theatre. "I want to be artistic director," Alphonso says, "The current fellow simply is not qualified for the job — he knows nothing about weapons...."

The Eunuch Von Munich by Michael Joseph



Otto Kopf, our anti-hero existed in a nocturnal world inhabited only by his wretched imagination.



Nausea engulfed him...

as he strained to free himself from his burden



Otto, like all of us, could not elude the the drudgery of human existence

Rumors
are spreading
faster than
AIDS.

FM Poetry

Coordinated by John A. Klein

This, then, begins. It seems Fridays aren't such an ending of the week as they are a beginning.

Here in Santa Barbara one should vainly wonder if God Himself was with the the setting sun, sharing Himself with us — or at least with those who endure sunsets.

Wallace Stevens was true in his observations. One need not go to heaven to enjoy the beauties of the earth. Beauty exists in its capacity to change and improve, or even die (though I have yet to see a season "change" in Isla Vista).

So then let Friday exist as it shall today, as a beginning. Let the weather dictate an all pervasiveness and show through its infinite powers to charm — a reawakening. Sure, it's religious. It ought to be, but in no institutional way whatsoever.

Breathe with each exhalation of the ocean and you'll see where any individual notion of God stands (if you want to limit religion to God). But don't trust me. Let UCSB sophomore Jeff Lanterman give his insight:

And drifted across my eyes
And whispered to me through the cracks
In a worn window sill
And flew on the backs of many seagulls,
Tossed and thrown in the stormy air
And shown brilliantly upon me,
From behind a billowing cloud
And through all these things
Though none in particular
Revealed itself to me

Religion and poetry sometimes exist in fleeting, unknown destinations. One realizes that both exist out there, somewhere, but never is one quite sure where, how far, or to what extent. And to deny either would be to deny your own existence. Both exist in various forms and ideas (yes, often shaped by us).

Is religion packed away deep in our minds ready to create thoughts? Does poetry exist only as long as we are capable of poetic literacy? Let's not give ourselves such credit, or nearly such significance. Shakespeare immortalized his mistress in poetry. Historical causation, at least in the Eastern philosophical sense, lends itself to religion that exists above and beyond Man.

Religion and poetry breathe. They are alive.

(Have I been drinking too much of the moon, or am I just optimistic?)

Come back. It is just Friday and spring. Perhaps there is still time to cleanse — perhaps time to unwrap the filth known to mummies — time to smell salt in a sober and Clinique-free morning. (Ever wanted to lie on your back on the beach, head facing the Islands with the eyes open, and swallow the white foam as it rushed through your body?) Healthy and clean to be sure, if it could be done. Poetry works in the same way. Quietly or abruptly, without material weight, it promises, if nothing else, an introduction to spiritual longevity. Enough of that.

Poems, poems, and more poems — we need poems. This is a poetry column and it survives on student work. Of course, you shall receive nothing but the pleasure of hearing your own voice. Send all work care of Friday Magazine, with at least a phone number attached to the name.

Poetic opportunities abound. Borsodi's Coffee House is planning a "Poetry Exchange." This unique event would feature live poetry readings and performance from UCSB and Isla Vista. If you are an undergraduate, graduate, or faculty member and are interested in giving your work an audience, contact myself or Doug Arellanes at the Nexus, at 961-3993 for further information.

There is more. The College of Creative Studies offers a weekly literature symposium. The event offers live readings every Wednesday from 4 to 5 p.m. in the College of Creative Studies (Bldg. 494), room 136. All readings are free.

The Academy of American Poets is accepting entrants for its annual Frank Coulter Prize for poetry. An award of \$100 will be given for the best poem or group of poems. Students should submit entries to the English Department office by April 22.

Claire Rabe is organizing a bilingual poetry contest in *The Independent*. Three poems in Spanish and three in English will be chosen, to be published in *The Independent*. One poem per person, deadline: April 28. Put your name, address, and telephone number under your signature or on the front page of your poem. Send it to: Poetry Contest, *The Independent*, 607 State St., S.B., CA, 93101.