

AND THERE WAS LIGHT

An address delivered by Richard Dirksen before  
the Governing Board, Faculty, Students and Parents of St.  
Albans School.

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Two scientists labored in adjacent laboratories for many years, each intent on his own experiment, and each convinced of his own infallible direction. Their frequent comparisons and evaluations of the work at hand led to just as frequent arguments and resulting cynical condemnations, each of the other's position. As years went by, each progressed favorably in his exploration, the one of the macrocosm and the other of the microcosm. It was on the very same day at the very same instant that the adjacent doors burst open, and the elated men met in the hall. Eureka! Excelsior! and Hallelujah! were exclaimed in unison, for one had finally managed a multi-trillion light-year look into space with his most powerful atomic-powered telescope, while at the same instant, the other had accomplished a decillionth-power electron-microscopic magnification of that narrow abyss into the heart of the smallest molecular particle. For the very first time, of course, they had seen each other eye to eye!

When one is asked to define and explain the influence exerted by the Cathedral upon the lives of our students -- our sons -- and to assess the values peculiar to their association with a Cathedral School, one is tempted with an immediate metaphorical cliché. How to begin: -- The school, St. Albans, secure in the shade of a vast Cathedral. ---"Under the Shadow of the Almighty...", "... Resting in the shadow..." "... Serene in the shade ..."--- the suggestion is eagerly examined. And yet, the obstinate geographical orientation of the Cathedral to St. Albans School mocks the metaphor. Unless the Sun should rise in the North, St. Albans will never be touched by a shadow of the Cathedral. Let us consider, then, the obvious alternative. If not shadow, why not light -- reflected



light. The stark, white light off the stones at noon day -- the softer, pink-paling light of the early evening or morning -- the shrouded, luminous quality of the misty, cloudy day -- the storm-sombre and serious cast of the early-dark afternoon light. Here is something which can be discerned, flowing over this most privileged school and illumining its daily life. But if, like the scientists, we are to see eye to eye, it will be necessary to look for the light on the inside of the student as well as the outside of the Cathedral.

"O Light Invisible, we praise Thee!" sings T. S. Eliot in a jubilant refrain in "The Rock"; and then goes on in that mighty tenth chorus to list and define the diverse, little gleamings which man thrusts out all around him in his dark, cluttered and uneasy world as he endeavors to find his individual path and make his progress toward the ultimate source of all light.

"We thank Thee for the lights that we have kindled,  
The light of altar and of sanctuary;  
Small lights of those who meditate at midnight  
And lights directed through the coloured panes of windows  
And light reflected from the polished stone,  
The gilded carven wood, the coloured fresco.  
Our gaze is submarine, our eyes look upward  
And see the light that fractures through unquiet water.  
We see the light but see not whence it comes.  
O Light Invisible, we glorify Thee!"

--- T. S. Eliot  
"The Rock",  
Chorus Ten

It is my contention that this progress toward light begins very early in life; that it is inherent, observable and defined in personality development; that it varies for each human being in the direction it may take; and finally, that this individual progress toward light is faster and farther-moving where examples of "glory" are abundantly manifest.

And so, we must first consider glory.

Driving in New York the other day, I had an opportunity to spend a little time on the site of the coming World's Fair. Pushing up out of that flat waste are buildings of all sizes, strange misshapen mushrooms, as yet un-landscape., unfinished, and most unlovely. Now visible is the huge orange atop the Florida Building -- the inevitable Sinclair Dinosaur hasn't changed a bit since '33 in Chicago -- and a pagoda with crushed automobiles hanging in it honors New York State. The mighty emblems of Ford and General Motors are emblazoned on palaces resembling pituitary malfunctions. Frigid facades and stilted set-backs, glazed with acres of brittle, virgin glass, all white-oxed and as yet unpolished, are being spewed up out of 600, pure-one-hundred-per-cent, All-American million-dollar bills. This will be said to "speak" of "our time".

I shall be there to hear it and to see it -- and I know that you will be also. The excitement of it in full swing, peopled and pulsing, will be enough to charge human batteries all the way back home to the television tube, where it can be witnessed again and again. But the remembrance of it will certainly be not of glory, nor will it recall much of beauty or truth, for all is hurriedly thrown together to provide a display case -- a vanity case if you will -- for man's most miraculous and temporary accomplishments. Our pride in our fair will be great, our self-admiration intense -- but what of awe and wonder can there be at that which is obsolete before completion, so swiftly does science now scan new ground -- what glory in fevered speculation upon the future? Who, of that horde of workmen, could care aught of so hasty a service in which his skill is temporarily and lavishly squandered?



Yet man's accomplishments are miraculous, glorious, and worthy of reverence. The extension of his legs to light-year boots in space -- the extension of his eyes and ears into ever-increasing macro- and microcosms -- the extension of his grip to crush old mountains, claw new rivers and fill small oceans --- and the ever-increasing dimension of his conscience and spirit --- are not all these miracles to equal a little water to much wine, or seven loaves and fishes to feed a multitude?

Yes! Put these accomplishments all together and consider them in the light of their glory; yes, and then speak of them with infinite care, with painstaking love, and with exacting elucidation ... with artfulness ... with skill ... and of their eternal mystery and through the voice of a Cathedral. For a Cathedral is the rare residue of man's spiritual distillations -- the essence of man's progress toward the Invisible Light. And to build one is to exact the meaning and arrest in time, a truth of his snail-like journey toward glory.

The Cathedrals, the great temples of all religions, are man's glorious expositions for all years. They eternally exhibit the minute manifestations of his progress toward light. They are the World's Fairs of his many faiths, and his one freedom ... his freedom to seek after Truth --- or search out the Invisible Light --- or love God --- say it as you must.

Do our sons attending here daily, or the thousands of students who visit here see and sense these things? Do they know there's a world's fair in the schoolyard? Well, the vocal ones tell us ... They write it in poems, in essays, in strange stories which appear in school literary magazines. They paint it in water and oil. They write to former masters,



stumbling to express what the contact meant. But we see others of them at casual times around the Close, boys and girls unaware of observance, looking at it longingly in one of those lonely moments of adolescence.

In "Winesburg, Ohio", Sherwood Anderson writes of young George Willard:

"... There is a time in the life of every boy when he for the first time takes the backward view of life. Perhaps that is the moment when he crosses the line into manhood. The boy is walking through the street of his town. He is thinking of the future and of the figure he will cut in the world. Ambitions and regrets awake within him. Suddenly something happens; he stops under a tree and waits as for a voice calling his name. Ghosts of old things creep into his consciousness; the voices outside of himself whisper a message concerning the limitations of life. From being quite sure of himself and his future he becomes not at all sure. If he be an imaginative boy a door is torn open and for the first time he looks out upon the world, seeing, as though they marched in procession before him, the countless figures of men who before his time have come out of nothingness into the world, lived their lives and again disappeared into nothingness. The sadness of sophistication has come to the boy. With a little gasp he sees himself as merely a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village. He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellows he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun. He shivers and looks eagerly about. The eighteen years he has lived seem but a moment, a breathing space in the long march of humanity. Already he hears death calling to him."

.... "Winesburg, Ohio"  
by Sherwood Anderson

Picture if you will a boy or a girl in this so-known-to-all-of-us state of mind, looking eagerly about, and over that shivering shoulder -- seeing a Cathedral!

No boy can move to a class or look out of a window in this school without being consciously or sub-consciously aware of the presence of such light. His eyes, as do the eyes of all who walk the Close, continuously turn upwards, for the Cathedral reflects a sea of distilled lights from a thousand facets, lovingly conceived and keenly executed. A million



color-lighting fragments of most carefully fired glass, selected to define miracles and aspirations; the so-delicately-polished light-lines of a statue to delineate lives or parables. Is the boy aware of the carving to go on a pinnacle 200 feet high? -- the skilled and proud carver saying, "Feel up in there behind, and you see I have cut perfectly the back side of the tree branches." Does the boy know of the molding, changed  $5/8$  of an inch that the shadow-line might be made more perfect to an architect's caring eye? Is he aware of the millions of hours of time given by thousands of people to this enormous perpetuation of man's finely created praise? Those light-reflecting limestone pinnacles constantly remind of the glory of reverent and determined dedication, and of the uncompromising quest for perfection, but can the outward, visible signs be translated into any grace in the young? Let us look to them, and how they are developing.

In a remarkable little book titled "Becoming", by Gordon Allport, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, we find a summing-up of the stages of "becoming". He concludes that two major forces are constantly in action and ideally in balance -- tribalism and individuation. The first, tribalism, is affectional relationships with family, which lead to conventional and stereotyped conduct. The second, individuation -- a search for freedom -- is the expression of how we reach beyond the mores of our tribes, shaping ourselves over and above the conventions. For instance, the observable tantrums in young children represent the impulse to resist maternal, tribal demands. Thus do they express the assertion of a free self. The concluding sentence of this essay is pertinent, and I quote: "All his life long this being will be attempting to reconcile these two modes of becoming, the tribal and the personal; the one that

makes him into a mirror, and the other that lights the lamp of individuality within."

Compare this to Sherwood Anderson's thought as George Willard and Helen White, two lonely adolescents, climb in the late evening after the fair, up to the top of the decaying and now deserted grandstand in Winesburg, Ohio: "In youth there are always two forces fighting in people. The warm, unthinking little animal struggles against the thing that reflects and remembers." Here we have the scholar-scientist and the artist saying exactly the same thing -- but an added dimension is present in the latter. The scholar delineates, but the artist illumines.

Within and around the Cathedral are the reflections of myriad such illuminations, not only in the fabric, but in the illuminations of lives; the lessons in living, in dedication and sacrifice, the eternal striving for perfection, and the benefactions of those many who served faithfully and well. Of these, a Cathedral offers abundant and exemplary examples. The numberless personality openings represented by a young, "becoming person, are really his spiritual pores, all-absorbing in the young. Daily exposed to the proximity of the Cathedral's light and glory, they are advantaged in discernable and effectual ways. In attitude, and style-of-life, and in discipline and demeanor, the constantly reflected light of a living Cathedral is kindling those interior lights of individuality within the progressing young. The sure effects are being felt, and not for a moment would we care to predict in what directions they might illumine any one of them.

Isn't it conceivable that a given combination of the early-acquired patterns of behaviour, coupled with the individuation - the search for freedom - might well produce enlightened sinners as well as Saints? Of course -



and agnostics and atheists as well as humanists and deists. Even with the aid of glory and in light, the progress of each man toward the Light Invisible is slow and oftentimes uncertain on his solitary and tortuous path.

But a Cathedral presents and re-presents. Specifically, it opens doors into many individual progresses toward light and provides the record of past aspirations. It sings of the glory and the light through the thirty choir and forty glee club boys. It reveals it to the Cathedral Servers in those daily, early-morning services, and to all of our students in services throughout the year. It can ring it out on bells in generations ahead through eager, disciplined, rope-wielding hands of St. Albans' boys. These are all of some importance. But the ethos -- the characteristic spirit which bathes, which surrounds a community -- in that which we know as its glory lies the Cathedral's immeasurable revelation to our children -- to we children.

There is no shade, no hiding place around a Cathedral. As the reflector of a great telescope gathers light from galaxies of stars, so does a great temple gather the light of millions of man's individual progresses toward many truths, reflecting and focusing them into a single piercing image. As the tiny, burning eye of the microscope sees ever closer to the very heart of the invisible and unknown, so does a young man search himself out in a slow, halting progress toward an Invisible Light. His growth towards free and illumined personality is influenced by many things in countless ways; but the everlasting examples of glory, memorials to millions of small spiritual achievements as reflected in the light of a Cathedral, can be only for the greatest measureable good.

In the words of Eliot, "When we have built an altar to the Invisible Light, we may set thereon the little lights for which our bodily vision

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is made."

And now I conclude with this: When there is enough light --  
then shall we see eye to eye.

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