

The number of Christian groups represented at the MSA Activities Mart has doubled since 1970.

God is real. Jesus is alive. The Bible is true.

Those ten words, with little qualification, are The Truth to a small, but dynamic and growing, group of students on Campus.

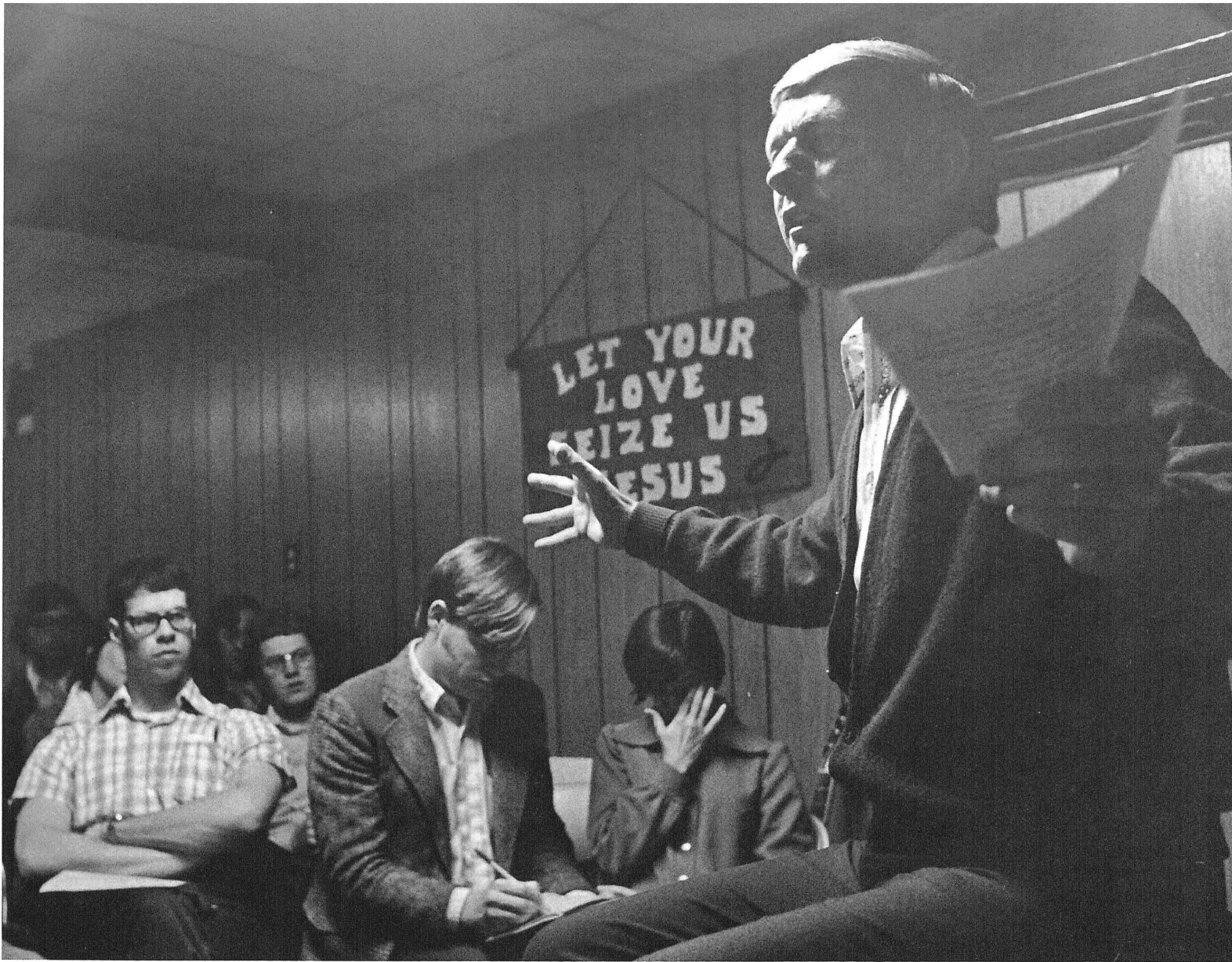
It is not as pervasive as the unrest and political involvement that shook higher education in the late 60s, but fundamental Christianity seems to be trickling into the emotional void left by the passing wave of student activism. Trickle is the right word. *Playboy* is still the best seller on the news stand; Columbia is still Nirvana for beer distributors; and, judging from admission prices at Columbia's porno theater, the wages of sin are keeping up with inflation.

If you ever passed through the Activities Mart, that smorgasbord of Campus organizations and special

interest groups available to students, you might have been surprised this year by the large number of signs erected by Christian groups relatively new to Campus. The 1970-71 Student Organization Directory listed only five Christian groups as MSA-recognized student activities. This year, the directory lists 11. And these are groups other than the traditional church youth groups that have always been around. Many are not affiliated with any particular church denomination. They exist independently, outside the church. Most of these non-affiliated groups are conservative and fundamentalist, reaching back to the values of first-century Christianity.

The Rev. Robert H. Betts, a Mizzou alumnus, is the pastor at the Ecumenical Ministry in Higher Ed-

BIBLE CHRISTIANS COME



Roy Weese leads a Bible class at the Christian Campus House, a conservative, non-denominational group.

ucation on Campus. He says he is not sure what the proliferation of religious groups means.

"I was surprised at their conservatism," says Betts. "They are more conservative, perhaps, than the state in general. The need for security and certainty is stronger now than at any other time on Campus. The 60s was an activist time. In the 70s, we are seeing a more inward concern with the perennial issues that have always been the concern of religion. I'm not sure what it means, myself. If it's a withdrawal from the world, I see a lot of dangers associated with it."

The extent of student involvement with religion is difficult to detect. A religious preference card is included with a student's registration packet, but filling out the card is optional. Clerks at the registrar's

office say no record of the number of cards returned has ever been kept.

Betts believes the conservative groups have the greatest numerical following on Campus. And representatives of the conservative groups are not complaining about lack of interest. Quite the contrary.

Linda Roberts, associate minister at the Christian Campus House, characterizes her group as conservative, fundamentalist and "more evangelistic than humanitarian."

The Campus House is home for 11 men, most of them students. A girls' house next door houses nine women students. The Campus House also contains a small religious book store and offers Bible study classes and meeting space for a number of fellowship

TO THE CAMPUS

By Dave Holman



Greg Stephenson, from Campus House, chops ice so a young man can be baptized in a quarry near Campus.

groups. The house is always open, and the ministers or residents are available for “emergency counseling” on a 24-hour basis.

Roy Weece, the minister of the Christian Campus House, began his ministry here in 1968 at the request of some Missouri alumni and staff members who thought such a place should be available for students. Weece says about 12 or 15 students came regularly to meetings at the house that first year. By the second year, the number had doubled. Now, Weece estimates 150 students and other people are actively involved with the house and come to meet-

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ings on a fairly regular basis. Other conservative Christian groups report similar success. None of them claims massive membership on Campus, but

nearly all can claim steady increases in participation.

Weece has his own theory about a renewal of interest in religion. “About 1969 or 1970, there was an upsurge of interest in Jesus Christ. It seems to be a cross-section of interest, not just one particular type of student or one school or field of interest. And I think there are three reasons for it. One is an ultra-materialistic emphasis in America today. . . . For these kids, the satisfaction just isn’t there. Another reason is the lack of moral standards today. You’re on your own. . . . Existentialism is high in the saddle. . . . We’ve come up with a near-standardless society. The kids have tried the fenceless life. But you can’t play a game without rules. I give youth credit for seeing this, although a lot of them can’t always put it into words. And the third reason is the anti-absolutism philosophies. I believe people have been told long enough that you can’t be sure of anything. And when somebody comes up and starts talking about an eternal absolute—and He is a real person—it sounds fresh as a springtime rain. I don’t see how anti-absolutism has survived as long as it has. To say you can’t be sure of anything is an absolute statement in itself and a contradiction.”

Wednesday night Bible study at the Campus House can be a strong emotional experience for those who believe. Roy Weece speaks with sincerity, a gift for imagery and a resonant voice that are hard for even a confirmed cynic to resist. When he recounts the travels of the first apostles, the listener's tongue tastes dusty. There, in Weece's presence, it is easy to believe, although he would never take credit for it.

The followers of The Way are another small, dynamic group on Campus. The Way is a highly organized international Bible study ministry with a unique materialist tinge. Way headquarters are in Ohio. The Rev. Randy Feese, Missouri director, says the ministry organization resembles a tree. The Way reaches people mostly through "twig fellowships," small groups of five or six people who usually meet in private homes to sing hymns, study the Bible and, occasionally, to witness such manifestations of the Spirit as "speaking in tongues." In this manner, The Way can reach a great number of people, but the group meetings remain small and personal. They are conducted by individuals trained in at least one of The Way's intensive study courses and well-qualified to fan the fires of the faith.

In most of the new and growing Campus groups, the basic pattern seems to be the same. Although the credos differ slightly in content, the tenets of faith are simplistic and they are absolute. Adherence to the faith requires a deep personal commitment to Christ, a total belief.

Mizzou student Scott Williams is vice-president of Koinonia, a fellowship group that meets in a private home near Campus. He says the group has about 20-25 regulars, but there is no clearly defined membership and no commitment to the group—"just to the Lord." Scott belonged to a Methodist church at home, but does not attend one here in Columbia. "Missouri Methodist just didn't offer the Word as I would like to hear it," he says. "I was searching for a church preaching the Word, and not what they think people want to hear. Why? What's the great concern? Those were the answers I wanted."

Betts, representing the liberal ecumenical view, thinks religion should not be a refuge from the new experiences that cause discomfort, change and growth of the individual—the things that education and universities are all about. He thinks the conservative groups are withdrawing from the world, the University government and government in general, and this is not a healthy trend.

"A religious belief that doesn't help one deal with the world as it is, is not a healthy one."

"Privatism is a real danger," says Betts. "A religious belief that doesn't help one deal with the world as it is, not as we wish it to be, is not a healthy one."

Some conservatives disagree. They say somebody has to be concerned with ultimate values, ultimate truth and people's souls, and these are the first concerns of religion. They would say the church is out of its realm and dilutes what power it has by trying to be involved with every issue that becomes current. They are concerned with the whole person in society, but they prefer to keep social action on a one-to-one basis as much as possible. They are quite willing to treat the symptoms of social ills, but they leave a frontal attack on the disease itself to those institutions better equipped to handle the attack. They may give until it hurts to send food packages to a missionary for distribution to starving Indians, but they are not likely to lobby in Congress for any sort of food allocation plan, nor is the fundamentalist missionary likely to petition the Indian government to spend its resources developing agriculture instead of atom bombs.

"My estimate is it's the last hurrah for those fundamentalist groups," says Rev. Betts. He thinks they fill a need for those who want something constant and reliable that seems to give meaning to all the rapid change we have experienced in the last decade or so. But hiding won't work, he says, and this will become more obvious as time passes.

This may be fundamentalism's last hurrah, but it could be long and loud before it dies. *Time* magazine reported that 18 Christian thinkers of nine denominations met recently at the Hartford Seminary Foundation in Connecticut to sign an Appeal for Theological Affirmation. The Appeal lists 13 liberal theological theses and condemns them as "false and debilitating." The significance or impact of the Hartford protest remains to be seen, but signers included both conservative and liberal thinkers, and they agreed that the Christian faith may soon be too weak to deal with social ills or anything else unless it first "seeks the transcendence, power and will of God."

Many young Christians at Mizzou appear to be involved in that quest. □