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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

Preaching to the Intellectual

In addressing the Corinthians the apostle Paul makes no concessions to arrogance of intellect. "When I came to you, brethren," he reminds them, "I did not come proclaiming to you the mystery of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1-2). What seems like absurd foolishness to unregenerate reason becomes the highest truth with self-authenticating validity to the Spirit-filled seeker. Faith is not the product of human ingenuity, but the illuminating gift of God.

Notwithstanding his insistence on an unmitigated Gospel of divine grace that is a stumbling block to Jewish legalism and folly to Greek logic, Saul of Tarsus was not inhibited by an anti-intellectual bias. To share as widely as possible the benefits of God's renovating action in Christ he determined to "become all things to all men" so that in all strata of society people might have an opportunity to respond. In Athens, the most renowned academic center of the ancient world, he did not hesitate to apply his erudition as a scholar and his skill as a debater to his encounter with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Through vivid parables and authoritative teaching Jesus reputedly captured the imagination of the common people. Brilliant lawyers and the power elite, however, were also attracted by the profundity of His interpretations. The greatest of the commandments, He told an interrogator, includes the total dedication of the mind to the love of God. Faithful discipleship does not consist in a *sacrificium intellectum*, but in the application of reason and every talent with the utmost exertion to furthering the cause for which Christ died.

In an Epiphany sermon which first appeared in *The Pulpit* (January 1961) Jaroslav Pelikan referred to the "Wise Men" as a prototype of intellectuals through the subsequent centuries and deplored their gradual alienation from the church:

> At one time the Wise Men lived in the church and by the church. Her nurture in the sacraments gave them sustenance, her fellowship gave them support, her traditions gave them continuity and direction. Then, for a while, the Wise Men fought against the church, striving to obtain and maintain their independence from the oppressive authority of an orthodoxy that identified its formulas with the voice of God. But today the Wise Men no longer live in the church, and they no longer fight against the church. Instead they find it possible to ignore the church.[1]

In the early church competent apologists like Justin Martyr and Origen prepared learned treatises in response to sceptics and heretics in the Hellenistic world. The appeal of Christianity convinced the brilliant pagan Augustine that he should dedicate his extraordinary mentality to its propagation and clarification through extensive commentary. The medieval schoolmen dominated the universities for generations. The secularizing impulses in the Italian Renaissance brought emancipation from superstition and sterile dogma, but religious motifs retained intellectual vitality. The renowned humanist Erasmus and his emulators in England and Germany combined the revival of ancient learning with moral and theological dis-

[1] Jaroslav Pelikan, "That the Wise Men Might Come Again," in Alton M. Motter, ed., *Preaching the Nativity* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961), 121—22.

course. The rallying center for the Lutheran Reformation was at the University of Wittenberg. From the inception of Christianity there has been preaching to intellectuals.

The first arena for American intellecutal life was religion. The early Puritans founded Harvard College and insisted on a learned ministry. The clergy in Massachusetts Bay Colony came close to being an intellectual ruling elite. Probably no single community ever had more confidence in the sheer value of education. Scholarship was extolled in the New England Congregational churches, where sermons were elaborate (and often dry) disquisitions on Biblical texts.

Popular religion in the United States, however, has long been characterized by an anti-intellectual bias. Theological "intellectualism" received a serious setback through the repercussions of the Great Awakening in the mid-18th century. Under the leadership of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield conversions were achieved primarily through an appeal to the emotions. Edwards, acclaimed by some admirers as the most brilliant mind ever developed in America, combined a zeal for revivalism with a high level of doctrinal exposition. In stimulating the emotions he did not neglect the brain. But there were more fanatical preachers like the incredible James Davenport, who resorted to frenzied antics and poured out invective on the established clergy. The Awakening swept over the Colonies and gave encouragement to uneducated laymen in exhorting people about the state of their souls. Those who were dubious about the methods used by the revivalists feared an outburst of superstitious enthusiasm and an anti-intellectual uprising against traditional and rational authority in both church and state. Charles Chauncy, the Arminian-influenced leader of the Boston clergy, showed his outrage at the insolence of unqualified upstarts in assuming that they could interpret and apply Scripture without special training. In his *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* published in 1743 he exposed what he perceived as the underlying error of the revivalists: "Their depending on the help of the Spirit as they despise learning." This discrediting of the intellectual enterprise, which was expressed by a minority under the impetus of the Great Awakening within the framework of the characteristic Congregational and Presbyterian appreciation for learning and rationality, gradually spread and eventually became typical of the majority of Protestantism. The impact of early revivalism was the initial vitiating factor in diminishing the theological-intellectual quality of preaching.[2]

As revivalism after 1800 moved from New England and the Middle Colonies out into the sparsely settled areas on the frontier it became more primitive and more susceptible to emotional excesses and "ecstatic" expression. The Baptists and Methodists, who were less dependent on traditional forms of ministry, became the popular denominations in the West. Often their less educated clergy repudiated formal worship and prompted physical responses to the conversion experience. In the huge Kentucky revivals there were sensational reports of groveling, jerking, howling, and barking.[3] Sometimes the ministers were unpaid itinerants, or they cultivated their fields during the week and pounded their pulpits on Sunday, relying directly on the inspiration of the Spirit rather than biblical study and careful preparation. The popular sentiment was that an appeal to the heart was more effective than an appeal to the head. Pioneers in the backwoods became suspicious of ministers who

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[2] A summary of the influence of the Great Awakening may be found in Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), pp. 67—82.

[3] See Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1958), pp. 20—50.

were polished in their presentations and embellished their sermons with a ponderous vocabulary. Simplicity and directness were preferred. An emotional upheaval became the assurance of salvation, not resolutions involving the mind. The success of a parson came to be evaluated on the basis of his ability to elicit the conversion experience in large numbers of people. The Puritan ideal of the minister as an intellectually competent theologian and educational leader was steadily weakened in the wake of the demand for men who could excel as crusaders and exhorters. As Sidney Mead has written, the minister lost his priestly dimension or his prophetic role and became a "consecrated functionary" directing the pragmatic goals of the visible church.[4]

The decline in the quality of revivalism from Finney through Moody to Sunday corresponded historically to a rise in anti-intellectualism among the "common people." Charles Finney is remembered for his introduction of "new measures" into his preaching campaigns. If the right techniques were employed, he was confident that the results would be predictable. His success was predicated on marshalling every resource at the speaker's command to appeal simultaneously to heart, mind, and will with the aim of gaining a total religious response. Rationality was deemphasized as audiences became objects of deliberate psychic manipulation.[5]

Dwight Moody added something else—procedures borrowed from business administration. His approach became a fusion between the evangelical and the business mind. Often he talked like a salesman of salvation before mammoth rallies in England and the United States. Unordained and with little formal education, he was reputedly contemptuous of any systematic appraisal of theological issues ("My theology! I didn't know I had any.") [6]

With Billy Sunday the derogation of the intellect in revivalism reached its height. He was a theatrical showman, an ex-big league ball player. His harangues were spiced with amazing feats of physical agility on the platform. His slang was a vast departure from the profound verbosity of the early Puritan divines. Sunday's retort to his sophisticated detractors was: "What do I care if some puffy-eyed little dibbly-dibbly preacher goes tibbly-tibbling around because I use plain Anglo-Saxon words? I want people to know what I mean and that's why I try to get down where they live." Literary preachers, he complained, tried "to please the highbrows and in pleasing them miss the masses." As for alleged conflicts between science and faith Sunday hurled his worst invectives against the modern critics: "Thousands of college graduates are going fast as they can straight to hell. If I had a million dollars I'd give $999,999.00 to the church and $1 to education.... When the Word of God says one thing and scholarship says another, scholarship can go to hell!" [7]

Indisputably, anti-intellectualism has been a pervasive force in American life. Historian Richard Hofstadter remarks that "the 1920's proved to be the focal decade in the *Kulturkampf* of American Protestantism. . . . In the Ku Klux Klan movement, the rigid defense of Prohibition, the Scopes evolution trial, and the campaign against Al Smith in 1928" the revolt against modernity con-

[4] Sidney E. Mead, "The Rise of the Evangelical Conception of the Ministry in America (1607—1850)," in Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams, editors, *The Ministry in Historical Perspective* (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 228.

[5] See William G. McLouglin, *Modern Revivalism* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), pp. 166—216.

[6] Richard K. Curtis, *They Called Him Mister Moody* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Eerdmans, 1967).

[7] William G. McLoughlin, *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

tinued.[8] For many diehard traditionalists it was the intelligentsia who were the chief enemies.

Anti-intellectualism in church and society has persisted until the present. The irrational fanaticism associated with the "Know-Nothing" bigots in the 19th century was repeated during the "McCarthy era" in which university professors and ecclesiastical leaders became the victims of "guilt by association," intimidation tactics, or outright slander. Many ordinary citizens distrusted Adlai Stevenson as an "egghead" who was too aloof and analytical. Jokes were circulated about John F. Kennedy's "Harvard brain trust."

The post-World War II religious boom was accompanied by a tremendous upsurge of activity among Pentecostal sects and revival-oriented pietists. While the original "free churches" (Methodist, Baptist, Disciples of Christ, and so forth) which thrived on the frontier became more appreciative of the benefits of higher education and more desirous of an "intellectually respectable" clergy. Henry Pitney Van Dusen of Union Theological Seminary professed to delineate a "third force in Christendom" distinct from both Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism and Protestantism. With a diversity of beliefs and practices defying any summary definition, millennialists, holiness bodies, Jehovah's Witnesses, and militant fundamentalists shared one common characteristic in their mutual distrust of formal religion and intellectualized theology. Truth and a genuine relationship with God are assumed among them to be reached more through feeling than reason.[9]

How does the history of Lutheranism in America correspond to this general picture of a gradual repudiation of the Puritan stress on proficiency in mental disciplines, and only a partial retention and recovery of intellectual-focused preaching? Colonial Lutheranism on the Eastern seaboard and early 19th-century Lutheran settlements in the interior of Pennsylvania and New York were sometimes susceptible to Wesleyan sentiment and pietistic revolt against confessional standards. Samuel S. Schmucker, president of the Lutheran seminary at Gettysburg, was a "liberal ecumenist" who accepted "new-measures" revivalism in his eagerness to Americanize his denomination. However, Schmucker's intention was frustrated by the rapid influx of conservative-minded German Lutheran immigrants and a sacramental and liturgical renaissance led by Charles Porterfield Krauth. A parallel development among the German Reformed became known as "the Mercersburg theology" of Philip Schaff and John W. Nevin. Nevin leveled a forthright attack against the rampant revivalism in a published critique, *The Anxious Bench* (1843). Episcopalians and Lutherans usually tended to concur with Nevin in their non-collaboration with crusading evangelists and their insistence on Biblical exposition through formal preaching.

Among the Saxon immigrants who brought "old" Lutheranism to the United States were some laymen who studied theology and could do their own reading in Luther. Following a leadership crisis in Perry County, laymen meticulously applied their own learning in judging the pronouncements and sermons of the clergy. Part of the original nucleus for the Missouri Synod came from the middle class in Germany and included some professionally trained people. The preaching of C. F. W. Walther presumed familiarity with orthodox theology.

As the years passed, the proportion of educated laity in the total body diminished swiftly. Later immigrants who became the

[8] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1966), p. 123.

[9] For a recent interpretation see William G. McLoughlin, "Is There a Third Force in Christendom?" *Daedalus* (Winter, 1967), pp. 43 to 68.

rank-and-file members of the Synod usually came from lower social strata. Vast numbers who became "mission potential" for the Missouri Synod were of lowly extraction and had never enjoyed the opportunity for more than a rudimentary education. Thus, as this confessionally rooted church body (with its first generation theologians trained at German universities) expanded by leaps and bounds, it also lost much of its respect for culture and learning.[10]

From about 1870 to 1910 the Synod receded into a deeper isolation because of both geographical and linguistic factors. Where the members were not living in remote rural or semirural areas, they were cut off from outside contacts by the language barrier and by the stringent fellowship principles which disallowed association with the heterodox. The educational height achieved by most of the farmers and townspeople was graduation from a Lutheran parochial school. Not everyone was ambitious enough to complete all eight grades, or economic necessity dictated that some withdraw from the pursuit of knowledge at a tender age. In the cities the laity did not advance much farther. The basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic coupled with the memorization of Luther's Small Catechism were regarded as sufficient preparation for farming or employment in trades or factories. In many instances the only highly educated person in a Missouri Synod congregation, or perhaps in the entire community, was the pastor himself, and he could be called an intellectual only in a restricted sense. If he had a scholarly bent, he was more likely to be erudite than profound or creative.

After World War I there was a perceptible rise in the educational achievement of Missouri Synod youth. As free public high schools became a familiar landmark in every American community, an increasing number of parochial school graduates availed themselves of this opportunity and broadened their horizons. Eventually, of course, Lutheran young people began to matriculate at "secular" universities and colleges. Protective countermeasures were taken through the acquisition of Valparaiso University and the formation of Gamma Delta, an association of Lutheran students which fostered *gnosis* (knowledge) and *diakonia* (service). Already in 1934 when Missouri Synod students were asked: "What is wrong with the church?" the responses indicated that aloofness and obscurantism were resented. The immutability of ideas and the insular posture toward other Christians were challenged by intelligent and probing minds. The lack of theological training for the laity on higher levels was one of the complaints registered. A student from Washington University (St. Louis) predicted a widespread defection of youth unless there would be more coordination between Lutheran doctrine and the changing times. Other students were disturbed over the alleged conflicts between science and religion and the evasiveness of the church when confronted with social issues.[11]

Statistics for 1939 reveal that there were an estimated 8,375 students of the Synod (including those enrolled at church colleges), representing nine tenths of one percent of the communicant membership of the Synodical Conference, seeking a post-high

[10] See Arthur C. Repp, "Summary," *100 Years of Christian Education* (Lutheran Education Association Yearbook for 1947), pp. 219 to 220: The loss of the original ideal of a broad general education is to be blamed at least in part on "the new type of immigrant which came in during the seventies and increasingly in the next three decades, immigrants who for the most part did not come from the upper middle classes but from the peasantry educated in the German *Volksschule* and imbued with a strong nationalistic spirit."

[11] "Forward to a Better Church," *Walther League Messenger*, December 1934.

school education.[12] By contrast the total enrollment for the term 1962—63 soared to 52,230 young men and women.[13] The sons and daughters of financially successful parents aspired to college degrees.

Meanwhile, professors at state schools were encouraged to affiliate with the Lutheran Academy for Scholarship. By the late 1960s it became evident that Lutheran preachers would more and more be addressing congregations with a high percentage of college graduates. Especially in university communities it has become crucial to expound the kerygma in thought forms which can appeal to the intelligentsia. In our Sunday morning assemblies, despite the anti-intellectual prejudices that persist because of the collapse of the Puritan heritage, the proximity to the phenomena of revivalism, and Lutheran tardiness in penetrating the citadels of learning, we are now likely to find individuals who think critically and scientifically.

What are the possible implications for sermon preparation and preaching?

The core of the Gospel will not be altered. The same timeless-timely message of the Creator God disclosed as the incarnate Logos in the teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ will continue as the focal center of proclamation. But the terminology in which the thrust of Law and Gospel is projected may be altered. Our inherited symbols and words have to be redefined and articulated in relation to the experiences and tensions of our own epoch. We cannot return to the intellectual rigidity of colonial Puritanism, nor can we reach "thinking people" with popular religiosity or the techniques of neo-evangelical revivalism.

If we are to reestablish communication with the "cultured despisers of religion," it will be necessary to become sensitive to the demands of contemporary intellectuals. The key words which emerge are integrity and relevance. Many residents of our academic communities are convinced that Christian faith fosters dishonesty. The objection is raised that the doctrines retained by the church are incompatible with scientific research. Limited exposure to religious concepts has convinced them that enlightened minds must repudiate such barriers to progress in an open-ended future. Much of what they hear emanating from ecclesiastical sources strikes college graduates as intellectually untenable, morally dubious, and — most often — unrelated to their real concerns. Unless the church can speak meaningfully about overpopulation, poverty, war, and race, it attracts no following among the students and faculties of our high-level universities. Preaching is "tuned out" or never heard at all if it is confined to theological abstractions or innocuous generalities.[14]

It has long been a trite commonplace to refer to our "post-Christian era." For decades Marxists have condemned religion as an "opiate" and Freudians have dismissed it as an "illusion." Only a few years ago radical theologians concurred in the "death of God." T. S. Eliot had anticipated the situation confronting us:

> But it seems that something has happened
> that has never happened before:
> though we know not just when or why,
> or how, or where.
> Men have left *God* not for other gods,
> they say, but for no god;
> and this has never happened before.

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[12] *Statistical Yearbook*, 1940, p. 215.

[13] Information supplied by Reuben W. Hahn, then executive secretary of the Missouri Synod's Commission on College and University Work, Dec. 5, 1963.

[14] For a summary of the intellectual critique see A. R. Vidler, *Objections to Christian Belief* (New York: Lippincott, 1964). The censure of Christianity is summarized under the headings of moral, psychological, historical, and intellectual objections.

That men both deny gods and worship
gods, professing first Reason,
and then Money, and Power and what they
call
Life, or Race, or Dialectic.
The church disowned, the tower over-
thrown, the bells upturned,
what have we to do
But stand with empty hands and palms
turned upwards
In an age which advances progessively
backwards? [15]

Preparation for preaching to the intellectual includes an awareness of the image constructed by contemporary man in his search for self-realization and self-understanding. A diversity of prototypes has come down to us —Biblical man, the Greek ideal, the medieval saint, the this-worldly Renaissance individualist, the scientific genius, the capitalist exploiter, the bourgeois moralist, the proletarian victim, the anxiety-ridden existentialist, the emancipated black man, the communist version of the "new humanity." Each has contributed a *Weltanschauung,* a particular perspective, a system of values.

Western man as we encounter him today is a complicated fusion of these various historic incarnations. The distinctive influence of modern American life can be perceived in Riesmann's "other-directed man" or Whyte's Organization Man. New factors are operating both from within our cultural legacy of the past and from the technologically conditioned aspects of our existence in the 20th century. The consequences which can be detected are: (1) intensified secularization coupled with a disavowal of the transcendent; (2) an ambivalent relationship to reality in which people are inordinately fascinated by death, sex, and violence, while they are paradoxically in frenzied flight from their full implications; and (3) the disintegration of vital communication as mass-man has lost vital relationships in the family or the community.[16]

What can be done to approach the sophisticated man of 1969 who is conscious of the loss of old verities and is in quest of new meanings? A nostalgic retreat to some previous age with an anachronistic formulation of doctrine will be futile. There is no archaic answer, no matter how cleverly constructed. The language of Nicaea or the dogmas of scholasticism will fall flat on modern ears.

The task to be assumed is not easy. What is required of preachers who seek to address intellectuals is a new magnitude of consciousness. With radical depth and scope they must become sensitized to the major concerns of our era. With enlarged imagination and sharpened judgment they must exercise creative insight in evolving a homiletical response to all that they perceive. Inherited symbols and words will have to be redefined with fresh and vigorous applications.

The sermons of Joseph Sittler, a Lutheran theologian on the faculty of the University of Chicago, may provide helpful patterns. From his "introduction to university preaching" and from his published sermons a newcomer to the endeavor can gain some helpful aids.[17]

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[15] T. S. Eliot, *The Rock.*

[16] Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1957), p. 83. "Imminent seems the collapse of that which for millenniums has constituted man's universe. The new world which has arisen as an apparatus for the supply of the necessaries of life compels everything and every one to serve it. It annihilates whatever it has no place for. Man seems to be undergoing absorption into that which is nothing more than a means to an end, into that which is devoid of purpose or significance. But therein he can find no satisfaction. . . . While he is expanding his life, he would seem to be sacrificing the being in which he realizes his own selfhood."

[17] Joseph Sittler, *The Care of the Earth and Other University Sermons* (Philadelphia: For-

Sittler reminds us that the high intelligence of an audience does not guarantee familiarity with the terms and episodes of the Old and New Testaments. The legislation of Moses or the parables of Jesus are not necessarily recorded in the memory of college graduates. The metaphysical presuppositions of Isaiah or Paul in a prescientific age may be utterly alien to a Ph. D. in economics or chemistry. While a style of condescending theological simplicity would be unpalatable, precise explanations and frequent reformulations may be desiderata.

The pertinent problem always remains: How does one explicate the substance of the Gospel in the most effective way? How does one discard the excessive baggage of inappropriate verbiage without risking the loss of some vital elements in the total message?

Often it becomes evident that antireligious iconoclasts have only rejected their own caricatures of Christian faith. Sometimes they have confused the tenets of adamant dogmatists or the world-denying scruples of extreme pietists with the essence of Christianity. In many instances a point of contact for communication may be established by eliminating such misunderstandings. For instance, a sermon on "Christian Agnosticism" might mention that the anxiety of doubt is a common experience that can reduce our preoccupation with nonessential appurtenances. There is no absolute contradiction between "honest doubt" and convictions sincerely held. Similarly, a sermon on "Christian Materialism" might affirm the innate goodness of created matter and indicate that physical pleasures are not to be despised when they contribute to human happiness. Even sensual delights can be God-approved benefits when they are used in moderation under appropriate circumstances. Eradicating the spurious notions which are all too prevalent about the implications of a firm Christian commitment becomes a preliminary, if not integral, part of preaching on the contemporary scene.

There is no single pattern which can be prescribed in interpreting the "faith once delivered to the saints" to an academic community. Illustrations and applications may be chosen from the entire range of human culture — history, literature, philosophy, and art. The temptation is to overload a sermon with references from these sources and to neglect the theological base or the practical connection. Then, too, if the congregation is composed mostly of physicists and engineers, citations from Plato or Shakespeare may not be as compelling as they would be to students majoring in English or the classics.

Introductions to sermons and attention-gatherers throughout the exposition of a theme may advantageously draw on current events, especially if the audience includes social scientists or student activists. Beyond making the content of the sermon "come alive" in terms of "what's happening," it is crucial that the sermon offer concrete suggestions as to how concerned people can become involved in the effort to elevate the quality of life and in the struggle for freedom and peace. Here relevance may unavoidably require commentary on controversial questions. Obviously the pulpit should not arrogate the right to dictate precisely how each hearer can best fulfill his responsibility, particularly when available choices seem complex and ambiguous. Yet, the preacher must be forthright and courageous in asserting his convictions — not in a vacuum of vague allusions, but in penetrating analyses of real issues. Franklin H. Littell writes:

> Popular preaching has deteriorated because it has lost its essential quality of bindingness. Great preaching is preaching for a verdict. Great preaching is involved. (engagé): it has foresworn the hands-in-pocket stance of the casual observer. Great

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tress, 1964). For further examples see George A. Buttrick, *Sermons Preached in a University Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1959).

preaching has moral earnestness — not to be confused with the half-abashed repetition of petty legalisms and minor moralisms. . . . A good sermon speaks to the condition of those present.[18]

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CHAPEL ADDRESS

The following sermon was delivered in the chapel of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, during the last week of the 1967—1968 school year.

My text is a fragment from our Lord's commission to the Twelve: "Freely ye have received, freely give. Take no bag for your journey." (Matthew 10)

My commentary is an oracular saying from a book by Norman Brown, *Love's Body.* This book came to my attention with that highest of all commendations — as a gift from the hands of a friend. From a chapter on freedom: "We stumble on the truth. The truth is always scandalous, a stumbling block; truth is where we stumble or fall down. . . . By good great fortune, gratis, by grace; and not by our own work or will. . . . A treasure stumbled upon, suddenly, not gradually accumulated by adding one to one. The accumulation of learning, 'adding to the sum total of human knowledge'; lay that burden down, that baggage, that impediment. Take nothing for your journey; travel light."

And that is my theme: "Travel light."

For those who require at least a ritual obeisance to the church year, I have a subtext from the Epistle for the week: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak."

My young brothers, how heavy a freight of intellectual baggage have we laid on your too docile minds, how heavy a weight of anxieties and compulsions on your spirits — I mean our compulsions, our anxieties? Will you graduates do us a final kindness before you leave? Will you assure us that we have left you free, free to be your own men, free to do your own thing; open to God and His world, open to man and his need in a manner quite uniquely your own? Will you promise us to lay the baggage down and to travel light?

I have been alternately pleased and appalled to follow the progress reports in the daily bulletin on the Book Store commentary sales to graduates. One can only be gratified for whatever evidence there is here of respect for the written Word and for responsible, methodical Biblical scholarship. But one wonders how much there is here of desperation, of clinging to the apron strings, of anxious regret for facts not mastered, of fear to speak a word of personal conviction in the scandal of a personal discovery. I am haunted by memories of a young pastor on the plains of Colorado, surrounded and intimidated into gibbering silence by his authorities until by some grace it dawned on him that his people were not impressed by his authorities, that they did not even need his authorities, but that — wondrously — they needed him. Boys, lay the baggage down. Travel light!

Who would venture ever to say a word on my Gospel chapter from Matthew if he had to wait until all scholarly hands had been counted, all opinions sifted, all levels of tradition defined, all historical dilemmas explicated? There is scarcely a Gospel text more threatening. But one thing we can all see: our Lord takes risks with His men. He wills that His authority become incarnate in them and that in them His kingly claim be laid on the lives of others. That is their burden, yet in assuming that burden they receive the freedom to travel light.

"Freely ye have received, freely give." No modern translation approaches the Gospel radiance of these words from the King James. *Dōrean,* freely, giftwise. By good great for-

[18] Franklin H. Littell, *Sermons to Intellectuals from Three Continents* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), VIII, IX.

tune, gratis, by grace; and not by our own work or will. "You received without pay, give without pay." Would you trade for "Freely ye have received, freely give"? There may indeed be a lesson for us in that other prosaic rendering as we anxiously or enviously compare the fine print in our call documents, as we reckon the financial extras of car allowances and paid utilities, as we count the bedrooms in the parsonage and the number of full baths. There is some comfortable baggage in the institutionalized ministry that most of us would find it difficult to lay down.

Yet this morning I so much want you to hear the Gospel in these words: "Freely ye have received, freely give." Shall we venture a different modern rendering? "God in Christ has completely opened Himself to you; open yourselves completely to others." We glory in a trained ministry, and so, I think, do I. But what can choke the heart with joy is the prospect of so many vigorous young men moving out from here to become centers of human openness among God's needy people, to be the bearers of His peace to a fractured world. "Freely ye have received, freely give." In such giving of your self you will experience the precious mutuality of the Gospel's chain reaction. You will receive back more than you give every time.

A ministry conceived of as openness to others will free you from the baggage which above all I would have you lay down before you leave. I have come to experience it painfully as the burden of infallibility. It is the compulsion at all times to have a word to say and the conviction that that word must always be God's most intimate truth. Oh, lay that burden down and travel light! "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak." The human truth is more in the ear than on the tongue, more in the heart than in the head. If you still feel there is something you must say, wait a moment: "It shall be given you what you shall say."

During a recent hospitalization one of my visitors offered to say a prayer with me. He was one of you. Do you think the words he used made much difference to man or God? I can't believe it. His message was in his concern, in his humanity, which for that moment incarnated my Lord's love for me.

There is the truth I would have scandalize you this day. I would have you stumble over your own humanity and to see in it God's gift for ministry in Christ. In Christ's risk to send you lies your freedom, and in your reckless human response.

Travel light!
Travel free!
Go with God!

St. Louis, Mo. WALTER J. BARTLING