



GRAMM

A Newsletter for Graduates of the General Program of Liberal Studies

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The View from 318

The most notable feature of the view out from 318 is that it is predominantly green. You will agree that that's at least as much a surprise for a South Bend January as the triumphal switch to green on the football field just a few years ago. And I do hope that the current and no doubt temporary coloration of the local environs heralds favorable results for the Program's effort and for all of your endeavors in this new year.

The view within 318 is a bit different but also green. It is a softer view with more space for the eyes to ramble over and yet more corners and angles to encounter. The difference is found in the beneficial effects of a remodeling of the Program's offices; they are carpeted from wall-to-wall and, more important, 318 now opens into 317 (the seminar and tutorial room immediately south of the Program's offices in which so many of you encountered the likes of Socrates and Descartes). So in adjoining room 317 we have a yet unnamed GP common room the uses for which have already been multiple and the effect of which has been a boon for the common, genuinely collegial, life of the Program. It is heartening to hear the informal seminars springing up among students as they pause in 317 before and after classes.

The greenness within is only partly on the walls. It is more in evidence in the promise of some new developments and in the rich maturity of a more radically innovative educational program now in its 30th academic year. As for the new developments, Professor Katherine Tillman has accepted a major administrative appointment as Assistant Provost of the University; happily for all of us in the Program this exceptionally talented teacher continues to make the time to teach one course per term. Elsewhere in this issue you can read about our new faculty arrival, Professor David Schindler. And as for curricular developments, the Program is adding to its Origins of Christianity course (the Scripture course of recent years) a second course on the Roman Catholic and Christian theological tradition. Most important is the continual movement of new and excellent students to the Program which holds its traditional enrollment well in a time of serious attrition for liberal arts colleges and programs everywhere.

Only a few weeks ago the Notre Dame community laid to rest Father John J. Cavanaugh, President of the University from 1946 to 1952 and the President whose keen interest in the Great Books movement, concern for educational

quality and persistence led to the establishment of the General Program of Liberal Studies. Father Hesburgh in an endearing and eloquent homily at the funeral mass cited the Program among other living testimonies of the life and efforts of Father Cavanaugh. Just this past autumn the faculty of the Program met in seminar to discuss a 1950 NBC radio transcript which featured Father Cavanaugh and Robert Hutchins, the late and famed President of the University of Chicago, in a discussion of "Morals and Higher Education."

I turn now from an ultimate benefactor of the Program to an immediate one, my very living, active and pun-prone predecessor in the chairmanship of the Program, John Lyon. Through a leave-of-absence this past autumn, Professor Lyon has been able to take some other views besides that from 318; he's even had some vantage points in London and Ireland, whenever they'd allow a Scot in such places. In fact, besides regaining the perspective of the South Cafeteria, Professor Lyon is returning to a regular research program and has now made a full return to teaching. Regular readers of this column will know what I mean when I say that Professor Lyon has the honesty and humility to concentrate his attention on the ways in which he, the Program and the University may be falling short of what is best and should be. I have to confess that I need a good dose of the honesty and humility and the overall realism of my predecessor. If I'm allowed to get away with being irresponsibly positive for awhile it is in good part because John Lyon has fought some key battles, lit important fires and laid sturdy foundations necessary for the future strength and development of the Program.

General Program alumni now approach a thousand in number, and one of John Lyon's special efforts has been to open and maintain Program-centered communication with all of you. The launching of Programma is the most important and successful step toward that goal; Great Books seminars for alumni and other efforts have also contributed toward renewing and strengthening alumni awareness of the Program's continuing life and unusual if not unique position in the University and in the context of American higher education. One evident result of this concern and effort is the number of you who have specifically designated contributions to the Campaign for Notre Dame and to annual giving for the advancement of the General Program. Unfortunately, I have been able to thank only those of you who have sent me or another faculty member some indication that you have specifically designated funds for the General Program. There is at present no mechanism for notification of the Program of such designated gifts, and I am doing what I can with the appropriate administrators to see that such is established. Some of you, aware of this situation, have made direct gifts to the Program; let me say generally what I have said to you individually--we are indeed grateful for your concern and support for the life of the Program and its specific educational objectives.

PROGRAMMA (the Greek word meaning "public notice") is published toward the end of each academic semester by the General Program of Liberal Studies for its graduates.

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Next I must mention John Lyon's spirited efforts to protect the value and dignity of liberal and integrated undergraduate education in a period when educational administrators, faculty and students are strongly attracted by other goals. Professor Lyon has worked hard within the University and among the faculty to maintain the kind of priorities that are consistent with the continued vitality of the General Program. Sometime ago I read an explanation of the failure of the University of California (Berkeley) to make workable "a uniform nondepartmentalized curriculum" with a "self-selected full-time faculty." Levine and Weingart in Reform of Undergraduate Education wrote that because this "faculty still adhered to the university's traditional reward system, they were unable to work together, and most attempts at cooperative planning failed completely." John Lyon has had an acute sense of how increased emphasis on publishable research and specialization threatens the capacity of a community of liberal educators to work and grow together.

And finally let me add what I emphasized to our most recent graduates last May. John Lyon never lets student well-being slip out of central focus. The modern, increasingly bureaucratized university inclines all of us to be more "professional" and less personally involved. Having worked closely with Professor Lyon over a decade I know that he attends to and suffers over not only the academic but also the psychological, material and spiritual good of each of the Program's students. He is never too distant or too busy to fail to talk and anguish over the situation of a single student in the Program. It has been good and encouraging to see the faculty's traditional emphasis on the personal dimension of education exemplified in the chairmanship.

To his deep concern, John, with the support of his wife, Jackie, has added frequent action and regular song, not to speak of "modest comestibles and libations," in maintaining and strengthening the General Program and its community of alumni, students and faculty. Professor Lyon came to an enthusiastic embrace of the ideals of the Program from an academic preparation in the field of history. In that respect and perhaps in others he followed the path of Willis Nutting. It seemed right to me last May, as it does now, to conclude this brief tribute to John Lyon by an excerpt I treasure from Nutting's The Free City.

After I had been teaching for eighteen years according to the conventional academic pattern, and undergoing constant frustration because I was becoming ever more aware that the important goal in the education of men was wisdom rather than knowledge of history, there came a great release. Father John Cavanaugh, then president of Notre Dame, established a new "department" which came to be called the General Program of Liberal Studies, a way of teaching and learning somewhat after the model of the plan of St. John's College, Annapolis.

In establishing the General Program, Father Cavanaugh acted with a wisdom seldom shown by administrators. He did not impose the plan on anyone. The new faculty was composed of men who earnestly wanted to make the experiment. And once the thing was set up, he did not try to run it, but allowed the faculty as complete an autonomy as the most general regulations and policies of the university would permit. These regulations and policies do indeed prevent the program from becoming as real a community of learning as one could hope for, but compared to what goes on generally in the country the grass is green, and it is a privilege to work with the faculty and students who constitute a much more real community than can be found elsewhere.

Walter Nicgorski
Chairman

EDITOR'S NOTES

Programma is late in appearing this semester. Although I regret that this is true, I offer no apologies. There are reasons--but not excuses-- to account for the delay in our usual schedule. Rather than explicate the particulars of these reasons, I wish to celebrate the circumstances which make the lateness of this issue acceptable. Our publication policy dictates that "Programma . . . is published toward the end of each academic semester. . . ." The leisurely tone of that statement of policy sustains all of us who work on Programma: the department chairman, myself as editor, faculty contributors, and Mrs. Rees, our department secretary who can be credited with making our essays, ideas, and messages appear in a form fit to be duplicated and distributed. I am sustained by this casual deadline, not because it allows Programma to become a low priority, but because it represents a modifying influence in my attitude towards my work. And it allows me to find pleasure rather than oppression in this obligation. I am not advocating lateness and disregard for deadlines (I have enough trouble obtaining homework from students as it is). But in a life in which we are constantly subject to non-negotiable deadlines (for applications, for proposals, for articles, for correspondence, for paying the electric bill and registering to vote), and in which we constantly subject others to similar requirements, Programma is a pause that refreshes. It is small and friendly, different, and important to special people. In these regards it parallels some department traditions.

Besides its tardiness, this issue is distinguished by an optimistic tone. Although it was not consciously intended, Professor Nicgorski establishes in his opening words a theme of greenness and new beginnings which is reiterated in the closing essay. And from Professor Nicgorski's exhortation to build cathedrals, we turn to the writing of a Program graduate who spent his college years building castles, and who has now departed to live in them. It is hoped that this issue is not unduly self-congratulatory; we are not averse to addressing more controversial matters in other issues. But many of you have communicated optimism and firm belief in the Program from your various distances in time and space, and the spirit of some of those messages is hereby reciprocated.

The summer issue will include letters and messages from alums, along with a complete list of contributors for this academic year. We invite your response as usual, and of course, your contributions--monetary and literary.

---L.C.F.

An annual gift of \$1200 to the Program or an endowment producing that much income each year would allow the Program to sponsor and to encourage publication of an annual set of lectures by a prominent scholar/educator concerned with the quality and possibly with the reform of undergraduate liberal education. I have in mind such persons as William Arrowsmith, Otto Bird, Eva Brann, and James Redfield.

--- W.N.

ITEMS OF INTEREST AND CONCERN TO THE GENERAL PROGRAM COMMUNITY

Dr. Richard Thompson, Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, and a very active faculty member in the Program in times past, retired in August, 1979.

Michael Giesler ('66) was ordained a priest in the Opus Dei community in August, 1979.

At the time of this writing, Thomas Ahern, a 1954 graduate of the General Program, and an officer in the U.S. State Department, is among the hostages being held in Iran.

In keeping with the Programma policy of informing alumni of new developments in the department, we have invited Dr. David L. Schindler, now in his first year with the Program, to introduce himself, and he responds with the following article.

ON COMING TO THE PROGRAM

The intellectual history which led to my interest in, and eventual entry into, the General Program began, I think, in a very real way in the years immediately following high school. For it was then, I suppose like most of us, that I began to become self-conscious about the convictions which gave direction to my life. My parents had stressed the importance of values, especially ethical and religious, and indeed had linked them with a tissue of convictions in economic and political matters, and I had taken all this for granted. But when I moved away from home for the first time, I began to become aware that the values which I had as a matter of fact were, to say the least, not accepted as self-evidently true by everyone.

I recall vividly the cumulative experience: at first noticing the difference among the values held by different persons, and how these differences so often seemed to be connected with differences in judgments about political and economic matters, reactions to daily news events, and the like; and then being gradually overwhelmed by the implications of the experience. Why were there so many differences? Why would people differ on such important matters: was there nothing universal about the values themselves? Or were the differences in values rather to be located in the persons appropriating them? I confess to finding the former alternative too frightening in its consequences to consider it as possibly true. And so I turned to the latter alternative: if only everyone would commit him or herself to complete objectively, there would emerge some consensus in the matter of the truth of values.

But I was constantly and increasingly troubled: how did I know that I was being objective? Did I not already have a set of convictions (beliefs and

values) which was shaping the direction of my inquiry--indeed had predetermined its outcome? And worse, didn't I merely happen to have such convictions - by virtue of having been born in this culture, at this time, in this Church, to these parents? And didn't that make this whole reasoning process about values and beliefs finally arbitrary? It was during the four years immediately after high school that the implications of this experience gradually pressed in on me. It became clear that, whatever else I did, I simply had to work through these questions to which my experience had given rise. I had scarcely any awareness during this time that this task would take more than a few years; and I had still less awareness of how my concern would over the years fracture into an unending series of questions flooding into all those areas of human concern and reflection which are packaged into the academic disciplines and departments of higher education. Perhaps most especially, I had yet to discover what the intellectual tradition of modernity was all about, and how its turn toward history and subjectivity would raise issues about the nature of my inquiry far more radical than I had ever imagined.

I found the college curriculum frustrating in terms of the questions I wanted to have answered. Not only did the courses seem - at least in terms of my interests - to be unrelated to one another; but they often seemed to operate at cross purposes. I seemed constantly to be told in all sorts of subtle and not-so-subtle ways that the objectivity I was preoccupied with understanding and appropriating was a matter of moving away from convictions; that objectivity (reasonableness) and belief and value convictions had nothing to do with one another. For roughly two of these four years I spent most of my extracurricular time reading works by and about John Henry Newman and Christopher Dawson, and it was here that I experienced a profound sense of liberation. It seemed to me that what Newman was exemplifying and saying, in terms which I would use later, was that the appropriate method for discovering truth was in the first instance radical openness and honesty; that the various special methods were but further differentiations of method in this more basic sense. (In short, objectivity had something intrinsic to do with authentic subjectivity.) And what Newman and Dawson both seemed to be saying, though in quite different ways, was that a religious (Christian) commitment was not only not incompatible with the appropriation of methodical inquiry in this basic sense of method, but on the contrary carried it to completion. Religious commitment, properly understood, precisely opened one to all dimensions of experience, to truth and value wherever they might emerge.

When it came time for choosing a field for doctoral study, I considered some interdisciplinary programs, history, education, philosophy, and religion/theology, before finally deciding upon the latter. The reasons for this choice I think were primarily two: I was convinced that a religious and theological integration was necessary for any final resolution of my concerns; and the study of religion/theology, being by definition concerned with ultimate things, seemed to carry with it the freedom to undertake any kind of inquiry which had a bearing on such things--which is to say, in the limit, any and every form of inquiry. It therefore seemed to be the most likely context in which to continue pursuing my interests. I entered Claremont Graduate School in 1970, and received my Ph.D. in the Philosophy of Religion and Theology in 1976. There I met John Cobb, a theologian whose honest and vigorous engaging of the questions bearing on the truth of Christianity in relation to the difficulties raised by contemporary experience vividly exemplified for me the method and integral Christian humanism of Newman and Dawson, and profoundly affected the

horizons of my inquiry. There also the conviction which had developed earlier (in the first instance through the reading of Gilson) deepened and became much more explicit: namely, that metaphysical judgments are operative, often in a decisive and controlling way and however unconsciously, in all our judgments -- from natural scientific to aesthetic to theological. It therefore became clear that the inquiry to which my earlier experience had given rise must involve a metaphysical turn.

I happened upon a placement listing for the General Program last fall (1978) and applied, being attracted by what seemed from a distance to be a program quite continuous with the interests I had pursued over the years. The view up close is still more attractive: I have discovered here a community of persons dedicated to a free and relentless pursuit of reflection on those dimensions of experience which make our lives worthwhile, and I can only say that at times I have been overwhelmed by the support and stimulation provided by the members -- youthful and less youthful -- of this community.

--David L. Schindler

BUILDING A CATHEDRAL

(As traditional in recent times, the current academic year was formally opened in the General Program with an address by a faculty member of the Program. The occasion is a meeting of students, faculty and friends of the Program after the first few days of class. It occurred this year on August 29. The meeting was presided over by Professor Edward Cronin, senior member of the faculty, who introduced the entire faculty and concluded by presenting the new chairman, Professor Nicgorski, who delivered the following address.)

Welcome to the 30th academic year of the General Program of Liberal Studies, the 138th academic year at the University of Notre Dame--all of this taking place in the 190th year of the Republic, the 203rd year of the Nation and the 1979th year since the Lord Jesus Christ came upon this earth. So let it be.

Elemental as that is, I wanted to do my part for our sense of history in the General Program. For a more complete picture of the story of mankind, see the unsteady speculations of geologists and anthropologists. If you don't understand the difference between the 190th year of the Republic and the 203rd year of the Nation, you need to take the Politics tutorial. Now you are shocked! You never thought you would hear a "plug" so early in this talk. But after all, there is an old and no doubt somewhat Machiavellian principle of political action: "Get the dirty work done early!"

I do extend a warm and genuine "welcome back" to our continuing students--we've missed you--and a special welcome to students new to the Program. I have been and am deeply moved by the experience of talking with so many of you this past weekend. I talked chiefly with students new to the Program, namely transfer

students to the University and students coming into the Program from other colleges in this University and from tentative commitments to other majors. Some of this group comes to the Program with little knowledge of it and moved primarily by a search for an alternative to prevailing educational modes; among these some have encountered the Program through reading the little blue brochure about it here at Notre Dame or in a high school counselor's office; one or two of you noted to me that the Program was brought to your attention when Mortimer Adler made mention of it in a recent interview on national public television. Most of you who are new, however, as well as those who are old to the Program came to it because you have discussed the Program with another student in it or with a graduate of the Program. Thus it is that the experience of those who are being and have been educated in the Program continues to be its most effective advertising in the larger world of Notre Dame and beyond. And so you have come, continuing and new students, from every corner of this nation; some of you who transferred to the Program are determined and financially able to extend your Notre Dame education by a semester or even a year in order to experience the Program as a whole rather than cut it back in any way. I toast all of you and your earlier teachers and parents and friends who have helped ignite or fan the spark that has allowed you to make this kind of decision for genuinely liberal education. In the words of a seventeenth century scholarly toast, I say to you "Taste the salt of wisdom, drink the wine of happiness." I do have to point out quickly that the modest libations which will follow this talk are thoroughly non-intoxicating. We in the General Program always get intoxicated analogously rather than literally.

A special welcome to our new faculty member, Dr. David Schindler, who brings to us an outstanding teaching record, evidence of fine scholarship and a wholistic, integrated and spirited interest in the fundamental human questions that should allow him to make a significant contribution to this community of teachers and students.

And to the continuing faculty--a formal welcome back. As a group, they have traveled nearly as widely as you students during the past summer. Father Carroll and Professor Tillman have followed their separate itineraries in and around the capitals of European civilization. Professor Crockett has again been teaching at the Graduate Institute in Santa Fe, and Professor Sloan with family returned to home country in Utah. To emphasize the range of the faculty's travel I should add that Professor Crowe has been to Niles during the summer and I have been to Mishawaka.

This being the 30th year of the Program, I am especially grateful to Professor Cronin for chairing this evening's meeting and for presenting me to you on this occasion. Professor Cronin was among those who made the initial and courageous break from other departments and set up the General Program of Liberal Studies in 1950. It had to be a daring experiment, and it is one that has worked. Evidence of that is found in the quality of faculty who continue to be drawn to the Program and in an alumni now approaching a thousand who are like those of no other major in the University in the degree of satisfaction with and enthusiasm and support for the undergraduate program they chose and experienced.

My life has been shaped by the General Program and ever will be, as yours will be. So to Professor Cronin, gratitude on behalf of all of us on this occasion for his role in joining Professor Bird and others in the founding

and early development of the Program. A toast to him as representative of all those who acted so intelligently and forthrightly at that time. I must add that Professor Cronin has done more than share in the founding and early development of the Program. He has continued to exemplify the Program's distinctive dedication to teaching, winning recently the prestigious Sheedy Award as the outstanding teacher in the College of Arts and Letters. As many of you know, he is better than ever and just as tough.

That we have the Program today--not only alive but also very well--is due to the efforts of many, but among those present this evening I wish to single out Professors Lyon, Crowe and Rogers. Professors Lyon and Crowe as my immediate predecessors in this office of chairman have guided the Program through the peculiar challenges of the educational milieu during each of their tenures. And Professor Rogers in patent love for the liberal arts, for the Program and for the individual students passing through it has been an inspiring and moderating presence from the time of his student days in the Program.

Now, thirty years ago, the Program didn't come out of the air. It wasn't simply one of Professor Bird's or Professor Cronin's brilliant ideas. It was part of a movement in American education, a national reform movement to which the then President of Notre Dame, Father Cavanaugh, and faculty here rallied. It was and remains the most significant reform movement in twentieth century American higher education. The movement's roots are found in efforts after World War I at Columbia University to restore an emphasis on undergraduate education and to do so by centering that education around the Great Books of Western Civilization. The reform movement was carried to Chicago in the 1930's where the late Robert Hutchins began the continuing struggle at the University of Chicago for a more meaningful and integrated undergraduate program of studies. In the late 1930's the movement took hold of old and faltering St. John's College of Annapolis and completely turned it around. St. John's founded another college in the Great Books mode in Santa Fe in the 1960's, and the movement associated with the Great Books has informed in whole or part programs of study throughout American higher education and is in evidence in most efforts at undergraduate curricular reform in the last generation.

At each place informed or touched by the movement it tends to manifest itself in a unique education program, as has happened here at Notre Dame. There is, however, a common core of convictions and principles, if not practices, to the Great Books movement. I believe that core can be expressed as follows:

- 1) the liberal education of undergraduates is a goal of the highest importance and a great national and human trust; it cannot be sought incidentally to other pursuits of the University or College; in fact, it must be the central concern; it is worthy of the time and efforts of the best minds and souls that higher education can assemble;
- 2) liberal education is best sought not through the use of textbooks, commentaries and secondary digests but through the greatest achievements in thought and expression as found in great books and other great artistic and scientific achievements;
- 3) liberal education cannot be mass education; it must leave room for and encourage personal interaction between teacher and student in the exploration of the great human questions and the great ideas that correspond.

At Notre Dame, this Catholic university, the Great Books program, the General Program has always had an additional dimension, and I have found this well expressed in Vatican II's Declaration on Education where the Council describes Christian education as marked by its striving "to relate all human culture eventually to the news of salvation, so that the light of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of the world, of life, and of mankind." From its beginning the General Program has striven to understand the knowledges of Faith and Tradition and to appreciate their relationship to and perspective on all human problems and achievements.

Without, I hope, being unduly Promethean or Pelagian, I must conclude that if the Great Books movement had had a wider and deeper effect on American undergraduate education, the quality of our leadership and of our national life would now be markedly better. That this movement have such an effect remains one of my great hopes and a task which is worthy of the support of all of us. But now let me turn from the movement and the Program to our situation as teachers and students within it.

A story that I have heard attributed to G.K. Chesterton helps me begin at this point. You may know that Chesterton, the well-known English-Catholic man of letters whose works range from detective stories to serious theological polemics, had in 1930 an extended stay at Notre Dame as a distinguished visiting professor. In any case, the story has it that Chesterton once came upon a construction site and approached individually several workmen (mason's apprentices, I suppose) who were moving bricks from a drop-off point to the places where they were readily within reach of the working masons. Chesterton asked a brick-carrier what he was doing, and he responded that he was passing time and earning a living. Approaching a second brick-carrier, Chesterton asked the same question, and this carrier responded that he was moving bricks from here to there. Approaching a third workman and asking the same question, "What are you doing?" Chesterton received the answer, "I am building a cathedral." I want to talk this evening about the importance of our "building cathedrals" in our work as teachers, scholars and students. Some among you, I fear, will think me foolish and perhaps irresponsible when I explain just a little of what I have in mind for us by this story. For what I want to say is that we must take ourselves seriously; we must regard our being and development as concerns of high, and, yes, sacred importance; we must, above all, let visions grow within us--visions of what we can be and do, visions that relate our potential being and doing to the great tasks before the community of mankind. Those are the tasks of human development and human renewal through education and conversion, the tasks of new understanding and new insight into all important things and the tasks of new levels of community in justice and love.

You know the grounds from which I will be accused of foolishness; you may indeed share them. The argument goes like this: do not take yourself too seriously; find your place in the culture that surrounds you; make peace with the world--that is the way of happiness, or at least it is the way of security. Alvin Toffler in the popular book, Future Shock, gave the educational philosophy (pardon my using the word that way) that usually characterizes the school of "make your peace with the world." Toffler wrote, "for education the lesson is clear, its prime objective must be to increase the individual's 'cope-ability'--meaning by 'cope-ability': 'the speed and economy with which we can adapt to continual change.'" Toffler's emphasis clearly is on our fitting in rather than forming or reforming our culture and future cultures; such fitting in or adapting

is to be the aim of our education. It is, perhaps, enough to note how far this view of education is from that of Socrates or from the way that Christ showed to those who would follow Him. But George Bernard Shaw, English wit and playwright, said a half century before Toffler's contemporary statement of conformism what still must be said. "The reasonable man," wrote Shaw in often quoted lines, "adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man adapts the world to himself; therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

Now there are indeed dangers in my invitation to build cathedrals, in the invitation to take ourselves seriously, to look to our own development and to let visions of great moments grow. I want to say something about those dangers shortly. But before I reach that point, before I even try to say more specifically what "building cathedrals" might mean for our lives as teachers and scholars in the Program, I must become yet more foolish, more unrealistic, more yet the unreasonable man of Shaw. In fact, I want to turn tables on those who would call me the fool and do so by citing of all people Woodrow Wilson. Yes, the Wilson presented so often by historians and others as the idealist who failed. This is not the place for a discourse on Wilson that would show how I disagree with the prevalent assessment of him. Suffice it to say that I would not deny that he was an idealist. In fact, the statement of his I wish here to cite goes as follows: "The world is run by ideals, . . . only the fool thinks otherwise." To my urging you to work in the spirit of building cathedrals, Wilson now adds that those who build cathedrals move the world. He defies then the earthy realism and hard cynicism in which so many delight. He can help us see the high practicality of what we are about in taking our search for understanding seriously, in seeking for the wisdom that can illumine a life, a nation and ultimately a world. We must both learn and teach without forgetting the high practicality of our efforts.

There are ways, indeed, in which we can take ourselves too seriously. We do need to discover for ourselves the truth of Christ that only in losing yourself do you find yourself. We do need to avoid shattering ourselves and our families by overextension into the good and necessary tasks before us. We do need to learn by experience the wisdom that Pope John XXIII prayed for in asking for the ability to discern what could be changed from that which must simply be accepted. These are all important cautions. It is, however, only the person with a vision of better ways who can possibly have the wisdom Pope John sought; only such a person can intelligently compromise with and adapt to the world even as he or she uplifts it.

There is a healthy conviction that suspects as dull the person who writes or talks too much about the goals, nature and process of education. But there's a season for such talk and reflection, and we have a rather intense season as the year begins and students and faculty alike settle into place. Let us tonight proclaim that season over and let us begin the season for Oedipus and Achilles, for Plato, for Ptolemy and Augustine, for Thomas Aquinas, for Erasmus and Shakespeare, for Kant and Beethoven, and Marx and Einstein. This is the time for living, searching and learning joyfully within the support of the Program. It is a time to lose oneself in ideas and wonders and a time to nourish this Notre Dame community around you as you will later nourish the world by the qualities of mind and character that this effort in the Program can yield. What can I say but let it happen. Build a cathedral, your very own.

--- W.N.

(The essay which appears below was presented to Professor John Lyon by a student in a recent seminar. The author, Robert T. Massa ('79) was graduated "with highest honors," holds memberships in Phi Beta Kappa and Delta Phi Alpha (German honor society) and was the 1979 recipient of the Otto Bird Award for his senior essay, "What, after all, is Cinema?". Since graduation he has worked in the intern program in drama with the Phoenix Theater of New York City; he is currently investigating graduate programs in drama, literature, communications, and aesthetic criticism. He writes that from his vantage point in the real world, this essay now seems a bit sentimental in style, but he consents to its publication in its original form. -- L.C.F.)

SOME WORDS IN CLOSING

When I decided to write this essay on Thoreau's Walden, I thought it would be 'in the spirit of things' to go with some friends to the lake near my dorm. We perched ourselves on one narrow strip of beach in an arrangement that has somehow become a ritual for us, and buried ourselves in our respective books and notebooks. Later, another friend joined us, but no one else seemed to notice. Out of courtesy I announced, "Hey everybody, look who just came in the room." The room. I suppose no one heard me, but nonetheless I felt an icicle slide down my throat. I realized that the lake and the flowers and the sky were happening all around us, and there I was, locked in some imaginary study-closet, sifting through the pages of Walden, ignoring the 'Walden' at my feet.

The next day I decided to get a fresh start. I returned to the lake in the morning, without friends, without books. For a while, nothing came to me. Then I began to see patterns in the drops of sunlight on the water: a thousand jewels woven in a fabric that danced along the lake's surface. I remembered I took great delight in such things as a child--how soft clouds looked, how silently snow fell--that unguarded interest and wonder for the things around me. I had not lost these things entirely, but I had most assuredly forgotten how important they were to me. They had become mere decoration.

So, too, in studying Walden in my usual manner, I was allowing it to be merely a decoration. It was to become another book to plant on my shelf (buried somewhere between Thackeray and Thucydides). I needed to live with the book for a while; to listen to it; to be silent with it. It is a lie to lock myself up in a study closet with any book; with Walden, it is blasphemy.

Another day passed, and I began to realize that this book is very important to me. I am about to enter society, a society in which there is only a very subtle distinction between being 'in the groove,' and being 'in a rut.' I am leaving school for a bit for as good a reason as I came: to learn the art of living. These four years I have been 'building castles in the air.' Now I need to put the foundations under them. Walden--as distant, as idealistic, as individual as it is--offers a guide for this task.

The guidance that the book offers came alive to me in my own experiences at the lake. 'Coming Alive': that is precisely the point. We are supposed to dance with the sunlight, hug clouds, listen to the snow, for, as Thoreau believed, nature is a highway of communication between man and his spirit. Every fact in nature ideally corresponds to a facet of human consciousness. Now I more fully

appreciate the long, lyrical, careful, almost meditative passages describing Thoreau's daily encounters with nature.

But Walden is much more than an account of Thoreau's daily experiences. It is indeed a spiritual autobiography, as reverent in its own way as Augustine's Confessions, as philosophical as Pirsig's Zen.... We apprehend this as we trace the sublime controlling images used throughout the work. Thoreau lived at Walden Pond for two years, yet in the book, this time is compressed into one year. Seasons of the year are symbols (and indeed catalysts) of the inner metamorphosis which Thoreau experienced during his stay. He begins in the summer when the woods are thick with life. The gradual changes he undergoes are represented by the coming of autumn: as the trees shed their faded leaves, so must the complacency and complexity of 'civilized' life be shed. The winter is a time of barrenness and darkness: the soul closes in upon itself, feeds upon the fruits of solitude. Spring, the perennial re-enactment of the creation myth, is the rebirth, the flowering of winter's laboring pain. Thoreau achieves through his attention to nature's rejuvenation a purification of his spirit, a new innocence free from ignorance, a faith free from arrogance, born of wisdom.

I am reminded of Dylan Thomas' "Poem in October." Thomas uses different metaphors, but the message is the same, the sacramental renewal possible in the attentive experience of nature:

And down the other air and the blue altered sky
Streamed again a wonder of summer
With apples
Pears and red currants
And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
Through the parables
Of sunlight
And the legends of the green chapels

And the twice told fields of infancy
That his tears burned by cheek and his heart moved in mine.
These were the woods the river and sea
Where a boy
In the listening
Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide,
And the mystery
Sang alive
Still in the water and singing birds.

The sacramental devotion to nature which both Thoreau and Thomas praise is to be experienced by each individual, for himself. Walden is a guide, not a leash. Natural order is in fact the only legitimate bond among individuals for Thoreau, and he celebrates the individual as much as he celebrates nature. He does not expect everyone to follow his own drummer; above all else, to be true to himself. No one can force us, we must open our own eyes, for "only that day dawns to which we are awake."

As I look out the window at this moment, it is in fact close to sunrise. I have spent the night musing over this book, over the other special books from

these years. I have been too anxious to sleep. When I finish this essay, my final work in the General Program, I will have completed a long, dream-filled night. I am going out with bags full of much more than the stripped necessities with which Thoreau lived; but, at the same time, I leave with arms stretched out to hug clouds.

Again, the Dylan Thomas poem comes to mind:

And the true
Joy of the long dead child sang burning
In the sun....
O may my heart's truth
Still be sung
On this high hill in a year's turning.

-- Robert T. Massa
5:15 A.M.
the 10th of May
1979

I would like for my old friends and teachers to know where I am and what I am doing these days.

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We solicit expressions of interest in a Chicago-area alumni seminar proposed for April or May, 1980. Please include your preference for time, day, and week, when responding.