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The Style and the Mission

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Today I set out on an adventure. I invite you to come along. The adventure is the Easter quarter experiment. It's called "Style of Life in God: Mission in Community." My assignment this morning is to introduce the style and the mission. Let's be frank: my task is to motivate you to participate. The result I hope to achieve by this address is to elicit from you a commitment to take part in the experiment. I am happy for the assignment. I intend to participate and hope you will, too.

Why? Why participate? The very asking of the question shows that my task isn't easy; commitment won't be automatic. I would have a much easier time if my invitation to you asked you to join me in a night out on the town. I assume that more than a few of you are asking why you should participate in the experiment. That's not strange. A body at rest tends to stay at rest, according to the law of inertia. Any effort to overcome inertia meets with resistance. The experiment asks you to become involved in an activity in which you are now not participating. The result? Resistance—maybe even resentment. Okay, that's the way it is. After all, we're human. What's more, we're from Missouri; we've got to be shown. You need good reasons for participating. I'll try to deliver those to you.

There's another, more serious, barrier to participation. And that's true for faculty as well as students. Your preconceptions and prejudices can get in the way of the

experiment. Maybe you're prejudiced for the experiment; you're convinced that an emphasis on spirituality is just what we need around here, because you've discovered the one sartorial pattern of spirituality with which to clothe us all. Maybe you're prejudiced against the experiment; no matter how many words you read about it, they all spell worship, because you assume the experiment is the latest brainchild of the seminary's worship boys. There's the prejudice that the experiment is working with an old assumption of spirituality which our modern-man-come-of-age has outgrown; today's emphasis should be on action, not introspection. There's also the assumption that the experiment has a hidden agenda: "They're not telling us everything. What are they really up to?" I can't blame people for asking about hidden agendas. I've had enough conversations with people which rambled on for quite a while before I finally realized what was really wanted of me. So it's hard to believe when the Sealantic Committee says, "There are no hidden agendas. There is no ulterior purpose. We're not out to manipulate you. We mean it: we want you to join together in mission in community so that we can help one another discover what our style of life in God should be." Well, how about it? Let's lay our preconceptions and prejudices out in the open and label them for what they are. Then perhaps we can open up our minds to listen and our hearts to hear. And maybe you'll be open enough

to hear a few things I want to say to you today.

I find that there is a much more serious obstacle to participation in the experiment. It's summed up in the question: "Who needs it?" After all, we already have plenty of opportunity to do what the experiment wants us to do. We have daily chapel, and we can go to matins, vespers, and compline to boot, if we want to. We own Bibles galore—in the original, no less—and we have plenty of provocation to read the Sacred Writings. We can pray when we want to. We had the chance to sign up for share groups. True, brothers. But many of us don't take advantage of the opportunities open to us to worship, to pray, to commune. We're all too professional in our handling of the Scriptures. Many of us are not interested in the give and take of share groups, and it's not because we are sharing our faith and life outside of share groups. A District president wrote me recently to point out that almost half of the 18 seminary graduates who recently entered his District wanted nothing to do with evangelistic efforts involving personal witness. It's true, isn't it, that there's more than a little gap between our profession and our performance and that members of the seminary community engage in activities that are not worthy of followers of Jesus Christ? How long will it take before it can be reported of us as of another mainline Christian denomination that the majority of

clergy no longer pray except in the conduct of public worship?

Perhaps you're responding, "Okay! Things aren't what they should be. But remember, participation in worship, even right conduct, is no guarantee of spirituality. And you can't ever pressure people into devotion. Anyway, what does the Easter quarter experiment have to do with the academic program of the seminary? We come here for an education." I'll deal with the relation of the experiment to the seminary's purpose in a few moments. Though you can't pressure people into devotion, discipline can have something to do with spiritual development. I agree that saying prayers and going to Communion and doing good do not necessarily indicate the presence of spirituality. But from the beginning genuine spirituality has expressed itself in corporate worship, private meditation and prayer, interpersonal witness, and deeds of love and goodness. And when people feel no need for these activities, the warning bells are ringing. Shall we ignore the warning of the onset of death? People who prefer a wonderbread of their own to the Bread come down from heaven are so starved they no longer feel it. People who sense no need for personal spiritual growth are like the man who is so frozen he no longer knows he is.

I'd like to share a prayer with you:

OF THE KINGDOM WITHIN

O Mystery without origin or end,
O Blessed Trinity, One God,
Have mercy upon us.

That dreadful night, that season of the dark
When savage man, deserted by the sun,

Snatched at the trees and tore them from the ground,
With rites of death to bring spring's bright return.

That bleak winter of man's mind,
When all the world,
The stars, the moon, the fields, the hills, the seas,
The floods, the storms, the noise of nature
Made a thousand gods,

That time of futile sacrifice dissolved
Into Perpetual Light
When You were born.
Lord, lead us to the Kingdom of God within.

And yet,
Today we seek those thousand gods again.
We turn our backs upon Your blinding light,
And use our brains to rearrange the world,
In primitive belief that new research,
Worshipped as though it were a golden bough,
Will save us from the need to change ourselves.
Lord, lead us to the Kingdom of God within.

We do not wish to change ourselves at all.
Our thralldom to our egos suits us well.
Preserved and strengthend by our cowardice,
Our egos teach us how we may avoid
The lonely freedom of Your discipline.
Lord, lead us to the Kingdom of God within.

Eternity, unsought, untouched, unloved,
Stretches around us, while we try to run
Into some new dimension, made by man,
Of captured particles from outer space.
Civilization has produced a bomb
Whose chain reaction fulfills ancient dreams,
And brings the power of solar energy
To man's command. Our destiny is clear:
Either we engage You one by one,
Or blow ourselves into a pagan sun.
Lord, lead us to the Kingdom of God within.

O Christ, this gift of Kingdom
God gave us with Your birth,
We pray to find it whole
And not in ruins,
Destroyed as by a child,
Impetuously,
To find it as a fortress

From which the soul,
The mind, the body,
Set forth to do Your will.
*Lord, lead us to the Kingdom of God within.*¹

Seeking the gift of God's kingdom—that's what "Style of Life in God" means to me. I have to share one of my prejudices with you. I'm not too keen on the phrase "Style of Life in God." That's not because it isn't useful but because I have a thing about using clichés. A few years ago I noticed everybody talking about "style of life" and decided I never would, just as I religiously refused to use "existential" when that was the key adjective 10 and 15 years ago. But here I am talking about "Style of Life"—in God, yet. Maybe the phrase communicates to you without explanation. But with my prejudice exposed and my mind therefore more ready to listen, let me tell you what I think it's about. It's about what we do in our relation to God. It's about seeking first God's kingdom—for ourselves. It includes more than worship or prayer or good works. It's about what we used to call sanctification until we took that word to the cleaners so often we shrunk it to mean "doing good." It's about what we used to call spirituality until we let people take the flesh and blood out of being spiritual and limit spirituality to the functions of a dehumanized soul. St. Paul is talking about "Style of Life in God" when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ, who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Saint John is talking about it when he says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," and then spells out the implications of that

sonship. "Style of Life in God" is everything that's involved in "walking in the Spirit."

As you can see, the Easter quarter experiment has to do with what is essential to our life as Christians: our relation to God and how we live out that relation. We sang about it in the opening hymn:

Come down, O Love divine,
Seek thou this soul of mine,
And visit it with thine own ardor glowing.
O Comforter, draw near,
Within my heart appear,
And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

You can't limit the Christian life to moral, ethical, or philosophical dimensions. At its center is God and the reality of communion with Him.

Not only our relation to God but growth in our relation to Him is essential. Professor George Hoyer has already announced the text for the Easter quarter experiment, "Brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. . . . For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:1, 3). We are destined "to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15). We are to keep on growing until we attain "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). No matter how long we've been at it, we haven't got it made. Some of you have finished *Worship I*, and so you know a little bit about worship. There's more to learn. How long have you been

¹ Kay Smallried, *Spilled Milk: Litanies for Living* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 23—24. Used by permission.

praying—20 years, 40, 60? Have you reached the prayer maturity of a St. Paul or a Martin Luther, not to speak of a certain Jesus of Nazareth? "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." In what sort of abundance are these fruits falling from the tree of your life? In your relations with others, how much of an instrument are you for God to touch the lives of others? I suspect there might be some possibility for growth in that area for some of us.

Growth can be cultivated. Of course God's Spirit is like the wind that blows where it wills. We can't expect to command God's Spirit to do our bidding. But God has promised to hear our prayers. Through the waters of Baptism He has initiated us into a life of growth. He has given us Good News to speak to bring His power for salvation to bear on our lives. Through His inspired spokesman He invites us, "Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). He has supplied us with a holy meal and invites us to it: "My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him" (John 6:55-56). There are means of grace that enable us to grow in sanctification, spirituality, relation to God. And there are means to the means—some old, some new—which we can use to grow to maturity as children of God. The Easter quarter experiment, as I understand it, is designed to help us get at the process of spiritual growth and to get with the means to God's own means for cultivating growth in our lives.

I said earlier that I would deal with the

question of the relation of the Easter quarter experiment to the purpose of the seminary. Developing a "Style of Life in God" is very much the business of this seminary because it is the business of the pastoral ministry. The major task of ministry is to bring people into communion with God and to help them grow in their relation to Him. In our time we have come to a renewed appreciation for the social dimension of Christian teaching and rightly stress the importance of deeds of love and service to a world in need. The clergy have to be right in the middle of ministering to society. But let's be blunt about it: a pastor is more than a social reformer, a humanitarian, or a poorly paid substitute for a psychiatrist. His primary task is to bring people into relation to God and to help them grow in communion with Him. As the prayer I read a few moments ago put it, we need to find the gift of God's kingdom within, "as a fortress from which the soul, the mind, the body, set forth to do Your will."

If pastors are really to be effective in their work, they have to be involved in personal spiritual growth themselves. Now please don't add Donatism to the list of heresies people would like to pin on me. I am fully aware that the validity of a man's priestly functions in no way depends on his moral integrity. The Gospel is still the power of God even when it's spoken by a man for whom God is something less than real. But if your task is to assist people to genuine humanity, it helps to be genuinely human yourself. When your words about God reflect your own experience of Him, they have the ring of truth about them for your hearers. The apostles knew what they were doing when

they insisted that the successor to Judas in the Twelve had to be an eyewitness of the risen Christ. We witness best when we do in fact witness.

The seminary is in the business of preparing men for a ministry that has ever so much to do with establishing and developing relationship to God. That's why the Easter quarter experiment is rightly our business. A seminary is not properly described as a combination of classrooms; it does not exist for academic investigation alone. A seminary has four goals, according to a significant study by Charles Feilding: knowledge, professional competence, humanity, and Christian formation.² Concordia Seminary's list of objectives is in agreement. It does not use the term Christian formation, but it envisions a candidate who, among other qualities, "displays the gifts with which the Holy Spirit has endowed him, by reverence for God, faithful personal discipline in the use of Word and Sacrament and the opportunities for study, and for growth in the grace to edify his fellow Christians, to serve men in their need, and to witness to all as a person of good reputation."

In other words, the seminary is interested not just in what students know and think but in what they are and do—as Christians. Worship is therefore not an extracurricular activity incidental to the function of this institution, something we do here in addition to our real business because we happen to be Christians. Worship and prayer and witness and goodness and love are at the heart of what the seminary is for, because they are at the heart of ministry, and the seminary prepares for

ministry. The seminary has to be as interested in the spiritual development of the members of its community as it is in their personal growth, their advancement in knowledge, and their progress in professional skill. The Easter quarter experiment is saying that Concordia Seminary is interested in your spiritual development and wants to find out what it should be doing to help you and students who come here after you in growing toward spiritual maturity.

I'm not sure how aware you are that we are not alone in this interest. The Easter quarter experiment is the home stretch of a course that stretches back a couple of years. It is part of a project sponsored by the Fund for Theological Education through a grant from the Sealantic Foundation to determine what can be done to foster spiritual life among seminarians. Professor George Hoyer has been carrying out the project under the guidance of a student-faculty group called the Sealantic Committee. The experiment is designed to provide final documentation for the recommendations Professor Hoyer will be making to the sponsors of the project.

You realize the implication of that statement: all the answers are not yet in. The experiment is necessary to provide the answers. So far the project has ascertained a number of things. There is indeed a need to develop spirituality among seminarians, although most seminarians do not feel the need, and most seminaries are not very concerned to do something about it. Something can be done to foster a style of life in God, but it requires some form of discipline to do it, the very thing people claim stifles spirituality. Some functions have proved useful in the past: meditation,

² Charles Feilding, "Education for Ministry," *Theological Education*, 3 (Autumn 1966).

prayer, worship, Communion, personal and community witness. How can these be adapted for use today? More important, what new forms and functions can serve today? That's the question the experiment seeks to answer through the discussions in which we engage one another. In this experiment we take God at His word that each of us is a gift to the other. We agree to take part in a mission to one another to try to come up with a contemporary "Style of Life in God."

Do you know what you're in for? Each week at this time there will be a half-hour presentation about some facet of life in God by someone who has had some experience in it. Then we spend an hour in small groups discussing what we heard and working out its implications for our lives.

There's more, of course. The experiment is not just for talk. We are supposed to translate talk into action: to pray and not just talk about prayer, to witness and not just talk about it, to commune, to worship, to meditate, and in the process to propose to one another forms and ways by which the reality of God present for us in Word and Sacrament can be apprehended. One form of devotion is being suggested to us. It's entitled *Seven Days: Word Power for Daily Prayer* and was written by Ewald Bash, the creative leader of the Youth Department of the American Lutheran Church. It offers a form of devotion for each day of the week and is commended to us for our use each day. I began yesterday with "Day One" of "The Seven Days of God the Father." I recommend the material to you as a satisfied customer. The individual groups are of course free to decide on other or additional forms of de-

votion and ways of fostering spiritual growth.

Are you about ready to participate? So that we are clear about it, let me spell out briefly what participation involves. First, it requires a commitment from you to the entire 8-week effort. Second, it means that you take part in the effort with an openness to listen and learn and a willingness to share your insights with others. Third, it involves your presence at each Monday presentation and at the group meetings immediately following. Fourth, it means that you will involve yourself in morning chapel services, the weekly celebration of the Eucharist, daily prayer and meditation, and in whatever other activities your group agrees to do.

What can you expect from participation in the experiment? Who knows! Maybe you will have a remarkable experience in spiritual growth. Perhaps you will discover resources that will be of lifelong service to you in your ministry. Conceivably you could say and do things that will be of profound help to someone else. It's possible that our seminary will learn how we can be more effective in reaching our goal of "Christian formation." And the results we share with the powers that be in the world of theological education may be of benefit to other seminaries. To me these are results worth striving for. I hope you agree.

A man's inner self is like a castle set high on a hill and surrounded by a wide moat. The only way in or out of the castle is over a drawbridge which can only be let down from the inside. Only occasionally does the inner self let the drawbridge down to venture out to others or to let others in to the recesses of the heart. Brothers, I think a time has come to lower the draw-

bridge to reach out for God and our brother
and to let God and brother touch and trans-
form our lives.

LET US PRAY:

God the Father,
God the Son,
God the Holy Spirit,
Most Glorious Trinity, One God,
Be with us now.

When we, in nights of pain, dismay, and
grief,
In torment of mind, confusion, and de-
spair,
Take flight within ourselves to hide from
You,
*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with Your
grace.*

When we forsake decision, strength, and
peace,
Forsake Your costly joy for cheaper plea-
sure,
And drift directionless upon the world,
*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with Your
grace.*

When we, at odds with life, with death,
With home, with friend, with place, with
self,
At odds with everlastingness,

Seek refuge in the meaningless,
*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with Your
grace.*

When we have reached our undeserving
worst,
And jeopardized our souls with lethargy,
Submitting to dull habit's tyranny,
*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with Your
grace.*

Scrape clean our minds,
That we may think of You,
Unveil our eyes,
That we may see You,
Quicken our hearts,
That we may serve You,
Form our desires,
That we may suit You.

The journey to redemption is begun,
Surrendered to You, we shall try to go
Wherever You ask us,
Knowing that on the way we shall meet,
Must meet,
Your Cross.
*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with Your
grace.*³

St. Louis, Mo.

³ Smallzried, pp. 5—6. Used by permission.