

Richard Gelwick, Feb. 17, 1980

MY LAST LECTURE

"AND"

The idea of giving a last lecture is a provocative one. Never have I had so many comments on a forthcoming address as I have had on this one, which was well advertised. But the striking aspect is the way the thought of a final presentation grips our imagination. It is as if one could look forward to knowing the time of their death and to ask what they would want to say on such an occasion. I have been counseled to look at G. K. Chesterton's essay, "If I had only one sermon to preach", to remember choice sayings of wisdom such as "This too will pass", and some have even suggested that this would be a time for making predictions about the future. The way this series has caused many to pause and to reflect on what they would say if they could give a final talk is a guarantee of its value regardless of the actual lectures that are given. I am deeply honored to be here and to join in this challenging series.

When I begin to try to focus what I would like to say I find myself like those authors who after finishing a book sit down to write acknowledgments to those persons who have helped their work. But their list of persons who have encouraged, assisted, influenced, and informed them becomes so numerous that they have to say that they can name only a few of the major ones, and the author knows very painfully that naming his or her literary sources only skims the surface of the persons who have made the work possible. So I come to the end today looking back on a family and a home life that have given me security and love; a country that has let me grow in both the small town and the big city with the freedom to inquire and to enjoy the beauty of nature and the high arts of civilization; looking back on an education that has enriched yet made me thirsty for learning all my life; looking back on the faith of the church that has both comforted and inspired me by teaching the love of God and of neighbor. Such a look truly overwhelms one with gratitude for life, for persons great and humble.

So I want to begin this last lecture with the words that I would like to be able to say as my last words before I die. These words are "Thank you".

As some of you know, a year ago last December, I had to undergo suddenly without prior warning heart by-pass surgery. One acute attack of heart pains led to a diagnosis that all four of the arteries of my heart were from sixty to eighty per cent closed, and I was a good candidate to drop dead if something were not done. Because I am in the field that I am, and specifically because I teach a course on death and human existence, I found that I had many resources for thinking about the meaning of my predicament. I saw myself confronting the problems of denial, of anger, of bargaining, of depression, and of acceptance that have been so well taught by Kubler Ross in her book On Death and Dying. I laid in bed and analyzed my fears and anxieties using the concepts of Paul Tillich's classic, THE COURAGE TO BE. I prepared my last lecture then on a tape recorder so I could finish my course on "Theology and the Shaping of Western Culture". Besides the real fear that I discovered in myself, the other feeling was one of gratitude, and the gratitude conquered the fear. I realized in those thoughtful moments how related, how connected, how interdependent we are.

One day as I was thinking, I remembered a visit to Gandhi's memorial in New Delhi. It was a very simple rectangular block of ebony marble. Inscribed on the side of it in Hindi were the last words that Gandhi spoke; he said, "O Ram".

According to our guide, Gandhi had wished that when he was going to die that these would be his last words. As I understand it, this utterance is a kind of prayer of thanksgiving, addressed to the deity of the Ramayana legend. Indeed when Gandhi was assassinated by a fanatic in 1948,

he was leading a group in prayer, and his last words were as he had wished.

When John Calvin in his monumental work, *THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION*, came to the discussion of the Christian life, there is a main theme that runs throughout like a red thread. Calvin's theme is "that we are not our own". Again and again he uncovers the ways in which we are all debtors, that our life is possible only by the gifts we have received. Naked and unprepared we are born into the world, and we are clothed, nurtured, and given our existence. This sense of relationship to a goodness that surrounds, sustains, and guides us despite the doubt and despair that life brings is from a final perspective, overpowering. We are not our own. For this kind of realization, I find the most precise response to be the direct address, "Thank you".

Then one should ask to whom is this thanksgiving addressed? It is difficult, as we have said to name all of those to whom we are indebted. How can we then direct this feeling of gratitude? The answer was shown to me in 1973 by Michael Polanyi, about whom I shall say more later. Then he was 82 years old, distinguished physical chemist, social thinker, and philosopher with honors and degrees from universities all over the world. I was working with him on his last book published in 1975 as *MEANING*. Several times we drove from his home at Oxford to one of his favorite places, the town of Abingdon on the Thames. Abingdon was founded in the seventh century and was the site of a Benedictine monastery. Besides the ruins of the abbey, it has two churches of ancient vintage. One day after lunch, Polanyi stopped to go into St. Nicholas' Church, which dates back to the twelfth century. We sat there for some time shivering in the cool building. British churches are generally unheated most of the time. As we were leaving this quiet place, Polanyi said: "When you have lived a life as long as I have and had as many good things as I do, it's wonderful to have a place to say "thank you". As I think of why the church is important to me, one of the chief reasons I find is that through it one can address in a deeper way that sense of the infinite graciousness. When one has great debts, feels the many blessings beyond reckoning, thanks are addressed to God so they can be the most inclusive, and I understand God to be the one encountered in the wonder of nature and the multitude of people that make a life. If a person were an agnostic, I can imagine their wanting such a place as a church with its transcendent symbolism to say "thank you".

This thought of God as the symbol for the encompassing leads me to the central theme of my last lecture, the dialogue between faith and learning. My professional involvement in higher education began in campus ministry where the relation of the church as a community of faith and the university as a community of learning was the key issue. What happened was that I came to discover the mutual ministry of each institution and the common bonds that they share. In basic ways, the university was discovered to be not only a community of learning but also a community of faith - faith in reason, faith in science, faith in education, faith in progress, and many other faiths. In like manner, I found that the church was not only a community of faith but also a community of learning. To be faithful to itself, the church had to be self-critical, testing and formulating its understanding in reference to the world to which it is sent. The church also had to be self-critical of its own beliefs testing their

fidelity to the historic teachings and foundations of the church. Without continual learning there was danger that the church could betray its own heritage internally and also fail in its mission of service by ignorance of and irrelevance to the society in which it lives. It became clearer as I worked in campus ministry that there was a special kind of dialogue between the church and the university, one that was vital to each of them. The university needed very much to have the challenge of the church to examine its presuppositions and its values. The charter of the university is its pursuit of truth, but the idolatries and partial faiths of business success, research prestige, national patriotism, and athletic prowess can weaken and corrupt the purposes of higher education. Besides these pressures from without, the university is threatened by pressures from within. There is the spirit of competition and fragmentation between disciplines and schools. There is an absence of the integration of learning. There is false detachment lurking in so called objective methodologies that exempts faculty from responsibility for the value and ethical implications of their teaching. The church has a mission to call the university to be faithful to its historic purpose, being what its name suggests, universities, whole truth. At the same time, the church is in need of the ministry of the university. The Biblical commandment is to love and to serve God not only with all of our heart and strength but also with all of our mind. The history of Christendom is overly marred by prejudice, narrowness, bigotry, blindness, and ignorance. Human pride is defensive, and it can be the motive for refusing to grow and to learn. Pride can distort God and faith by trying to limit truth to our preferences, to our experiences, and by denying the power of God to exceed our doctrines and our understanding. The critical power of thought established in the university is an essential challenger for the church to be on guard against a failure of mind.

The dialogue of faith and of learning is a calling for the responsible student or teacher. The true health of the community of faith and the true health of the community of learning require that they be free of each other in terms of power, but also they be closely conjoined with each other in terms of mutual influence and interpenetration. The church needs to be refreshed by new knowledge, and the work of learning needs to be preserved from imbalance or failure to serve the pursuit of truth and knowledge. John Henry Newman in his famous essay on THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY recognized that there were three communities standing in a triadic relation, the sacerdotium (the church), the imperium (the state), and the studium (the school). Today most of us would quickly think of ourselves as members of the state. A large but fewer number would think of themselves as members of the republic of letters. Still fewer would think of themselves as members of the community of faith and of love. Least of all are those who recognize the intimate connection between political justice, international peace, conservation of natural resources and this triad of communities.

One of the most crucial lessons of my life was learned in the conflicts of the free speech movement and the following movement to end the Vietnam war, as I worked as a campus minister in Berkeley, California. In both cases, it was the idealism of the students that drove the rest of us to see the fact that free speech on campus was being abridged and that our nation was wrongly involved in the war in Vietnam. Years before these issues became faced on a national scale, students were trying to tell us of the mistake we were making. The spirit of free inquiry and the power of the mind to be critical came alive in the student movement of the early 1960's. As the campus ministry became identified with the concerns of the students, we found ourselves regarded as outsiders by both church and

university until we were vindicated by the courts in upholding the rights of free speech and by the government in ending the war. The critical lesson was that at a crucial moment in world history, not just Berkeley history, the ministry of the church supported the students' pursuit of truth and of justice, and the students recognized the relevance of religious faith. Then there was a genuine dialogue of faith and of learning.

When I moved from campus ministry to college teaching, I thought of myself as still engaged in the continuing dialogue of the two communities. All of the things that I have taught from Introduction to Philosophy to Biology, Personality, and Culture have been aware of the tension between these two poles, the critical reason and the life of faith. To a large extent in the college, I find myself having to do mostly the critical task, the development of questioning, the raising of doubt in order that there may be room for that growth of mind and of person that has capacity for greater imagination, daring, and commitment. I do not use the class room to teach my beliefs, although I am aware that they will influence what I say. The purpose of teaching both philosophy and religion is to make it possible for each person to make a more thoughtful and informed choice for themselves by looking at the strength of many alternatives and answers.

In the time remaining, I want to reveal the three main themes of the dialogue that have engaged me and to disclose my beliefs on them. These are the key problems of my intellectual and religious life. They are the things that if I could teach and study for another fifty years that I would want to pursue.

The first theme is what I will call science and religion. It is common place to say that we live in an age of science, but we are poorly aware of what this has done to our convictions and to our behavior as humans. Since the beginning of the scientific revolution of the 16th century, our worldview has increasingly become mechanical and materialistic. The impact of the achievements of science has been to discredit religion and spiritual values and to establish in its place a new religion of science. Indeed Herbert Butterfield put this momentous transformation in perspective in his seminal book, THE ORIGINS OF MODERN SCIENCE:

"Since that revolution overturned the authority in science not only of the middle ages but of the ancient world - since it ended not in the eclipse of scholastic philosophy but in the destruction of Aristotelian physics - it outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and reformation to the rank of mere episodes, mere internal displacements, within the medieval system of Christendom. Since it changed the character of men's habitual mental operations even in the conduct of the non-material sciences, while transforming the whole diagram of the physical universe and the very texture of human life itself, it looms so large as the real origin both of the modern world and of the modern mentality that our customary periodisation of European history has become an anachronism and an encumbrance (pp. 7-8)."

The conflict between science and religion is not a conflict primarily between theories of nature. To think of the problem of science and of religion as a question about Genesis and geology or about literal or historical interpretation of the Bible is to trivialize the problem and to miss the most important part. The basic problem is that a mistaken understanding of science has taken hold of our

outlook awl taught us that the ,r_7'pory qualities of reality are the ones that can be measured and quantified and that the secondary qualities of life are the ones that cannot be measured, which happens to include both morality and religion. These distinctions were first made by Galileo when he said that shape, size, quantity and motion were the primary qualities which the scientist should seek to examine when he was inquiring into given bodies. Tastes, colors, sounds and smells were a matter of comparative indifference to him - they would not exist, he asserted, if human beings had not possessed noses, eyes, ears, and tongues. In other words, science was to confine its attention to those things which were capable of measurement and calculation. The distinctions became embedded in the philosophy of John Locke, the single most influential philosopher of the American revolution. The impact of this mechanistic outlook did not fully appear until this century when world wars, the attempt of Hitler to destroy a whole people, and the outburst of terroism and nihilism with the killing of innocent persons for the sake of killing alone.

Listen for a moment to the following excerpt from an ordinary paperback detective thriller and consider how commonplace such writing is for us:

This kid had come out of the midwest. A college kid, good family, money. He wanted to get into the theater, and his parents agreed to bankroll him for two years. So he came to New York, signed up for courses in acting school, began to make the rounds.

The freedom in the village in the 1960's almost literally exploded his mind. Drugs, sex, whatever he wanted. He couldn't handle it. Trying to reconstruct it later, the cops could nail some of it and guess the rest. The kid never did get hooked on the hard stuff, but he was dropping acid and bombed out of his gourd most of the time on pills and booze. He moved into a loft with five or six others, men and women. He was making everything that moved and being used the same way himself. He had to experience everything: that was the road to revelation and great art. After awhile, he couldn't even judge the quality of pleasures.

One night he strangled the young girl he was sodomizing. It could have been another man or child: that night it happened to be a woman. After they got him dried out and off the pills, they asked him why he had done it. He looked at them, puzzled. He didn't know. The victim was almost a stranger to him. It had just occurred to him to kill her, to experience that, and so he had done it. (The Second Deadly Sin, Lawrence Sanders, pp. 275-76.)

What is important here is not so much the obscene thoughts that involve our imagination but that such happenings have become common place and fulfill what Dostoevsky prophesied in the 19th century would happen to a culture that was no longer rooted in transcendent values. The death of God, saw Doestoevsky, was not in some atheist movement but the quiet triumph of a philosophy of knowledge that asserted that only what we can experience with our five senses is real. Such a view is what Hanah Arendt has called "the banality of evil". The appearance of a philosophy of strict empiricism does not seem to entail world wars, mass destruction, individuals rip amuck. Yet the groundswell is there in that outlook which has flooded our land with violence because it undermines the credibility of all invisible and higher ideals such as truth, justice, mercy, and love. If what is true is only what can be measured and weighed, then brute mass force, the power

of iron and of steel exploded into human flesh becomes the final arbiter of right and wrong.

It is at this point that Michael Polanyi became central to my dialogue of faith and of learning, of science and of religion. A victim himself of the brutality of Stalinism and of the anti-Semitism of Hitler, Polanyi turned gradually from his work in physical chemistry to social problems and to philosophy. Genius that he was, his University gave him nine years free of teaching duties to explore his insights and to develop his philosophy. What Polanyi found, and the implications of it that I see as revolutionary and fundamental to any hope for our future, is that science and religion, and all of the arts of knowing share a common ground. Despite the seeming distinctions between the ways of knowing in the arts and sciences there is a more basic structure of knowing shared by them all. Furthermore, the nature of this structure is like what in theology is called "faith" although it can be described in more neutral terms in what Polanyi called "personal knowledge" and "tacit knowing".

Working from his own experience as a scientist, and with an insight from Gestalt psychology, Polanyi demonstrated that objective scientific knowledge is not detached or totally objective; rather, scientific knowledge and all knowledge is bottom personal knowledge, that scientists, artists, and theologians all establish facts and meaning in the same way. He made his discovery by looking at how science works. He then took his insight and tried it in every field of knowledge that we have from the most abstract mathematics to practical skills and back to the arts, the social sciences, and religion. That role for religion is to show that, for most people, including theologians, have to discover what it means to live in a new conception of knowing after four centuries of critical doubt.

The complexity of a general theory of all human knowledge and its advantages over all over previous theories can hardly be explained here. But I should give some clues, because this work is a foundation for all the other work that I have done and would hope yet to do. We shall take a simple skill, a form of knowing, and by it illustrate a model of all human knowing. Consider for a moment a person playing a concerto on the piano. If the person performs well, her attention will be on the music as a whole, its harmony and rhythm, movement and tone, and expression and color all integrated into a single unity. But if the performer begins to focus on thoughts of which note she is playing, thoughts of which finger she should move next, thoughts of which beat she is now on, the performance will falter and may even stumble or disintegrate.

What we see in this elementary case is that in knowing how to play a piano well, we use two types of awareness. One awareness is very focal and explicit, the production of an accomplished piano recital. The other awareness is very subsidiary and implicit, the reliance upon a background of knowing, of learning in the particulars of music. In other words, to use the language of religion, the pianist has to have faith in her training and to apply it comprehensively in her attention on playing the concerto. To turn quickly to science, Einstein has to have faith in the whole apparatus of scientific tradition, equations, and terminology in order to turn his mind to pondering the possibility of the relativity of space and of time. Science, or any form of knowing, far from being any a-critical, detached, or uncommitted act, is a form of commitment trusting and relying upon a long tradition of understanding as well as immediate tools and skills for making fresh contact with the edges of knowledge.

Science and religion, each having distinctive and separate functions, should not be confused or merged. Nevertheless, they have a common ground for dialogue because of structure all human knowing, which leads to my second theme, theology and humanism.

I regard theology as an invention of the encounter of Christianity with Hebraic and Hellenistic thought. Theology has a central role in our own development as a civilization and will have in our future, if we survive. As I see it, theology; which is the intellectual interpretation of Christian faith so that we are helped in every age to live faithfully, is an agent of change. As indicated earlier, I think what we believe about the nature of the world affects the course of world events.

The first early uses of the word theology appear in the writings of Plato and of Aristotle. The word "theology" literally means the scientific study of God. But Plato and Aristotle were Greeks and did not mean the same thing by God that we do. In Plato's writings the term "theology" has two primary uses. The first usage is that theology is the telling of the stories of the gods of the Greek pantheon for the edification and upbuilding of youth. Plato's second usage is the search for rational understanding of these stories. Implicit in Plato's early usages is a basic conflict. On the one hand, the divine may be best understood through story and myth and is not subject to direct rational analysis. On the other hand, stories and myths are not clear and we need to state their meaning in a logical manner. When Aristotle succeeded Plato as the leading Greek philosopher, he moved the emphasis in theology to Plato's second usage and developed a complex science called metaphysics to investigate rationally the science of being and first principles. While Plato and Aristotle were expounding in the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ, the Hebrew prophets and priests had also developed language for ultimate reality. This way of talking about the divine was through story, myth, legend, and history. Its form is imaginative rather than rational analysis and nearer to Plato's first sense. This Hebraic record, we have in the Bible which narrates events, gives myths to explain primeval origins, recites the story of a covenanted people, and ultimate reality is disclosed through the way in which God is personified as the Lord of history appearing through a covenant with Israel. The Hebraic way of thinking about God provides strength for the second major element of human experience as later understood by theology, namely, that God cannot be named or objectified finally but only worshipped and obeyed.

Since Christianity began as a Jewish sect and Jesus was a Jew, Christianity is firmly rooted in the Biblical view of God as holy and beyond human understanding. But since Christianity also had to share its message in a Greek speaking and Greek thinking world, it had to adapt its message into Greek concepts and categories. Here was the marriage of the Hellenistic and the Hebraic that produced the discipline of theology that we have today. This theology has a bi-polar essence. On the Hebraic side, it asserts that the Holy God is hidden from us except where God has chosen to disclose the divine, and it asserts that this ultimate reality is known only in personal encounter, subject to subject, I-Thou. On the Hellenistic side, theology claims that the ways of God are rational and intelligible in the orders of thought and of nature. With what God has done in the divine revelations of history, the theologian can and must provide intelligent and clear understanding. Notice please, that theology was born in and always lives in a creative and dialectical tension. Because God is holy and transcendent, no theological statement can ever be a final or exhaustive statement. The task of theology is to keep alive the awareness of the divine activity in our life and

history.

With this tension in mind, let me quickly place the role of theology today in perspective. Surveying the whole of Christian thought from the first century until now, I think there are two monumental achievements of theology which determined the future of the world. One can get lost in the story of the doctrinal developments, but once you get inside them and see what was at stake, you realize that they were crucial for our liberation from slavery, monarchy, superstition, class oppression. Furthermore, these two achievements are crucial for the worldwide movement of liberation that now occurs for women, blacks, and underdeveloped countries.

These two achievements stem from the doctrine of the Trinity first made normative at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and in the doctrine of the two natures of Jesus at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. There may be, and I hope there are, new formulations ahead, but I see in retrospect the foundations for that humanism which is increasingly world wide. The great achievement of the doctrine of the Trinity was to make certain for Western civilization that we worship and serve not many gods but one God, not polytheism but monotheism. The impact of that Council which settled for all time the question of polytheism versus monotheism assured the continuing influence of our original Hebraic heritage and made it possible to move toward a world and a universe of unity. It took centuries for us to move to our modern secular world of science and technology here we easily accept a uniformity of natural law and of rationality throughout the planet, but our relief in this unity of order and the rationality of nature grew from our early Christian expectation that everything is under one ultimate power.

A second major implication of universalism was to follow from monotheism and this was settled at the Council of Chalcedon. Here the issue was how to talk about the divine and the human nature of Jesus. In one sense the issue was not dissolved, only resolved by stating that there were two natures in one person and one substance without confusion. The crucial issue at stake here was the divine involvement in the human predicament. The winning faction in this dispute was represented earlier in the theology of Athanasius, seen that unless God is fully involved in the human plight, we are deceived about salvation and without hope. That Athanasius said, was that God became human that we might become like God. In that affirmation, clarified at Chalcedon, was the decisive turn that Western civilization would follow its original Hebraic attitude that we are indeed the image of God. Worked out in the modern secular world, humanism has become the bearer of this earlier theological belief. As far as I can see, every liberation movement, every revolution for human justice is continuing commitment to the moral perfecting of the human self implicit in ethical monotheism. We have accepted for the whole human race an inexhaustible task, the growth and development of the highest human potential. Chalcedon was the final turning point in that commitment.

Quickly I must turn to my third and last theme of my dialogue of faith and of learning, which concerns the place of the Christian in a religiously pluralistic world. I have worked throughout on the premise that faith and learning are intrinsic to human existence. We are all, atheists or what not, people of faith because of the very nature of knowing. We are also all, ordinary citizen or Nobel scientist, learners, people of growing understanding because we are living in a dynamic and changing world. The time has come for the development of a true

ecumenical spirit of dialogue and of learning with the major religions of the world. We are no longer in the context of the early or the medieval Christian struggle with barbarism and polytheism. We are no longer in a struggle of missions versus darkness and ignorance. The entire world has moved in the 20th century to accept a civilization of science and of technology and to want the rights of human dignity and freedom. As much as we may disagree about the means towards these ends, we must acknowledge a common bond in the goals that are sought.

One of the greatest obstacles holding us back is an attitude of exclusivism within the Christian community. Hendrik Kraemer noted prophetically in 1958, twenty-two years ago, the problem that we have had thrust upon us in Iran in the past year. He said:

The present conditions and significance of the Muslim world as part of the present-day world as a whole have entered a new stage, the newness of which cannot easily be over-estimated. The current western evaluations and judgments about the Muslim world insofar as they are derived from the past, are therefore necessarily outmoded. The time of Christian missions in the Muslim world, as the organized determined effort for converting Muslims... is passed.

Few of us have any inkling of the association of Christianity with Western imperialism and its current hatred as an object of anti-Westernism. We notice mainly the political and economic reactions because these are more easily seen and more frequently reported in the news. But the religious history of humankind is making a monumental turn in this century, as well as the political and economic situations. The resurgence of vitality among Buddhists and Hindus as well as Jews and Muslims is an indication of a new stage in the whole history of world religions, of which Christianity is only a part. Our recent generation of great theologians, Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, are the last generation that can formulate a conceptual system that is religiously isolationist. The era of religious isolationism is as much at an end as political and economic isolationism. There have been so far two major intellectual impacts upon the Christian faith that have radically affected its conceptions. The first, as we have noticed, was Creel's philosophy. The second, as we have also noticed, was the modern scientific revolution. The third is now beginning in which a theologian must learn to "forget" out his or her position in that we are members of a world society in which other thinkers are equally intelligent, equally devout, equally moral, and equally creative as Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jews. The time has come to an end when we can think of our tradition as the true faith, others as superstition, our behavior as the good, others as unethical. The academic study of religion has shown that the faith of other peoples is not so different from ours as we were brought up to suppose.

must get over the notion that if Christianity is true, other religions must be false.

It is intolerable to be in the moral position that to enjoy God's presence is dependent upon other people's damnation. I think we can now see the moral absurdity of this position. Our next step will be a theological one of making a doctrine of other religions that respects and understands them as other ways of faith. Long ago, I heard of a very intense professor who always rushed into class and began lecturing immediately, because he felt he had so much to cover. In fact, he

tried so hard that his lectures were a constant flow of words until the very last moment when the class left. Rather than lose any time, he went as far as he could and sometimes ended in the middle of a sentence. So when he began his next lecture, he started immediately with where he had ended and...