

Student Power or the Right of Dissent?

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Since the student demonstration against the Board of Trustees' decision barring Dick Gregory from the Calvin College campus took place (cf. *Beacon Lights*, January, 1968), the Board has defended its decision by giving the rationale behind it.* It said, "We do not question your (students') right to discuss varying points of view on the important social issues of the day. . . . However, the abrasively vulgar manner of his presentation and style, known to members of the executive Committee from having read his books, makes his presence at Calvin College inconsistent with the college's Christian profession and purpose. Knowingly consenting to the type of performance Mr. Gregory as a night-club entertainer is likely to give would constitute a dereliction of duty and conscience on our part."

This rationale is evidently quite unsatisfactory to some of the students, for an attempt to thoroughly demolish it is made in the *Chimes* editorial, entitled "We Got Trouble." First of all, the publicity "hurts the college's image, and therefore its ability to raise cash." Secondly, this decision will "handcuff the Speaker's policy," because what speaker can be obtained who is not abrasively vulgar? There is also the element of racial prejudice. It seems that the Board members from the Cicero, Illinois area especially opposed Gregory's appearance because Gregory has disrupted that area in the past.

But the worst trouble is that this decision and rationale will serve to polarize the Calvin community, dividing liberals and conservatives and causing disunity. This polarization would be the result of the ambiguous nature of Gregory's rejection. So says *Chimes*.

The Board is right. Gregory has no place on Calvin's campus. He is not only "abrasively vulgar," he is positively wicked and profane, a rabble-rouser who would probably try to spread discord and upheaval at Calvin just as he did in Cicero.

But the real question deals not with Gregory's rejection, but with the right of dissent of students. It goes even farther than this, however. The students undoubtedly may disagree with some of the administration and Board policies. But do the students have the right to revolt and rebel against such policies. It comes down to student power. The president of the college, while emphasizing the unity of the Christian academic community, said, "I think the students themselves, however, would despair of any other student takeover of either curriculum or discipline or administration of the college because the students are made up of large and diverse groups representing many interests. Students are a temporary group; they graduate within four years or leave within a year. And therefore I am sure that the students would want to advise and let their opinions be known, but that they would not want a takeover as the word power seems to indicate."

But it is not sufficient to attempt to smooth over these difficulties, because that is exactly what the students are attempting to do — take over the administration and discipline of the college. As one student stated at the demonstration, "[The Board's decision] simply represents an interference into the academic autonomy of the school." The students want to make the school policies, and resent it when they are brought up short by those with more wisdom as well as authority. They seem to have little respect for traditional, time-tested policies, no respect for law and order, and great admiration for liberal innovations.

This decision could, as *Chimes* says, affect the whole Christian Reformed community. It is receiving a great deal of unfavorable publicity through *Chimes*, which, as the president of the

college says, "Appears to be read more avidly and more universally in our churches than some periodicals." It could polarize liberals and conservatives, making both lose sight of what is right and wrong. About the only conclusion one can come to concerning the whole matter is that it is not yet finished; its effects have yet to be felt. The winds of unrest, dissent, and change are beginning to blow more strongly through the Christian Reformed Church. The students are carried along with the spirit of the age; those in authority make weak attempts to stem the tide of unrest and innovation. Which side will win?

*All of the following information is taken from Calvin College *Chimes*, Jan. 12, 1968.

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