

Fanaticism: hold your breath, pinch your nostrils

Timothy L. Davy in a guest opinion column (Daily Nebraskan, Jan. 24) urged us "to hear a logically-based, intellectually sound speaker on Christianity" named Josh McDowell.

Hopefully, by the time this column reaches print I will have followed his advice; not because it's good, but because I have never seen a "Christian Intellectual." As far as I'm concerned, a "Christian Intellectual" is a contradiction in terms.

Since I cannot write about McDowell before I've heard him, I will do Davy one better and address myself to the writings of a man much more famous and prestigious in the Jesus movement than Josh McDowell. That man's name is Francis A. Schaeffer.

Schaeffer is probably the best known and most widely read "defender of the faith" in the Jesus movement. He has written a raft of books, one of which is entitled *The God Who is There*.

The theme of this book is that modern man has experienced a "change in the concept of truth." This change has been a movement from a belief in absolutes to one of relativity. Unfortunately, relativity leads to despair, for which the only answer, according to Schaeffer, is Christ.

The author manages, in his mind, to deal with this large topic in only 191 pages. In reality, the book is a shallow series of nonsequiturs finally culminating in a mishmash of rhetorical confusion.

For example, he criticized Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus incessantly for being unable to live consistently within their philosophical beliefs.

There is no serious attempt to analyze their philosophies, only this ad hominem attack. Schaeffer never realizes that attacking the man and not his argument is a logical fallacy for which you would fail any philosophy class.

Another major weakness in the book is Schaeffer's argument concerning the Christian existentialist, Soren Kierkegaard.

He criticizes Kierkegaard for being unable to communicate the experience of his "leap into the absurd" (as if Schaeffer could communicate the experience of his salvation) and then a hundred pages later says that Christianity is "the only explanation which can fit the facts of their (existentialists) own experience."

I can only wonder how Schaeffer can state that Christianity answers Kierkegaard's experience after complaining that Kierkegaard can't convey the facts of that experience.

These are only two of the innumerable examples of poor logic, irrationality and just plain stupidity which grace almost every page of this ridiculous book.

The best way to read it is to play the "substitution game." Just put the words Muhammed, Allah and Muslim wherever Schaeffer uses Christ, God and Christian. His essays are so meaningless and illogical, Davy, that almost any words will fit quite nicely.

The reason Schaeffer is so big with the Jesus Freaks is that he clothes his ignorance in eloquence. Part of his finery is a knack at name-dropping when, in fact, he knows very little of the ideas of the men to whom those names belong.

Lastly, he decorates his narrative with, supposedly humble, but dramatic conflicts and arguments he has had with atheists, Hindus, Muslims, and Catholics. Of course, super-saint Schaeffer always shows them the great white way to Jesus.

Schaeffer, however, is not alone in his ignorance. I have talked to several hundred Jesus Freaks in the past five or six years and ignorance characterizes almost all of them.

I have asked scores if they were familiar with Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultman or any one of a number of Biblical scholars. Invariably I have gotten the same answer—No. (These men are as famous in Biblical scholarship as Muhammed Ali is to boxing.)

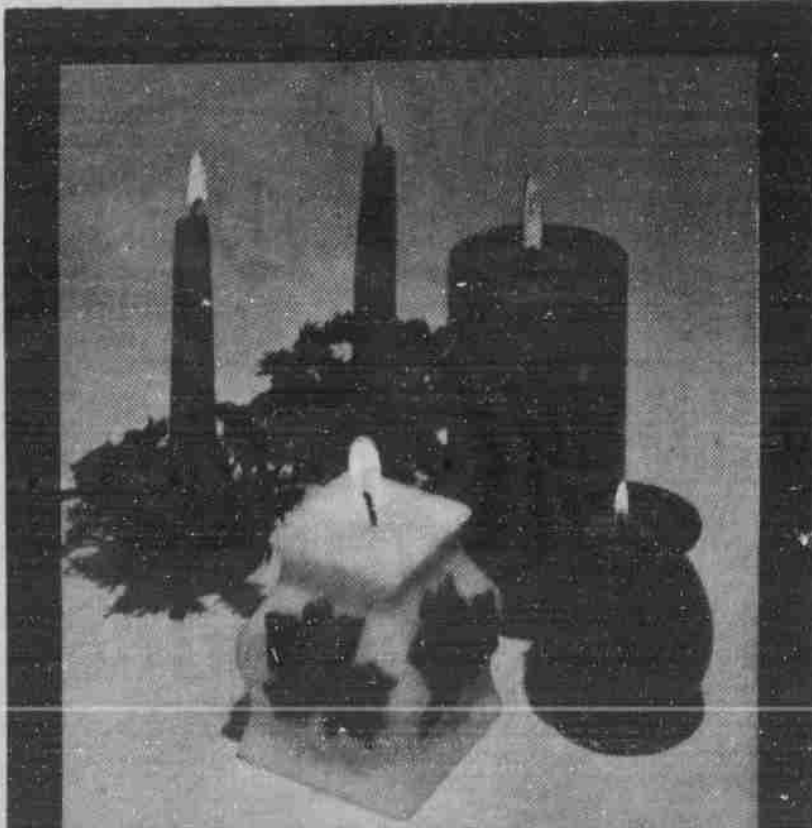
Perhaps the U.S. Catholic Conference of 1973 summed it up best when they said the Jesus movement "tends to be simplistic, emotional, antirational and naive."

But please don't get me wrong. The Jesus Freaks will surely win a few converts. They put on an advertising campaign that would make Madison Avenue twinge with envy. Besides, this season of the year is always a good time to save a few unsuspecting freshmen, who, facing a dreary February and feeling guilty about their first sex and drug experiences of last semester, are easily swayed.

It is unfortunate that the rest of us will have to put up with fanaticism's latest Elmer Gantry, but we've seen it before and I'm sure if we simply hold our breaths and pinch our nostrils, it will all blow away.

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