

Passing The Flame

Cathedral Age Fall 1990

EDITOR'S NOTE: One hundred and thirty years of Cathedral experience come together in the persons of Canons Charles Martin, R. Wayne Dirksen and Richard T. Feller. As the completion and consecration of the Cathedral came into view, these three "bearers

of the tradition" sat with the Chapter to pass along what they felt should be known by those who would come after them. The following is excerpted from those lengthy conversations.

FELLER

The first tradition that I think we have here, and it's one that I inherited—and it's been so strong—is a tradition of excellence. Excellence in architecture, excellence in art, excellence in liturgy, music, conferences, whatever we do. That's a tradition that I think should be carried on. It was handed to me with great seriousness, and I would like to recommend that in whatever is done that tradition be carried on. Satterlee said, "To do a thing perfectly and to do it to God" (or some words to that effect), and that's what we try to carry on.

MARTIN

The first thing for us all is to have a vision which is large, demanding and exacting, ever expanding, and ever related to the real, ever-changing world.

Bishop Satterlee came here and saw a great Cathedral which would hold high, in the capital of the nation, the values of the nation and the values of the church. To see what he did in this then-southern town and to have Congress pass a resolution creating a national cathedral would today be impossible!

But the bishop had a vision and held to it. For example, in picking the current location for the Cathedral—the Chapter as a whole was completely against it because it was so far out in the country that they thought nobody would possibly come to it. Remember these were the days of horses and buggies. But the bishop chose the greatest location the Cathedral could have in this city or perhaps in any city; the highest spot overlooking the Capitol and the city as a whole. And he stuck to it. They had the vision and the commitment to hold to it.

DIRKSEN

Isaiah begins Chapter 56 with "Thus says the Lord. Keep justice and do righteousness for my salvation will come and my deliverance will be revealed. . . ." Then he goes on to say for all who believe in Him, His promise is to bring to His holy mountain all who keep the Sabbath and hold fast the covenant, and to make them joyful and to accept their gifts at His altar. And then the Lord reveals the name of His house when He says, "For my house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples."

The earlier builders adopted this as the motto—dared use it to describe the Cathedral Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, but used "people" singular instead of "peoples." I've thought a lot about this, and I think it's too bad [that they chose the singular

form]. Especially in these latter years of greatly heightened political and social and religious awareness. Mark uses the word "nations" when quoting this, and how mightily inclusive of our native Americans it would be if we used that word. It would also be powerfully specific in identifying the present constituency of the Anglican Communion.

Luke has Jesus saying to those who sold in the Temple, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it into a den of robbers." By this Jesus meant, I think, not just money changers, but robbers of faith and despoilers of spirit, and despoilers of the vision.

Is this perhaps a prophetic warning for the Cathedral? And for all churches? It seems to be a broad and maybe eternal warning. What is to be avoided? The despoiling of God's house. If it becomes corrupted, it will be taken notice of.

A house that is built on a hill cannot be hid, and "in my Father's house are many mansions." There are all sorts of spaces that are in this building. This house is The House. God's House. "I am Alpha and Omega," claims the house. It is the prophecy in stone. This house will not reinforce rhetoric nor tolerate the artificial or pretentious, the unlovely or unloving. None of those will His house tolerate.

MARTIN

In terms of "a house of prayer for all people," the Cathedral has made, through its leaders, an effort to bring together religious faith which has carried on through the years and rendered a real service.

The fact that it is such a house for all brings an enormous number of visitors to the Cathedral. You have people of all faiths coming and going away impressed with that which is built.

As to the building of this Cathedral: it wasn't any easy decision to make a decision on the nature of the architecture. Gothic is great architecture, but during the liturgical revival they were attempting to bring in corporate worship and saying "the altar way up there is remote from the congregation and doesn't have any meaning. You ought to rethink and redesign the whole doggone Cathedral and get your altar out in the center of people where they can join in and participate!"

It was seriously considered. Bishop Dun brought it before the Chapter and the Building Committee, and it was rejected. But on the other hand it brought about the placement of the Sunday morning altar to

where it presently is—out in the Crossing.

Magnificent as the Cathedral building is, it must, from my point of view, be used creatively and imaginatively in its worship.

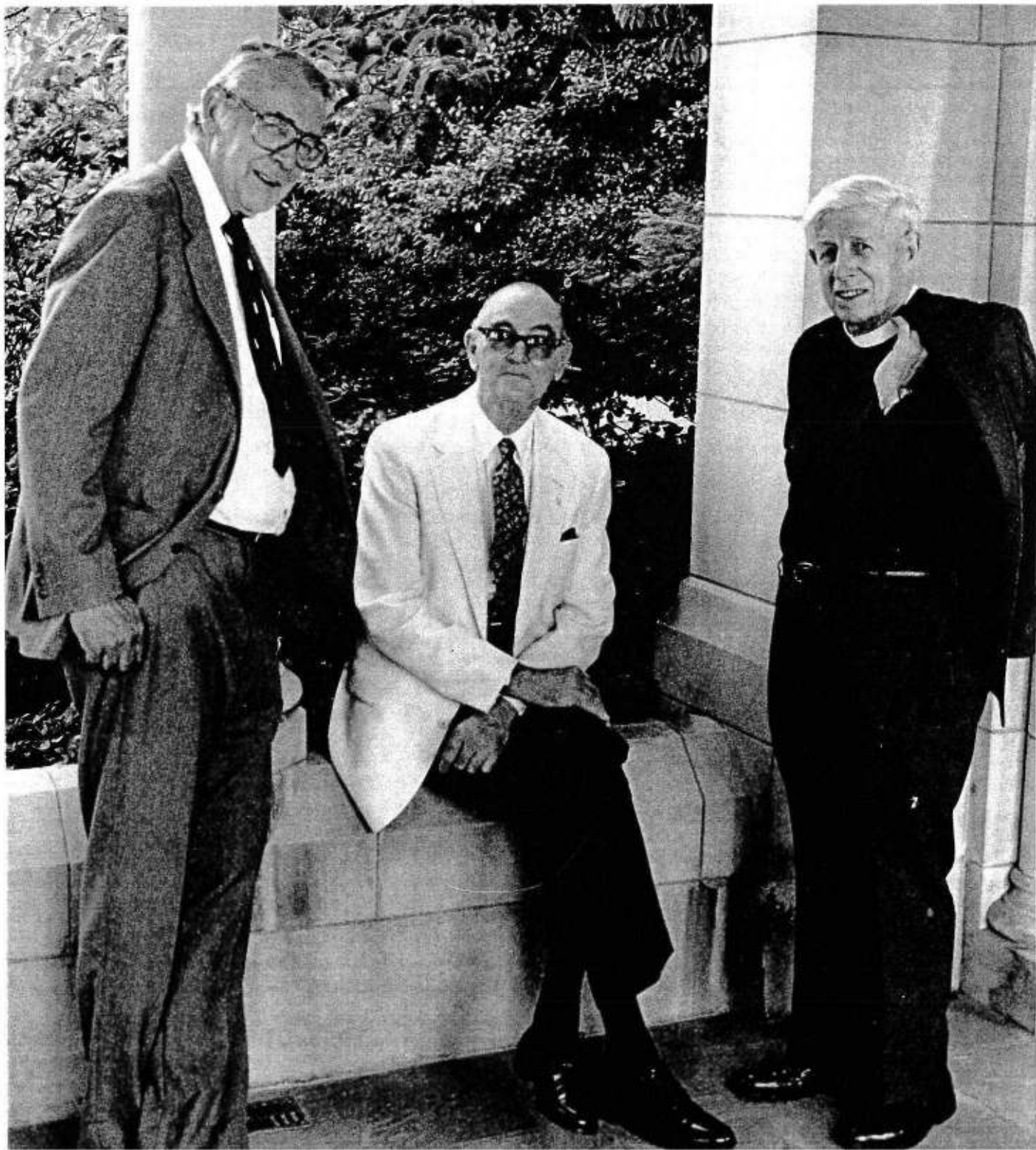
DIRKSEN

Worship in the Cathedral is distinguished most by its quality. Much prayerful thought and concentrated attention to well-prepared detail is given to it. It is faithful to our book. In the preparation and selection of music it is faithful to a long tradition, while equally promoting the best that new creators are of-

fering to God. The preaching is carefully prepared and faithful to the Word. This has been consistently so since its beginning.

This is provided for the faithful of all denominations, not only on Sunday but during the week. Nothing we do now permits a dissembling for popular appeal, for to do so would despoil the offering presented. What the Cathedral's larger mission requires, however, is yet to be met: regular opportunity for the traditions of *other* worshippers to be offered by those who would and could make the best of offerings, not

Three voices of Cathedral history: Canons R. Wayne Dirksen, Richard T. Feller and Charles Martin.



the occasional, but as a part of the weekly rota of services.

Not to be crowded in among other services, and thereby diminished in comparisons of attendance or attention paid, but a rota developed and staffed for the Cathedral, and with the financial and liturgical support of the Cathedral. It should not replace what we do well. Rather it would enhance and broaden our whole offering to Him in His house for all the believing and all the faithful—foreigners as well as us.

It is not a parish mission we would supplant; but that is where it would have to begin. I would like to see that all, who in any parish have a special offering of prayer and praise to make in their tradition, find a place and a time set aside regularly to make it in the Cathedral. The Cathedral's mission is to promote the Word.

FELLER

We need to continue as a true cathedral, not as a parish church. To make it a true cathedral, and I believe we may be the only true cathedral in America, I urge that we continue it as a true cathedral, without Cathedral membership. The truth is that the National Cathedral Association are the members of this Cathedral.

And we need a continuation of our tradition of strong lay leadership. Lay leadership was started in this Cathedral by Charles Carroll Glover in the 1890s. Through his leadership other strong leaders were endorsed and it has continued. This Cathedral has never been dominated by the ecclesiastics as many churches and cathedrals are.

And along with that goes the tradition of integrity; especially integrity with regard to large gifts. There is no doubt that there are at least two kinds of donors who come to us. There are the donors who wish to return to God something that was given to them. The other kind of donors are those who come and want to give a gift for their own enhancement and for their own name. What I'm recommending, is to be careful of the second type of donor. Don't take a large gift and sell your soul for it. Don't take a gift with too many strings attached.

DIRKSEN

Mission—how many committees have studied the mission of this Cathedral? I cannot begin to tell you. What is the Cathedral's mission in this age? Promotion. Promotion of religion, promotion of education, promotion of charity, of loving kindness, of attention, of compassion.

Many other institutions or organizations are like the Cathedral when you come down to it. Colleges, universities, think-tanks. All of them can do this conference type of thing, but none of them can do it with what is carried in the tenor, in the tone, in the name of that stone bible. None of them can do it amidst all of that eternity and glorious history that surrounds us and moves us and frames us.

Our mission is right there. It is all of those things. It is the broadest mission you can possibly make. If you make it authentically, and you do it perfectly,

and if you put it in the framework of what we are taught by God's great promise to us as exemplified in the building, then that will be the mission of the Cathedral.

MARTIN

This is a national cathedral that can speak of the values which it stands for to the nation as a whole, to the people in government, to the authorities that are here, and to all of the varied life that is in the capital and the nation.

A tension which has been real, is [the Cathedral's] relation to the diocese as a whole. It is a cathedral of the diocese. The Cathedral has done much imaginatively in trying to bring together and to lessen that tension. Yes, the Cathedral must be ever seeking to minister to the diocese of Washington, but to the ever changing world which is its diocese as well.

I was for twenty-seven years a headmaster of a school on these grounds. There are enormous resources here in the schools which the Cathedral must nurture, and for which it must be grateful. First, there are roughly 1200-1500 students, and their parents.

Then, there are several thousand alumni who have been nurtured in the life of the Cathedral, and among them some of the leaders of the nation. That richness must be nourished, recognized and brought into the total life of the Cathedral.

This is the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul. St. Peter was an impetuous cuss, he often failed to exercise good judgment—at a critical moment, when Our Lord was being crucified, he denied him, he didn't have the courage. He also often made judgments which were obviously not too wise, yet he did have a remarkable position among the apostles and still does. He had a depth of commitment, he had an understanding of the Teacher's view of life, that ultimately enabled him to give his life, both physically and in the work he did, and in martyrdom. I believe that we don't ask enough of each other. We ask too little of each other rather than too much.

St. Paul, ye gods, he was to the right of good Senator Helms in his presentations! Then he saw the weakness of his point of view, his understanding, and he was converted.

I've always distrusted a little bit people who are converted and who change radically from one position to another, but I read 13th Corinthians—and what understanding this man had, what gifts he had. What I'm saying is that St. Peter and St. Paul were human beings, and with a new bishop—well he will be human and have weaknesses and it will be our responsibility as Chapter to have understanding, sympathy, and to help him to hold up his hands, and above all to have imagination to be able to see the opportunities here.

A cathedral lifted high on a hill in the capital of what is still the greatest nation in the world. Here is an opportunity and a responsibility. ■