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CALLED TO FREEDOM

a sermon preached by

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in the  
DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL

Sunday, January 19, 1969, 11:00 a.m.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:11-20; Galatians 4:1-7; 5:1, 13, 14

"For freedom, Christ has set us free. Standfast therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

On Wednesday of this week, I was riding a bus through the bleak, brown hills of North Georgia returning from a conference of campus ministers from the Southeastern part of this country. It was a meeting that crossed denominational lines bringing together Roman Catholic, and Protestant campus clergyman for the first time in this part of our country. It was a meeting to which many people went with many great expectations. It was a meeting of great confusion. It was a meeting which talked about many of the issues of the day using many of the code words that are part of the university situation: the generation gap, student revolution, the multiversity, the military-industrial-academic complex, etc., etc. There was an attempt to try to find out what it means to be Christian community in the midst of all the complexity, change and apparent destruction that seems to be going on in the university scene.

Greek Orth.  
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I am not sure even now what was accomplished by the meeting. Most of us coming back to this university and to the University of North Carolina agreed that it would take a while before we could begin to fit together what happened there. At least we met. I think I realize now what Paul Goodman meant when he said, that perhaps the most useful role of university chaplains is to provide centers for some kind of necessary confusion to express itself. Certainly we seem to be adept at doing this at times. *As in this sermon!*

As I came back on Wednesday evening, I began to think not only of what was going to happen here this morning but again to ponder my own personal fascination, disillusionment, hatred and love of the university, of this university. It was almost like some bizarre parody of Freudian analysis. The University is both the mother that you want to love and the father that you want to kill. And I thought again, with all that is happening here that I can't understand how can I come to grips with it in such a way as to justify to myself, to those with whom I work, and before God, my presence here as a chaplain?

Simple rejection - the answer which is chosen by many who we know in the university really doesn't work for me. It doesn't work, first of all, for the reason that no simple rejection ever works the way we want it to. It doesn't make the object of one's rejection

stop existing. Rejection simply doesn't put away a situation or a person or an institution that bothers us. The story is told once of a very enthusiastic student that went to Lord Russell, Professor of Philosophy, and cried out, Sir Bertrand, I finally can accept the universe. To which Lord Russell dryly replied, "Yes, and you'd damned well better."

*Wasn't this Carlyle?  
"Egad, she'd better."*

Despite the defiant condemnation that we see around us in our country, despite the fawning admiration we see around this university, the university, probably like the little ladies in gray who always manage somehow to show up when you are in the hospital, is going to go on for a good long time twittering its slogans and performing some of its bad and enlightening acts long after most of the old and new rebels are no longer on the scene.

*insulting*

If rejection is a puzzle to me, adjustment to what the university is seems likewise an impossibility - not because of any courage most of us possess or any incorruptibility or bravery, but merely through the old primal instinct that most of us know and live out of, survival. If one adjusts to this institution as it is, we are wise enough to know that one just does not survive long as a human being. Dr. Carlyle Marney, who many of you know quite well, gave a speech at a church convention once that impressed many people. One of his older friends came up afterwards and said to him, "they'll get you, Carlyle, if you keep on like that, they'll get you - oh, not the bloody way; they'll make you a president of something."

*false!*

*so what?*

Most of us when we are honest and not trying to be witty or theologically profound, I suppose, like some of the things that are here and are deeply disturbed by others. Somehow all of us-whether we be ministers or teachers, or students or outsiders, have to winnow through these things in order to stay on in the university with integrity and with hope. Perhaps we can begin by thanking God that history and the events of our life today do much toward shaping the kind of world and creating the kind of conditions for the university that both set its limits and determine part of its responsibility, *for the better. (?)*

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One of the troubling things that emerged for many people at the Atlanta conference was the opinion that in almost all of the traditional institutions of our society, particularly the university, there is a problem that is increasingly felt by those who are most concerned about it. That problem is the question of viability. Can the university really make in relation to what it claims to be and to do? Again and again as one talked to the ministers and the students who were there, one got the impression that for too many students there were two choices awaiting them as they moved through those fast moving years as an undergraduate. They were harsh choices: to drop out physically or mentally, or secondly, to become processed by a system they saw as increasingly breeding obedience, frustration, dependence and fear, a kind of emasculation and enslavement of the Spirit and particularly of youth.

*a messy sentence*

*|| ?*

You don't have to look very far to see some of the symptoms of this kind of feeling, this kind of experience that so many students acknowledge today. There is a college within easy driving distance of this university where I recently spoke at a student forum. In the course of the day and evening I was struck by the number of stu-

The implication here is because a student is extremely upset it follows that his family and church and college constitute a bad system.

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dents who out of a moral sensitivity which had been given to them in this culture, by family and church and their college experience, were extremely upset by what is going on particularly as it began to impinge on their life in terms of Vietnam and the draft. These were students who intellectually wanted to oppose the draft but morally lacked the courage or the strength to say no. They were trapped men. They had been taught for sixteen years in our educational system. *The school too is to blame?* They had tried to learn what they were taught and they had been taught to be good. They were taught to obey their conscience and at the same time they were taught the consequences of going against a very important part of the system which most of the society affirmed. Now, on the step of adulthood, maturity and responsibility facing an obligation given to them by their society, they suddenly found they could not believe in a part of the institution they had been brought up to accept. But they could not trust themselves and their moral impulse so they were trapped and caught in a position of devastating moral impotence. As they talked there was evident a feeling of depression and resentment, a feeling of self-hatred, a sense of shame and of pain. *all caused by "the system" ?*

Obviously this is not an experience of all young men facing the draft but an increasing segment of our student population find themselves close to this kind of immobility of spirit. Their spirits break against an impulse to do what they see is right in a structure of society that has been setup to so process their lives that the question of morality is not a question that can be asked or even be dealt with. This is a condition that was bred in our society and in part in our university and in our schools. Many of the prophets of our time are saying that the present methods of our system of political life, education life, and of religious life breathes into those who are growing into adulthood in our society a kind of gentle violence that usually turns in on itself. There, I think, is a condition of pain among many of the young in this nation. If I were a psychologist I might be tempted to say we are close to a mass neurosis. It is clear that increasingly on the campus you find a lack of faith in oneself, a vacuum of spirit into which authority or institutions can quickly move and establish their hegemony over the life of an individual - a dependency upon which they then feed and control. *Who?* *We asked it in earlier generation* *hazy, unfocused imagery*

A statement from a campus newspaper points at this crisis. A coed writes: "What we all lack is some guiding passion, some moral vision if you will. We are unable to wind the loose threads of our experience into some larger pattern, and we know it. We write to please this authority or that professor while the universe skids about under our feet. We profess to disbelieve everything partially because, at heart, we do not yet believe in ourselves. If our revolt seems chaotic, it is because we have not found anything to promote or give ourselves to." *why?* *weave*

What we do in our schools, we realize, is deeply connected to what we do in all our culture and our society. What has happened to some students, we realize, is simply one manifestation of what we have done to black men, to the poor, and to Vietnam. That is, we don't teach hate in any school in this nation or any church. We don't teach murder but we do isolate the individual. We empty him of spirit by ignoring or supressing his impulses toward life, and *deeply affected by closely* *uu*

*Should we?*

freedom. We breed into him a lack of respect for life, a kind of a loss of love and thus we produce a nation of gently "good" but threatened men. Men who will kill without passion, out of duty and out of obedience. Men who have in themselves little sense of the vivid life that is being lost nor the moral strength to refuse what it is that they are asked to do. Increasingly rigidity and stillness are mistaken for order, and order as we know is increasingly becoming in this country understood as the absence of vital and free life. We try to preserve and create an order which depends upon the destruction of life both inside and out.

*This is false.*

And yet we have heard words from another tradition today, a Biblical word that says that the end of learning is wisdom and wisdom is defined in Hebrew as intelligent activity - the gracious wedding of idea and act, goodness and truth. It demands a merging of those polarities between self and society; between subjectivity and objectivity; between order and energy. We have allowed them to become polar opposites, antitheses, and we force the young in this nation to choose one or the other. It is not surprising then that they have turned against this kind of choice with vengeance and shout as they did at Columbia, "Kill all adults - never trust anyone over 30!" They must choose one pole because there is no synthesis of idea and act, of conscience and politics as they see it. Thus many have allied themselves with rough energy against reason, balance and moderation, those virtues which we liberals have worked so hard to institutionalize and preserve in our universities and in our churches.

*false*

*non sense!*

*we? who? how?*

We should not be surprised, because we have forced them to that choice. It is simply that many have chosen what we have always held to be the devil's side of the choice. If, as so many voices are now contending, our institutions of learning and worship are the means by which we deprive youth of their manhood, that is, the right to self-identity and self-determination, which is youth's inheritance, then we must not be surprised when they seek that freedom in ways which of necessity must be violent and childish in our eyes. *Aic.*

The choice between mindless violence and mindless authority is one which we can no longer afford in this civilization. Anarchy and chaos on one side and tyranny and oppression on the other are both unacceptable choices if we are to have a future and a society. I admit that this deeply troubles me for there seems to be increasingly little choice between mindless violence and mindless authority in this country. I am just enough of an academic to want to preserve much of what will be lost in the kind of rebellion or apocalypse that so many people see approaching. Yet the rapidity of events leaves me with no clear idea, no solution, no sense of what will be an adequate change from the situation in which we now find ourselves. There is no way of knowing, there no longer seems to be any way of estimating what is necessary or what will work. I only know that the problem now seems to be that our response to crisis is to move away or back rather than forward, and that we will surely, for the sake of some "imagined" order, increase in number and pressure the very approaches that have brought us to the edge of this confusion. I do not know. I believe that the young and the old must have values of course, must be responsible, must care. I know too that most of the violence I have seen done to the young, to the black, to the poor, to the third world; has been done in the name of value, and that well-meaning

*Are these the only choices? Hasn't one of us before thought?*

*Today is a future for the earlier generations*

*catastrophe?*

*Are these the only victims of "violence"?*

people who have been so dead-set on making things right have had a hand in bringing us to where we now are.

The paradox is a deep and troubling one for me and I would assume for many of you here. I no longer know if change can be accomplished for the young or for any of us without the apocalyptic fury that seems almost upon us. The crisis of youth and of education and their relationship in this country is symptomatic of some larger and deeper fault that seems to run through our cities, our churches and our individual lives. Perhaps nothing can be done consciously in those areas until the air itself is violently cleared one way or another.

W. W.

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only So I have no easy solution, no conclusions, no startling synthesis, a kind of hoping. Perhaps the only reasonable hope is a pattern which yields no answers, but which points to a course to be followed in the absence of answers. It may be, given that, the best thing is simply to close with an unfinished fragment which I try to catch for myself the hint of an alternative:...I am trying to surround you, I see that, I am trying to make with these words and these feelings a kind of city so natural and so familiar, that the other world, the one that appears to be, will look by comparison absurd, flat, limited and utterly unnecessary. What I am after is liberation, not my own, which comes often enough these days in solitude, or sex, but yours, and that is arrogant, isn't it, that is presumptuous, and yet that is a function of religion and of art, to set you free, to be a man, to find an identity, to determine what your future will be. It is that too which is the end of education; a liberation from childhood and what holds us there, a kind of midwifery, as if the nation itself were in labor and one wanted to save both the future and the past, for we are both. We are the thin bridge swaying between them. We are the "missing link". To tear one from the other means a tearing of ourselves and a partial death. It may be that the rending is inevitable. It may be.. And yet one still seeks another way, something less (or is it more) apocalyptic, a way in which the past becomes the future in ourselves, in which we become the active builders of what is to be.

written confusion

This I believe

Unless from us the future takes place, we are Death only, said Lawrence. Paul said it for the Christian in a different way pointing to the same existential truth: For freedom, Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Return, return and think again what I have asked of you: to follow justice, and love mercy, and give me the worship of your heart and therein you will find the freedom to experience as joy what you are given to do, thus saith the Lord of our faith.

end of quote

where?

Perhaps this is what is asked.

Let us pray: Help us O God to meet the conditions of freedom in our lives and in our institutions. Teach us the sheer delight of energetic and confused discipleship. Teach us to be free men, to embrace lived values, diverse styles and loving conflicts. Grant us peace with deep restlessness, courage for the struggles that lie ahead, and love to heal the necessary wounds, through Jesus, who lived and died and lived again, cutting through the verbiage of explanation in the loving gesture of Himself. Amen.

(Distributed by Alpha Phi Omega)

What do worshippers think, about such a sermon from our pulpit? Is this our hope for the future? KWC