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The Pursuit of Wisdom

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"So I directed them to their teacher, the grace of God, and showed them the sufficiency of it, which would teach them how to live . . ."

Journal, George Fox, 1663

The Pursuit Of Wisdom

BY DONALD MCNICHOLS, DEAN*

A Baccalaureate service has come to be a formal setting in which a final moral injunction is delivered to the graduating class. In this instance I am deeply appreciative of the honor which is mine, yet fearful of its terrifying responsibility. I am very much interested in you, the class of 1953. Most of you have been in some of my classes during the past three years; it has been my privilege to be your class adviser during this, your senior year, and these number among the reasons why I speak in this Baccalaureate hour with a personal interest in each one of you. Consequently, I have chosen to consider this most important challenge to pursue wisdom.

Matthew 13:53-56 relates an account of Jesus' return to his native community after having been acclaimed highly in an adjoining area. These people could not understand how Jesus, who was reared in the carpenter shop and among themselves, could possibly have acquired the necessary wisdom that he demonstrated. This attitude is very common yet today; it is the error of misinterpreting formal learning as wisdom.

This challenge is appropriate because educational effort is too detached from ultimate goals. During this century in

*"The Pursuit of Wisdom" was the sermon delivered by Mr. McNichols at the George Fox College Baccalaureate service May 31, 1953.

particular it has become only instrumental to earning power. With attention thus diverted almost completely away from all phases of life except the technological, little has remained in it that seeks to develop man's spirit. Education needs a new charge of purposefulness; it must awaken to its full responsibility. It must teach men how to live. Too much of the time education in general has been interested in only one item, namely, knowledge, assuming this to be wisdom.

My contention in this regard is supported by the Association of American Colleges in its *Bulletin* for March of this year, in which is quoted the words of Horace Mann who wrote in 1834:

Let the common school be extended to its full capability and nine-tenths of crime and lawlessness will become obsolete. Man will walk more safely by day and every pillow will be inviolate by night. Property, life and character will be held by a stronger tenure.

The author of the *Bulletin* article concluded, "Two world wars and their aftermaths have completely shattered such a point of view."

Men usually think of wisdom as a special endowment or talent, thus if in their own opinion they do not possess it, no effort is made to improve their condition. Let us try to determine what it is. One writer declared wisdom to be an "image of God." He said that it came to men with "holy souls." Further he stated, "She maketh men friends of God," and is "beheld of them that love her, and found of them that seek her." A contemporary speaker stated that wisdom, "implies the highest exercise of all the facilities of the moral nature as well as of the intellect." Stated more specifically, wisdom is, "the ability to judge soundly and deal sagaciously with facts especially as they are related to conduct."

My chief interest in these moments is to synthesize the elements of college training so that you as graduates will know what equipment you now possess in this pursuit. Your four years of college should have provided you with three important steps toward wisdom:

First, you should have developed the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. The daily chapel services, the

opportunity to witness "the creative wisdom of the individual." This is the path which your pursuit must follow now; namely, the development and utilization of your creative ability. The successful solution to any problem requires creativity, and one must focus his keenest attention when meeting life's problems in order to grasp the real issues involved. One must learn to suspend judgment until the relevant circumstances have been sifted and considered.

At George Fox College we attempt to conserve and disseminate knowledge; we also seek to aid the student in developing his inner spirit to the voice of God. When God speaks to the individual it is "deep sounding unto deep," for He speaks to the depths of one's total being, the experience is antiphonal.

I believe the true pursuit of wisdom is to follow these words from the philosopher George Santayana:

O world, thou choosest not the better part!
It is not wisdom to be only wise,
And on the inward vision close the eyes,
But it is wisdom to believe the heart . . .
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine.

Journal's First Year Complete

With the next issue of the George Fox College *Journal*, we begin our second year of publication. During this first year we have attempted to bring to our readers articles pertinent to education especially related to our own college. Many fine comments from readers have been most encouraging to us. Naturally, we want our list of readers to grow. Perhaps you are acquainted with someone who would enjoy receiving the *Journal* regularly. If so, please send his name and full address to the Office of Public Relations and he will be added to the mailing list to receive the *Journal* free-of-charge. Thank you!

you have come to know characteristics of energy, from Chemistry you have learned about basic elements, and from Biology something of structures and functions of biological life. Yet the basic tool from these studies is of more importance, I refer to knowing how to approach a problem in order to solve it. Dr. Northrop, the mathematician and scientist, declared that the correct approach to solving a problem "is like a ship leaving port for a distant destination. A very slight erroneous deviation in taking one's bearings at the beginning may result in entirely missing one's mark at the end . . ." He stated further, "There are many reasons for believing that perhaps more than anywhere else it is at the beginning of any investigation that the source of genius is to be found."

All of life seems to be solving one problem after another. If one can some way grasp this tool, that of properly analyzing the problem, its solution is quite sure to follow. To me, this is a very significant step in this great pursuit.

Now it seems that as graduates you are about to take a fourth step in obtaining wisdom, but before taking it, will you try with me to stand upon a promontory and survey in one great sweep of the eye a perspective of what is formal education? What is it more than a situation for acquainting youth with man's major discoveries and equipping them with a combination of specialized methods for exploring our world? It can at best only direct you to the fruitful methods of investigation. If you can make use of these tools and the data to serve God and mankind—you will be acting wisely.

What I am trying to say is that wisdom is found as we are able to apply our knowledge and use our minds and consciences to live better. When knowledge is applied to improve life, this is its proper and wise use.

At this point I feel like Virgil, Dante's guide to Paradise. He led Dante along so far, then pointed out the way. I am attempting to point the way, but you like the Florentine poet will have to go alone.

In every situation in which wisdom operates there is an

Wednesday night prayer meetings, dormitory prayer bands, special evangelistic services, and individual counselling with staff members have all directed your attention to reverence toward God. Why is this the first step toward wisdom? It is because reverence toward God gives one perspective of his own insufficiency. Regardless of your future attainments, remember that humility toward God and man is the only frame of mind that can lead you to wisdom and understanding.

Second, all of you have been required to take courses in the Arts, and the Arts should have given you at least one clear mental attitude, that of resilience of imagination. This total contribution of the Arts to the individual is so well expressed in the words of Mr. Morgan in his *Liberties of the Mind*, that I wish to quote him. In this statement he was writing of the British people during the recent war:

It was as if the minds of the British People had begun to stiffen, to congeal, into two clots of opinion, as if we had begun to lose our independence of judgment, our resilience of imagination, our power to refer each new problem, not to some rigid rule, but to our own consciences, our own sense of compassionate justice. It is the radical principle of all totalitarian systems to freeze imagination. It is the radical principle of art to enable men and women to think and imagine for themselves.

Why do you study Rembrandt in art rather than modern cover illustrators? Why does the music department teach Bach instead of composers of popular music? Why, in literature, have you been required to read Milton and not the writers of western pulp magazines? It is because true art, regardless of its form, brings you near to reality, thus freeing your spirit to soar. We express ourselves so well in the religious realm through singing and art, for these bring both the *mind and spirit* into performance. Both of these are necessary if we are to discover wisdom.

Third, from the sciences you should have learned something of "the initiation of inquiry." It is true that a certain body of information has been obtained also. From Physics

CALENDAR

Opening of 1953-54 School Year

- September 11—Dormitories open for Freshmen.
Beginning of Freshmen Orientation.
- 13—Special Church Service for Freshmen
- 14—Freshmen Orientation continues.
- 15—Registration for all Classes.
8:00 p. m., Student Body Mixer.
- 16—8:00 a. m., Classes Convene.
6:45 p. m., First Student Christian
Union Prayer Meeting.
- 17—7:30 p. m., Coeds' Big and Little
Sister Party; Mixer for Men.
- 18—8:00 p. m., Faculty Reception in Honor
of New Students.
- October 5 - 9—Christian Emphasis Week.
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