

# SITTLER



**Recordings of Joseph Sittler**  
**Summaries of Audio Recordings**  
**Held in the Sittler Archives**

# RECORDINGS OF SITTLER

## Summaries of Audio Recordings Held in the Sittler Archives

**Editorial Note:** We hope the user will keep in mind that these are written summaries (not verbatim transcripts) of audio tapes of greatly varied quality. Meta George faithfully wrote the summaries over a period of more than 10 years, as tapes came to the Archives, so consistency of style and format is not easy to achieve. In addition, many of the presentations were on sides of tapes that contained other things also, making coherence a bit tricky. As in any oral presentation, the flow is not as smooth as in the written word, and it was not always easy to hear exactly what Sittler said. Spellings were occasionally the result of guessing. We tried to check as many of the proper names on the tapes as we could, but Sittler was also very fond of making up "pseudo words" - "words" that are perfectly clear as to their meaning but would not be found in any dictionary. Some examples are "banalization," "livingness," "facticity," and "thingification." We have not done any "translation" of Sittlerian words - they give his presentations a unique character that we cherish. So we hope you will overlook any flaws you find and concentrate on the powerful and still-relevant ideas that Joe lifted up over the nearly 30 years of oral presentations recorded in these summaries. With almost no exceptions (noted in the summaries), copies of the tapes are in the Archive at LSTC and tape copies may be ordered if you wish.

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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



## 1959 University District Lectureship “Contemporary Witnesses to Damnation” *Seattle, April 6-9*

### Tape 1.

**Side A.** Presented on April 6. Answering a question from a participant about what is Sittler’s **understanding of Holy Scripture**, Sittler says that he does not believe in the inspiration of Holy Scripture. “We say that the Bible is the word of God.” (See Santayana’s article about the 17 meanings of the word is.) In reference to the Bible, we need to examine the meanings of is.) When we say the Bible is the word of God, we do not mean that it is identical with the word of God. The word of God is not the Bible. The word of God, according to the Bible itself, is that salvatory, redemptive activity of God toward men; it is his self-disclosure as creator and redeemer. Word in Hebrew and Greek does not mean the same as our English word (term). It means the saving activity of God. The declaration about God is also the word of God. Jesus is also called the word of God. [*See Sittler’s book The Doctrine of the Word in the Structure of Lutheran Theology for more on this point*].

**Is the first chapter of Genesis true?** Yes, but it depends on what you mean by truth. Example: Plato’s story of the men in the cave. The story completes his argument, even though it is not literally true. Genesis is not “First Steps in Biology,” nor “Zoology Made Easy,” nor “Do It Yourself Cosmology.” The men who wrote this story would be confounded to know that any attempt was ever made to read that kind of knowledge into their story. Accepting the story literally would be the most stupid misunderstanding of the nature of kind of truth which the story is concerned to tell us. This tale is the word of God telling man who he is, how his life is constituted, what is the amplitude of his endowment- the breath of God, nothing less, so that if he tries to cheat on his endowment, he calls it frustration, God calls it alienation. Sittler advises us to take the Bible with seriousness, as no less than the disclosure of the meaning of God for human existence, but much more gravely than literally. Both Luther and Calvin understood it so.

Continuing with the conference theme, **Contemporary Witnesses to Damnation**, Sittler asks “can we follow the delineation of a moral problem or the structure of a predicament or the articulation of a bitterness or anxiety or of a dullness of heart from a contemporary work and then see what the word of God has to say about the picture?”

**Dullness of heart** in Isaiah: He protests the burden the Lord has laid on him. “The heart of this people is fat.” This is an insult to your endowment. To live in this exciting and needy and beautiful and terrifying and dreadful and delightful world and remain a hunk of fat protoplasm is one of the most impenetrable of all human iniquity. They tranquilly simmer in their own blubber. In Ephesians. Paul refers to the heathen, “They are cut off from the life of God by a stupidity which their dullness of heart has produced.” The “life of God” means the life-giving power of God. Give up living like heathens. They are cut off from the life of God by a stupor, a stupidity, not immorality. A man can be very immoral

and still not be cut off from the life of God. Many have ascended downward to a relationship with God. There are people who are cut off from the life of God by the blandness of their righteousness, by the trivialization of their Christianity.

**There is an excellent illustration here of what Sittler is talking about; it is one of the most powerful and eloquent passages we have on tape** (but too long to include in this summary.).

Let us examine **dullness of heart** in Typhoon, by Joseph Conrad. Conrad's moral penetration exceeds that of any other writer of his generation. He is at his best when he operates in the gray realm of "partial damnation."

The Bible speaks of LIFE, DEATH and SIN. We'll see why dullness of heart is a form of unrighteousness and of ingratitude to God. Life is that which is God himself; he is the giver of life. Man has his life because life is in God and God endows him with life. If life is to be in relationship to God, not to be in relationship to God is death, whether there has been a funeral or not. The outcome of sin is death. Sin is the name of broken relationship. To be cut off from your true intention is death and sin.

The modern picture of the physical world whereby the ultimate realities are relationships and not substances is precisely the kind of language in which the Bible operates. LIFE is a term used to designate a right relationship. DEATH is a broken relationship. SIN is a term to indicate the career of a broken relationship. GRACE is the restoration of a relationship. LOVE is not a substance but a relationship. When the need of God is there, the love of God is a gracious gift. God seeks you not in your moral elevation but in your lostness and alienation.

In Typhoon, evil follows where no evil was intended. We are closer to an understanding of evil that is deeper than immorality. The captain was a moral man.

**Why the passion of the Bible against dullness of heart? Another powerful and eloquent passage follows** (too long to summarize; it would lose too much in a summary.) .

### **Side B. Presented on April 7.**

#### **Deceitfulness**

Before the evening presentation, Sittler responds to questions submitted from the audience the night before.

1. What does Paul mean in I Corinthians 7 when he says to remain in the condition in which God called you?
2. Define evil. Does evil exist as a force in its own right as opposed to good?
3. What is the most profound **dullness of heart** you see today? Sittler answers that we no longer behold one another; we just stare at one another. (See the story of the good Samaritan.) There are three words in Greek to designate "perceiving an object": a) "there's something there"; b) "to gaze at it"; c) "tenderly to regard it." ...."And he beheld the man."

The ultimate dullness is the thingification of man, a mechanization of the human world. [Cf. Sittler's book Care of the Earth for more on the distinction between looking and beholding].

4. Now that **we are dull**, what is the solution? How do (they) become related to God? Sittler says he has no reply, but asks the audience to ponder this quote from T. S. Eliot's The Wasteland: Where is the life we have lost in the living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? ("The Rock")

Continuing with tonight's theme- **deceitfulness**. Why is it that the word of God is given to us in the form of a story that takes place in time? When an artist wants to say something ultimate about mankind, he's got to tell a story. Man's life is a story. There is congruity between God's passion and our pathos.

**The Catcher in the Rye:** St. Paul said that you are the temple of God. Live like that. Let no man deceive himself. The first time we meet the devil in the Bible, he is telling lies. Evil is a temptation to be phony. "To be a Christian is to become a transparency for the holy." In the Lazarus story, Dives is self-contained so that the world never gets in. The actuality of the brother never penetrates. He is cut off from God. An ultimate evil is to live (in such a way) that other people shall not be able to see through us what is the nature of the God we have called God and we protest is really God.

Why did the author write Catcher in the Rye? Here is an aspect of an actual situation; this is the way things are. Notice Holden's openness to the real, the authentic, the true. The book reveals the damage done to human life by us phonies. A minister is under greater temptation than anyone to be a phony and a cornball.

Why is it that American churches leave the Holden Caulfields outside? We don't take religion "straight." We tell people to become Christian in order to accomplish something else (i. e., to get a more integrated personality, to improve the morality of the state, etc.). When God is sought for any other reason than because he is God, when the ultimate is sought for any other reason than it is the ultimate, when I want to know the truth for any other reason than it is good to know the truth, then neither God nor the ultimate nor the truth is honored but they are all debased.

## **Tape 2.**

### **Side A. Presented on April 8.**

When the tape begins, Sittler is answering questions from the audience. The first is about the **phoniness of organized religion**. Sittler says the question implies that organized religion ensconces ritual and dogma. He offers a good explanation for why people gather in a church (ritual). Dogma is only vicious if it claims for itself an absoluteness which properly belongs to that to which it points. When a true thing, a vital thing, a thing that has the dimensionlessness of spirit, whenever that becomes programmatic, that is, organized, it is instantaneously reduced. Something is enclosed by organization, or an attempt is made to enclose something unenclosable whenever we organize the spirit. An analogy: education. That to which the educational enterprise points, that in man and man's

history which it wants to preserve and transmit, that is not phony. Phonies may handle the non-phony. The non-phony may persist in its reality even under the handling of phonies.

Phoniness in the church: Often we don't acknowledge our phoniness. That is part of our egocentricity, our pride. Protestant Christianity has never identified any of its forms of the church with the one holy and apostolic church of Jesus Christ.

Roman Catholic Christianity identifies the organized church under the vicar of Christ as the one holy catholic and apostolic church and in that sense deprives itself of a built-in dynamics of judgment which is on the loose when Protestant Christianity is healthy. I come from one tradition in Protestantism which has liturgy, dogma, a confessional standard, but never identifies these as an absolute vessel to carry the godly treasure. It hopes it is a useful, obedient vessel. It never identifies itself with that for which it is the carrier. Even in churches where the pastor is incompetent, where the people are hypocritical, immoral, religiously lackadaisical, phony (and that is all of them!), the church is there because of what God makes available there—the Word and Sacraments. As Kierkegaard observed, we need a holy sense of humor.

The second questioner maintains that **Catcher in the Rye** has no **plot** or structure and wonders what the book's **message** is. Sittler replies that while the book has no plot, it does have structure in the form of episodic sequences. The heart of the message is "light has come into the world and the darkness cannot put it out." There is a light in Holden Caulfield; he wants righteousness.

The third question is about **substance and relationship**, based on something Sittler said in a previous lecture. Sittler clarifies: "I did not say God is a relationship. Every term used to describe the gifts and activities of God are relational terms. Sin is a relational term before it is a substance. Grace is the reestablishment of myself in a right and intended relationship." Every time we made statements about God, we use relational language."

The fourth question is about the idea of **beholding** Sittler talked about in a previous lecture. Do we really want to be seen and known, that is, "beheld"? Yes and no. The greatness of the Christian doctrine is that the One who sees and knows loves what he sees and knows. [See Sittler's video "*Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation*" for more on this].

The literature of each generation is its most lucid confessional. Our subject for the evening is Albert Camus' **The Fall**. It concerns the experience of a whole generation in France. Every sense of security is stripped away. It asks, how can one affirm life? Camus affirms a radical "this worldliness." There is no Hegelian built-in progress, no Darwinian push toward upward and onward, no possibility of educationally divesting humanity of its ambiguity.

There is a turning away from both contemporary forms of religious comfort, both Christianity and communism,- two seductions which draw men into illusion. Christianity is a betrayal of mankind because it asks mankind to fasten its hope upon that which is not and to support itself by the illusion which cannot be validated.

Communism is another form of the illusion. Camus rejects that, too. The heart of man's fall is that he would not let God be God. The subject of the book is man's acute egocentricity. The judge in the book is a profoundly religious atheist. Camus may believe that his role as a man is to go before the face of the Lord and do such a job of ethical demolition as to prepare men for a new understanding of whatever ultimacy they can relate themselves to with integrity.

Sittler reads sections from the book and comments on them. He quotes Luther: man seeks himself in all things even in God. This generation's moral blubber is thicker than most generations'. That's why The Fall is an important book as it points that out. Sittler references the problem of theodicy. Sittler refers to the play, JB. He reads a portion from MacLeish's article in the *Christian Century* about Job: God answers Job not in the language of justice but in the language of beauty, power and glory. How can we come to God but through love? Our labor, like Job's, is to learn through suffering to love and to love even that which lets us suffer.

The church must lift its noses from its quilting, lift its noises from our platitudes, we must quit the presentation of the Christian faith as a velvet stairs to the man upstairs and come to deal with the fact that the very question of God is under fire again, that the justice of God has to be addressed by squeezing the deepest essence out of the heart of the Gospel who is the figure of the love of God on the cross.

### **Side B. Presented on April 9.**

The tape begins with a prayer and an organ interlude.

Questions and answers: "When you pray, how do you see, feel, experience God?"

Answer: I don't, I believe in God. Sittler tells the story of Hannah in prayer. [*Cf. also "Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation"*].

Question: Camus says man is incapable of perfection. How do you explain that over against Christ's command to "be ye perfect?"

Question about the emphasis on guilt. How do we handle this constructively?

Question: How is one to guide oneself into the paths of rectitude? Answer: Christianity begins not with the imperative "You Must," but with the indicative "God Has." Christianity is not a movement of man to God but of God to man.

I am incapable of rectitude.

Question: Can anyone get rid of dullness of heart?

Subject for the lecture: T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets. Sittler discusses Eliot's use of moving images. All existence is a blend of past, present and anticipation. Sittler reads from the text. Time is the dominant theme, time as an inward feeling of passingness, sense of mutability. What does this mean for human understanding?. Sittler reads more from the Four Quartets. The "gift" half-understood, the hint half-guessed is the incarnation. Here the past and future are reconciled.

Any disclosure of God which is going to be adequate for man's profoundest predicament has got to meet two conditions: a) It has to be a disclosure here, where I am, in time. b) It has got to deal with my immutability. I, who have been born with the *imago dei*, and am thereby able to envision the timeless blessedness

of the eternal, can only be saved from the ultimate desolation if somehow I am re-related to that from which I am derived. "If any man be in him, he is a new creation." Old things are passed away. The only shape big enough to be congruent with the shape of the ultimate hurt has got the shape of a crucified man, and it is guaranteed its victory because "God hath raised him up."

## **1961 "Remembering and Forgetting- The Human Condition and the Gospel" Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago, July 9**

*(This summary is more or less verbatim)*

### **Side A.**

When the church affirms that the Christic understanding of life is the amplest, most penetrating and the most subtle of all possibilities, the church is obliged to take on the burden of saying as clearly and fully as she can what she means by this astounding claim. It is the duty of a pulpit in a university, standing half-way between committed faith that put that pulpit here and disinterested inquiry that surrounds that pulpit, it is the particular duty of a pulpit in a university to unfold the content and the dynamics of this claim.

There is a sense in which a preacher in a university can do this and a sense in which he cannot. The (preacher) cannot do this in the sense that a university chapel is not a church; her words and services are always, in part, disengaged from the organic wholeness of the witnessing and confessing church, the life of a believing congregation. The great cumulative tides of love, of grace, of remembered mercies and of remembered charities do not intimately bear her life along in a university. But, there is a sense, too, in which a pulpit in a university can unfold the content of the Christian claim with a kind of precision required by the very disqualifications I have mentioned. For the mind of a university engenders a desire for and a certain patience under the administrations of clarity, depth and precision. One does not in this place have to be troubled very much about the marketplace mores of popular preaching. Quick and facile solutions are not expected, shallow and obvious arguments are not required, the claims of the faith will not be pondered or rejected according to their instantaneous and obvious instrumentality to pragmatic and less than ultimate purposes.

In the university, it's the truth that counts. At least that's what we say. And if the faith cannot be commended as guaranteeing a kind of lubrication for scratchy personalities or to constitute a glue to hold the republic together, both contemporary forms of Christian aberration, this is nothing against the truth.

Now I want in a moment to measure against a particular claim of the Christian tradition a particular fact of our common experience, but as a kind of invitation to that inquiry, I ask you to listen to a paragraph from Gilbert Chesterton. Writing about 30 years ago, he is speaking in a large and general way of how it happened that he came to be an apologist for the Christian tradition. The multiple images which the paragraph employs suggest that there is no single thought or truth or fact or feeling or force by which one moves from



unfaith to faith. That movement is rather the symphonic and subtle interplay of many thoughts, many facts, many ponderings and surprises. [Chesterton quote follows, from G.K. Chesterton's book *Orthodoxy*]:

*“And then followed an experience impossible to describe. It was as if I had been blundering around since my birth with 2 large and unmanageable machines of different shapes and with no apparent connection: the world and the Christian tradition. I had found this hole in the world, the fact that one must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it. Somehow, one must love the world without being worldly. I found this projecting feature in the Christian theology, like a kind of hard spike. The dogmatic insistence that God was personal and had made a world separated from himself. The spike of dogma fitted exactly into the hole in the world. It had evidently been meant to go there. Then the strange thing began to happen. When once these 2 parts of the 2 machines came together, one after another, all the other parts began to fall in with an eerie exactitude. I could hear bolt after bolt all over the machinery falling into place with a kind of click of relief; having got one part right, all the other parts were repeating that rectitude as clock after clock strikes noon. Instinct after instinct was answered by doctrine after doctrine. I was like one who had advanced into a hostile country to take one high fortress, and when that fort had fallen, the whole country surrendered and became solid behind me. The whole land was lit up, as it were, back to the first fields of my childhood.”*

This morning, I ask you to attend to one hole of fact and one spike of Biblical doctrine. First, the fact. A reviewer describes the film *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* as the first successful attempt to depict the human psyche from within. Fifteen years after the bomb, the woman in the film, from Navarre in France, is trying to live in the universe of love. But there is that in the world which makes sardonic nonsense out of all the values and promises of love. That in the world which makes such nonsense lie so massively over and around the small world of her love, so defines the entire human condition and penetrates it, that torn between the two- the tenderness of the universe of love and the brutality of the great world,- she enters into madness. She knows that the only way out is to ensconce the present world of madness into the bigger, saner world of her entire life and the way to do this is to remember.

The film depicts the tormented effort to recollect in living actuality the deeds, the scenes, the first love, the happiness, the thought, and the emotion of her own past. It is her passionate striving, by remembering, towards sanity. According to the argument of the film, she both succeeds and fails. She wins and she loses. The film ends with no way out. It elaborated a contradiction that it cannot solve. The contradiction is clear, single and absolute, and it is this:

Life is constituted by remembering because life is organic, continuous, of a piece. My being is my remembered past. But, life is lived by forgetting. The moment's necessities can only be confronted and mastered by forgetting. This is the human condition. This is the hole of fact. Religion can't change this. Many say that religion can do something about the hole of that fact. Sittler says he does not believe it. The usual version that is supposed to be adequate for that (contradiction) is “Religion is good for you. It helps you live positively. It helps you forget the past, lean forward hopefully into the future. Refusal to forget does not rob yesterday of its burden but it robs today of its possibility.

Therefore, live forgetting, live episodically. If there is that in the past which keeps digging away at you, take it out, toss it away, forget it.” This is very thin stuff. It betrays the profundity the film exploits. Life is continuous, cumulative; it is constituted by the livingness of the whole of the past in every actual moment. Some say religion is commended for general health of personality, that it offers open-ended optimism. But religion in itself is nothing positive.

The Bible assumes the truth of Hiroshima. Men are not morons of pasted-together moments. Life is organic. The whole of the past does constitute the substance of this moment. The Jew, for instance, whose words we heard in the Old Testament lesson this morning, who cried out in pathos “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem..” knew he was defending his sanity. This same people knew the other side of the contradiction. Without a forgetting, a blotting out and a removal from the groaning back of the present of the pressing pass, life simply could not be lived. Therefore, this same people could cry “Blot out my transgressions from before thine eyes- let not my secrets come before the light of thy countenance.”

There is a hard spike of dogma that fits that hole of fact. (In our New Testament lesson, in Philippians), Paul writes “..not that I am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own.” Now watch the action of the verbs. “ I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Therefore, one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...etc.” There, the entire matter of the dialectic of remembering in order to be and forgetting in order effectively to live- this whole matter is put in a strange new context.

Paul was no positive thinker. He was rather witnessing that he could be a realistic and a heroic man because God is a positive thinker. The active verb “I forget, because I remember, and remembering I dare to forget...” This active verb “I press on”- observe this verb does not stand alone as a kind of a personal, moral effort, pumping itself up into a kind of psychic bravery by judicious selection and moral hypnosis. All the active verbs of life now operate for the apostle in a world of relations between God and man and man and man. A world of relations in which the basic fact is the passive verb of what God has done which now makes a quite new possibility for all the active verbs of man’s life. I do my remembering as I do my forgetting, within the tough circle of the remembering and forgiving God. I press on to make it my own because God has made me his own.

The pathos of time, which is the theme of Hiroshima, cannot be solved by eternity, for I am time, I am mutable, successive, chronological, time’s creature. Within terrible time, I must remember. For I am not a spatter of words but an unfolding sentence that began a long way back and will unfold on and on. Within terrible time, I must also forget, for the urgent moment must spring unfreighted to its appointed task. This contradiction of time cannot be solved by eternity. But the eternal in time, there’s the spike of dogma that fits strangely into the tough hole of fact. The eternal in time, the all-remembering, all-forgiving God become (sic) my time, my situation. The ultimate reality become (sic) the torment even of Hiroshima. If that could happen, that could do it. That’s the hard spike of Christian dogma- that God’s passion does become my pathos, that God’s deed of participation in Christ becomes my time, my place, my Hiroshima. That the eternal, while remaining eternal will not do, but this eternal become my temporal place and fact will do.

That is the hard spike of dogma, to be sure. Efforts to reduce it to positive thinking have succeeded only in making it a despicable, tepid counsel to people in real torment. A kind of paltry aspirin for actual anguish. It's a hard spike that God has become fact, that the eternal participates in time. It's hard, but it has the advantage of filling the hole and filling it, it holds deep things, both torments and delights together. Amen.

*Side B contains "How to Read a Parable" from Oct. 8, 1961*

## **1961 Message To Our Malaise** *Princeton Theological Seminary,* *July 17-20*

**Tape 1. (July 17):** This is, essentially, "**The Care of the Earth**" sermon as printed in *THE CARE OF THE EARTH AND OTHER UNIVERSITY SERMONS*, published by Fortress Press in 1964. The sermon is also included in the reprinted/edited version of the book, published in 2004 by Fortress Press.

(One side only.)

**Tape 2. (July 18):** "How Faith Forgets." Begins by discussing a G. K. Chesterton essay in which the author says that there is no single thought, truth or feeling by which a man is moved from unfaith to faith. The movement toward faith is an interplay among many forces, surprises, ponderings. Speaks of "the hole of fact." Illustration: A. E. Housman poetry.

Sittler talks about the prominence in literature throughout the ages of the theme of **mutability**. He recommends the film, *HIROSHIMA, MON AMOUR*. **Life is constituted by remembering, but life is lived by forgetting.** "I cannot be a whole person if I do not remember; I cannot be an effective person if I do not forget." **This is the hole of fact.** [See "*Remembering and Forgetting*" below]

Many today say that religion in general can do something about that, that faith is good for you. They say, forget the past; live episodically. Lean forward. Sittler says he does not believe that. The Bible takes the dialectic between remembering and forgetting much more seriously.

Life is organic, not pasted-together moments. The whole of the past constitutes the substance of every moment. There is a hard spike of dogma that fits that hole of fact. Its power comes through such phrases as in Paul, "I forget; I press on," in a grammar of grace. **I do my remembering and forgetting within the tough circle of God's action.** God has made me his own. His deed of human participation in Christ becomes my place and situation. The urgent moment, in all of its novelty, must spring un-freighted to its appointed task. The eternal in time becomes my time, my situation. God's passion becomes my pathos. Efforts to reduce all this to positive thinking have succeeded only in making it tepid counsel which is paltry aspirin for actual anguish.

It's a hard spike that God has become temporal fact, but it has an advantage. It does fit the whole of need. It does hold deep things together.

**Tape 3. (July 19):** Specifically addressed to fellow-pastors. "How can one possibly be a minister of the gospel of God?" We preach often about what we know nothing about. Have I a right to exercise a public role as confessor, teacher and preacher when I know that I do not know, often, what I am talking about? I have not, from within, the warm, confirming gifts of grace to match my utterances, have not the glow of the Spirit's gifts.  
(See "*The View From Mt. Nebo,*" *Care of the Earth.*)

**Tape 4. (July 20):** The subject is the **ecumenical movement**. Here is the present situation: At Lund, in 1952, a British churchman said that the age of comparative ecclesiology has now come to a close. We have spent time describing, one group to another, "why we are as we are." We can't do this anymore, as if amplitude of description were somehow a guarantee of the unity of Christ's church. Many of us are separated brethren not because we don't understand each other, but because we do. Lund ordered three commissions:

1. Christ and the church. This commission will report in New Delhi this winter.
2. Worship, appointed out of the assumption that churches actualize their innermost ethos and character more precisely and profoundly in the way they worship than in any other function of the church.
3. Many things that separate the churches are operational, not theological, nor spiritual nor Biblical. Part of the issue is a "corporation image."  
Another issue is self-conscious, proud rigidity.

**There have been great advances in the ecumenical movement but we are seduced by three illusions:**

1. We may forget ourselves into unity. We must wipe out our common history and simply say that we are not what we actually are. Impossible nonsense!
2. We may remember ourselves into unity, "remembering" something that never was.
3. We may rearrange ourselves into unity, turning the church over to the operators and constitution writers, so that they should rearrange our polity furniture in such a way that a new living room in which all will feel at home should somehow be brought forth.

**Another possibility:** See the parable in Luke 14 about the man who gave a dinner and no one came. Notice the context in which Jesus was speaking. Jesus is talking about the nature of the kingdom of God. It is an Oriental story. The excuses given by those invited are not the point of the parable. Preachers often find contemporary analogs to these excuses and then exhort, "Don't do that." But that distorts the form of the story. It pulls the center of gravity from the end of the story into the middle and the point of it is lost. Excuses are not the point but in order to make a point. The excuses are not analyzed by our Lord. The Lord of the feast remains the Lord of the whole situation. We do not read that he is disappointed or discouraged. He wants a full house. Here we get a beautiful image of the church. We have heard about the

church as the "body of Christ." Here, the **church is the dining room of God, the table around which his own are, who answer his invitation.**

**The unity of the church is a function of the obedience of the church.** The churches might be lured into unity by their deepened obedience to the appalling demands of men in this hour. The unity of the church is that which lies ahead of the church, drawing her through obedience to her Lord in the needs of men and the world in this moment. It is thus as much ethical as it is systematic theological. Drawn into unity by a passion with which she confronts the world around and the world ahead. Not accomplished by a single formula but by a profundity with which the church confronts the deepening irrelevance of her language to the language of this moment; the deepening incompetence of her ethical performance to the blasphemies and injustices of the moment and the deepening strangeness of her speech to men's need of grace in this unchurchly moment.

**The God of the church is not a pitiable figure standing at the head of an empty table. (He) will give us the gift of unity in his dining room when we are obedient to the tasks of the world at this moment. The way to unity is through repentance and obedience.**

## **1961 Called To Unity: Redemption Within Creation**

*World Council of Churches, New Delhi; July*

### **The New Delhi address.**

*(For full text, cf. Sittler, Evocations of Grace, or <http://www.augie.edu/pub/values/sittler.pdf>)*

Begins by quoting Colossians I: 15-20.

"These verses say clearly that we are called to unity, and they suggest how the gift of that unity may be waiting for our obedience."

"For it is here declared that the sweep of God's restorative action in Christ is no smaller than the six-times repeated 'Ta panta.' Redemption is the name for this will, this action, and this concrete man who is God with us and God for us- and all things are permeable to his cosmic redemption because all things subsist in him.

"A doctrine of redemption is meaningful only when it swings within the larger orbit of a doctrine of creation.

"...it is Irenaeus...who must be our mentor. The problem forced upon us by the events of the present decade is not soluble by the covert dualism of nature and grace. Christ enlightens this darkling world because the world was made through him.

"In Irenaeus, ... there are not two orders of goodness but only one. All goodness, whether it belongs to this world or to the final consummation, is a manifestation of the grace of God. For Irenaeus, the Incarnation and saving work of Jesus Christ meant that the promise of grace was held out to the whole of nature, and that henceforth nothing could be called common or unclean.

"The doctrinal cleavage, particularly fateful in Western Christendom, has been an

element in the inability of the church to relate the powers of grace to the vitalities and processes of nature. Post-reformation consolidations of the Reformers' teachings permitted their Christic recovery of all of nature as a realm of grace to slip back into a minor theme. In the Enlightenment, the process was completed.

"Is it again possible to fashion a theology catholic enough to affirm redemption's force enfolding nature, as we have affirmed redemption's force enfolding history?"

"The theological magnificence of cosmic Christology lies, for the most part, still tightly folded in the Church's innermost heart and memory. For it is true of us all that the imperial vision of Christ as coherent in 'ta panta' has not broken open the powers of grace to diagnose, judge, and heal the ways of humans as they blasphemously strut about this hurt and threatened world as if they owned it.

"If now we put together the threat to nature and a Christology whose scope is as endless as that threat is absolute, do we, perhaps, gain a fresh and urgent vision of the call of God to the unity of the Church, and some help toward its definition and obedience?"

"We must here acknowledge (that) the profound studies of Christ and the Church do not automatically furnish forth a common faith or draw us toward a faithful ordering of the life of the church in history.

"How does doctrine...bear upon the calling of God to the unity of the Church?"

Right doctrine drives toward unity in two ways: it constantly clarifies in intellectual terms what it is that sustains the church, and it calls the church to celebrate in deed what it points to as alone adequate to the world's need. The 'telos' of doctrine is action.

"The Church must think, but we cannot think ourselves into unity. The Church must seek appropriate order, but we cannot order ourselves into unity.

"The Church is both thrust and lured into unity..... The Church has found a melancholy number of ways to express variety. We have found fewer ways to express our unity. But if we are called to unity and if we can obey that call in terms of a contemporary Christology expanded to the dimensions of the New Testament vision, we shall, perhaps, obey into fuller unity.

## **1961 How To Read a Parable**     *Rockefeller Chapel, October 8*

(Similar to "How to Read a Parable," printed in The Care of the Earth, Fortress Press, 2004)

**Side B.** (*Side A contains "Remembering and Forgetting" from July 9, 1961*)

Text: Luke 14: 1-6, 12-24

This address deals with the importance of hearing a parable. We must hear what the man said. Sittler says that we must disengage the original story from the expanded and changed context in which it comes to us. He illustrates by supposing what might be the duty of an historian if there had been no records about Abraham Lincoln before he became President, if Lincoln had not left any written work behind, if all we knew about him came from the recollections of others.

Another point to remember when we read a parable: One must try to get to the central intention, the single point, the kernel. Attend to that and don't try to make something out of every figure, metaphor, incident, which is instrumental to the making of the central point. We are tempted to allegorize, to make morals out of metaphors. We try to hang heavy loads on every nail that's driven into every two-by-four of the scaffolding. A parable is scaffolding that encloses a construction. When the construction is done, then the scaffolding is laid aside and one is to attend to that for which the scaffolding is erected.

Sittler then begins discussing the text, and explains the point of the parable in 14: 15-24. The center of the parable is jerked away from men and their refusals and the master of the feast remains the master of the feast. He is still Lord of his largesse. His purpose is the joy, the fulfillment, the fellowship of men at his table. God wants men to know the joy and the fullness of their life in him and hence their fullness in themselves and among themselves. This joy and fullness is not unrelated to food, and warmth, and health, and justice.

After some reflections on a theology of history, Sittler concludes by giving the punch line of the parable: "...that my house shall be filled." He says that the parable suggests that those who are the obvious and natural receivers of the knowledge of the purposes of God are often the first to deny or evade it. "There is a steady growl of anger at the heart of the holy; the love of God for his human family has a hard and resolute intention."

## **1962 Faith of Our Fathers** *Rockefeller Chapel, Sept. 30*

*This sermon on audio tape is similar, but not identical, to "Peace as Rest and Movement," included in The Care of the Earth and Other University Sermons, published by Fortress Press, Philadelphia, in 1964. The text for both is Paul's letter to the Philippians.*

### **Side A.**

Nothing is simple. To grow up is to become aware of that and to grow up into maturity is to match that awareness with appropriate resolution. Nothing is simple. Knowledge is a documentation of that fact. The life of reason is an effort to explore, exploit and order that fact. A university exists in order to make a virtue of that fact and wisdom is the name we give to that combination of acknowledgement and resolution and serenity which, without capitulation, comes to terms with the fact that nothing is simple. The truth that nothing is simple reaches us and troubles us and may remain to transform us in many ways. It begins early, it gains in subtlety as we grow older and it never ends until we do. We come to know that nothing is simple, not in recondite ways only, but in the commonest counterpoint of our daily life. Two young people are in love, they are happy, everything is just fine, and then in some mad moment, the poor girl begins to blubber when she ought to laugh and leaves the big dolt standing like a befuddled ox. Nothing is simple.

Dig in anywhere, things get complicated and then their complicatedness gets a reverse English that the logicians call paradox, and added knowledge confounds the paradox. This is true of an effort to understand historical, physical, social, and psychological fact and when we come to the testimony of men who are bearing witness in the New Testament of their dealings with the Holy, the complexity, as the British would say, is simply splendid.

This preface is a way to invite your attention to a non-simple way in which St. Paul, in the Philippians letter, uses an apparently simple word. Words in themselves are tutors of non-simplicity. Take any word which is an indicator of man's common career and start peeling the word back and you are in instantaneous and steady trouble. The word 'peace,' for instance, which, occurring in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Philippians, I now invite your attention to.

Paul says, to take but 2 instances, "Rejoice in the Lord always; the Lord is at hand.... Don't have any anxiety about anything, and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Then, within a single moment after that, he says, "This peace whose function is no anxiety is to have an absolute concern with everything." Now apart from the huge structure of events which this letter of St. Paul declares God has brought about, which events constitute the peace Paul is talking about and the summary name for which gift of peace is the embodiment of the forgiveness and power of God in a man, Jesus Christ, - quite apart from that for the moment, look at the absolute claim the apostle makes for this peace which is God's gift. This peace is a kind of fixed, static center. It is firm enough and big enough to do the business of what proclaims to be adequate for a center. It passes understanding, says Paul, and do not take that lightly, because Paul was not a pious peasant with no brains or devoid of the sensibilities that trouble our proud and angry dust. Nevertheless, it is this man who says it passes understanding. What this peace keeps for a man is really all that a man is. For when the Greek language uses the two words together, keep your mind and heart, the language intends to enclose the total man in his being and actuality.

Now the sense of the word 'peace' in that context is surely a sense of all things at rest, fixed with a sure center, established, kept, secured, serene. That may not, in our judgment, be big enough for men of our time, given our perils, given our needs and our tasks. We may say that that may be a solution for a man- this man, that man- but it is no adequate power for the gathering disorders in this appalling world. It is not "big enough." This peace is static; that is a fault. Before we look further at that, take it for what it is in Paul's first use of the word: this static, given peace that secures him. It's no small thing, quite apart from a lack of a possible dynamism for our world. It's no small thing to be able to say, "I am fixed, kept, and sure of a mighty power whose might is adequate for all the raging lusts and longings of a man; for all the far-ranging of the mind and the longing of the whole man for a pattern big enough to bring peace to a whole man." That is no small thing.

Before we inquire if this peace has capacities for flexibility and movement as well as for rest, let us inquire into the structure of this first claim, that it has a power to grant rest. The part of the Philippians letter which constitutes the three chapters back of the chapter from which I am taking our text, these three chapters elaborate the structure of that peace



in a way that we can go into now only as a kind of summary. Paul makes three claims for it: First, he designates and affirms it. Then, this peace is certified historically as adequate for a man, and then Paul celebrates the scope of this peace, thus certified and designated.

Very briefly, look at each one. This peace which is God's gift to man, this peace is first clearly designated and affirmed. Paul doesn't do this abstractly. He is writing the Philippian letter in jail. It is likely to be the last of several jails he will ever be in, because he's in this one on the kind of a charge which, if sustained, will cost him his life in a Roman court on a civil and a criminal charge. Therefore, Paul isn't reclining with his feet on a professor's table writing a lecture about peace. He is at the end of a tether with his back against the wall, and when he talks about peace, it's with that wonderful, uncalculated immediacy that gives a certain force to what he says. He's in jail, and out of jail he elaborates on what this kind of peace can do for a man. He says it releases a man from three enormous tyrannies (well, he doesn't say it, he just does it):

First, the tyranny of being made less than a man or being crushed by the facts around a man. "I'm in jail, it's probably my last one. I can't preach, teach, travel anymore. They have got me. But they have me in such a way that they have to keep me here. In order to keep me here, they assign two people who have never heard the story of Jesus Christ. They assign two of them to me every four hours and they change them every four hours, and they can't get away." This provides a remarkable opportunity, as it were, so he makes a strange pulpit out of an unbelievable hell. Paul says, so what, I'm in jail, but a jail has strange possibilities. Let me tell you something about it. He goes on with a remarkable excitement to talk about the new congregation he's got from Gaul and Bythinia and Dalmatia- these big yokels who are chained to him at four-hour tricks.

The second kind of tyranny that's even more powerful than the tyranny of the enviroing world, because it's more subtle and we who may never have been or likely to be in jail feel it- it's the tyranny that our own egocentricity exercises over us. Paul was no plaster saint who didn't know what that was about. He had a fully blown sense of his own importance and of his own mission and of his own extraordinary capacity to carry it out. For such a man to be quieted, stopped, completely silenced- this was very hard to take. Everything in this violent little Jew called upon him to scream out in protest against those rascals who were using his imprisonment to pull the rug out from under his Gospel. Paul weighs this very calmly and says that's the way it is. But the point is, "whether from good motives or bad motives, they are preaching and the story of Jesus Christ, on whose account I am in this jail, is being told. I would like the telling of this story to have my name over it, I'm just that kind of a proud fellow, but 'down, Paul,' - after all, the point is the story, and therefore I will rejoice even in this mess, I will rejoice, because the point is not the Pauline or the Petrine, or some other teller, but the point is the story."

This peace was not a kind of sloppy serenity. It was of a kind of a powerful release, you see, from certain tyrannies that dog human life and environment. The driving demons of our own egocentricity. And the third one that it releases him from is in the first chapter, too. Paul pulls off what is to me an astonishing performance when he says whether I go on and live or whether I go to Rome and die- this is an interesting question but it is not an important question. He actually uses the little Greek phrase which can best be translated, "So what?" That may be the way things are, he says, but so what- win or lose, I can't lose.

I now have been given to understand my life, the meaning of my existence in such a way that whether my head remains on or is taken off, live or die, it is really all the same. If I die, I will be in full participation with the God of life and death and that I really love. And if I live, I shall be in full participating declaration of this God's Christ, who is my vocation. Therefore, whether I live or whether I die, let's move on to something important. Now, how is it with you at Philippi?

This peace that Paul talks about is nothing short of a man's receiving the reality of his existence in a truth which is God the creator and the redeemer of human life. This reality has become for Paul God's gift and sign and power in a man. This man indicates and gives to Paul what God intends a man to be in the fullness of his life with God. Therefore, he says, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, and all that is elaborated in chapters two and three in the Philippian letter.

The second element in the structure is equally non-formal and equally existential because "God is like that, because God has that will for man" is not hortatory or simply declaratory for Paul. We recall the magnificent hymn in the second chapter of the Philippian letter where Paul says, "Let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus." Now it does not remain my idea, notion, declaration. Who laid aside the glory that was his in the secret of the Godhead and became our existence and went down, through, in, and under the torments of our mortality, laid aside the glory and died as we die, not in Billings Hospital or taken care of at home, but even the death of the cross. That is, the certification of holy concern is written across history in the life of a man, a man such as we are. This peace is affirmed; its credentials are one in the travail of human life and finally this peace is celebrated and its in the words of the celebration of this peace that we come to that text which was read from the lectern a moment ago, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Because of this peace, be anxious for nothing. Then the great phrase, "Whatsoever things are true, good, beautiful, pure, of good report, think on these things."

Now, if you follow that the man knows what he's talking about, that he was in the grip of a peace-giving, holy relationship which enabled him to live like that, -- now comes the question: is life, so secured, as rich as it is fixed, is it as creative as it is serene, is it as relevant for now as Paul declares it to be redemptive for eternity? Is it as productive as it is free? Does it relate a man redemptively to the world as it related this man redemptively to God? Does it place a man before nature and history and society with their tasks with a creativity as good as that in which it places him before God serenely? Does it, based on the passive verbs of God's deeds -- does it leave a man palsied before the active verbs of man's historical and social requirements? In brief, it's fine for heaven. Does it make sense for earth? It is superb faith. Is it an adequate operational stance for a man in this world?

Observe now the strange dialectic of this gospel of peace, this gospel of the given peace of the passive verb. Because it is concerned with the freedom of God, it is to be realized in the freedoms of men. Because it looks first to the soul and its peace, its security, it has got to be active with the body in history and its needs. Because it seeks first the kingdom of God, not the apparent and pressing necessities that are closer at hand, but because it seeks first the kingdom of God and his will, a strange, new concern is given for the kingdom of man and his fulfillment. Because it is true divinity it is full of humanity.

Now let us watch this dialectic work out in the Pauline epistle. Take one instance: Every man must bear his own burden. Cast your burden upon the Lord. Bear ye one another's burdens. How are these related in this gospel of peace and movement? Every man must bear his own burden and every man's effort to bear his own burden teaches every man that no man is man enough alone for his own burden. Or for those condensed and celebrated burdens whereby he identifies himself with that magnified man which is all mankind. Therefore, every man who must bear his own burden must cast his burden upon the Lord, and because of the kind of a Lord, a burden-bearing Lord, you upon whom he casts his burden, now comes the ethics of burden-bearing: bear ye one another's burdens. These things, so different, have an interior dialectic which is completely true. Every man must bear his own burden, cast your burden upon the burden-bearer and therefore bear ye one another's burdens because now you know a God who is concerned with burdens.

The dialectic goes on. Because your love cannot gain God but God's love gains you, be ye kindly affectioned one to another. Again, because you cannot by work attain salvation, get to work. Because Christ has worked out your salvation in fear and trembling, work out your salvation, that is, actualize it. Live now as men who know what the meaning of life is. God is the author of salvation. The dialectic goes on to declare that the world which cannot deliver salvation for the spirit of man is nevertheless the theater of salvation. God is the giver of grace. The world is the realm of grace. Now let us hear Paul put it specifically in the way he does in the Philippians letter which is but one instance of his dealing with this that characterizes the whole corpus of his writings and the New Testament.

Attend now to the simple and non-simple meaning of peace as rest and as movement. Paul writes, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, lovely, gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things, and the God of peace will be with you." Now that passage, coming as it does at the summary of the Philippians letter, has troubled commentators ever since the third century. It is strange, coming here, because Paul all through this letter has been narrowing, narrowing, narrowing his insistence and his pointing. He has said, "This one thing I do." I press on, putting aside everything else, taking the whole world of culture, religion, education, knowledge- he says I count it as refuse, even worse than refuse in order that I might know one thing- that I may know him. That's all. Now he, having come this way, comes to the fourth chapter in Philippians, having pushed everything aside, he now scoops everything up. He is not concerned about the good, the true, the beautiful, the just, the gracious, but he says with terrible, tenacious narrowness of mind, this one thing- and now he turns around with this kind of baffling smile and looks upon the world and says, "Therefore, whatsoever things are true, good, just, beautiful, of good report, I command you, think on all these things." What's going on here? Is this an apostolic conclusion or an apostolic collapse? Is the peace of God as rest also a place in absolute and resolute engagement with this catalogue of human and historical concerns or is this a kind of soapy peroration that we expect from preachers? The kind of a last paragraph one hears in a baccalaureate sermon to tired seniors?

I'm going to assume with very considerable right (that) Paul did not, after the tight structuring of the argument in the Philippians letter, catch a momentary softening of the

brain when he came to the last paragraph. I shall assume there is a strange logic at work here and that hearing it out is appropriate to the commencement of studies at this university which is concerned with the good, the just, and the true.

The New Testament of the gospel of Christ proposes something shockingly new and promises to deliver it to the man who accepts God's acceptance of him and lives in the power and the moving peace of that new understanding of his being and reality. This new thing that can be indicated, but only indicated, in several propositions I want to conclude by laying before you [*sic*]. I shan't beat it out but simply declare what to me is the inexhaustible fascination of this interior dialectic of peace and love and joy and all the other great Biblical words and ask you to reflect upon it now and from now on. The propositions are these: that a man can only have what he gives up wanting to possess. A man can know joy in the world when he ceases to attempt to squeeze joy out of the world.

A statement in the Westminster Catechism- the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. That statement ignores the world. I would like to suggest that it indicates the only ultimate course if we are to live in the world without our appalling destructiveness and arrogance, if we are to live in the world with some justice and joy.

*Side B contains the sermon "Epiphany, Glory, and 63<sup>rd</sup> Street" from Jan. 9, 1965*

## **1964 The Scope of I** *Princeton Theological Seminary, July 15*

### **Preparation for preaching; scope of my existence; how shall I be obedient?**

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God."

Preparation for preaching. "Scripture is like a coiled heavenly snake." The necessity for a life-long discipline of listening to the scriptures.

The Gospel of John has 2 tracks or themes:

One speaks of a light that has no name (generalized luminousness), a light that lighteth every man. Grace is given in and with creation. That general power gathers to a point; that is Jesus. The light is named: the person, presence and power of Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke is another clearly structured document, calculatedly built up to a single theme: Jesus' affirmation of the love and freedom of God. Sittler discusses the parable of the man who gave a banquet and no one came. "The scope of my existence is not defined by my obedience or my excuse-making, but is drawn forward to the largeness of the will of God, to the largeness of his house and to the fullness of his intended life for me which is openness not only to him but to my life among the brothers."

How shall I be obedient?

## **1964 "Effort and Serenity"** *Rockefeller Chapel, Univ. of Chicago, Sept. 27*

*(Beginning of the Fall Term)*

**Side A.**

This chapel exists and is maintained for the worship of God. The chapel and all that takes place in it is not mere ceremonial. A ceremonial often exists and often takes the form of a chapel on a college or university campus. It's a kind of vague benediction that a college or university waves in the general direction of a tradition which is acknowledged to be dead but it makes good public relations to act as if it weren't. A ceremonial has been described as an outward sign of a vitality that once had force and meaning, but whose demise is now nostalgically remembered with appropriate actions and noises which continue the sheer momentum of the tradition, like changing the guard at Buckingham Palace.

This chapel is not ceremonial. It is not understood as a bastion of moral admonitions. The sort of religious maiden aunt who flutters around the ethical edges of the behavioral sciences, nor is the chapel to be understood as an adjunct of the office of the dean of students. Disengaged, that is, from the life of the university and its purpose but retained in order to soften the hard-nosed public image of a tough-minded faculty and to ameliorate the more dramatic forms of student indiscretion. These won't do.

This chapel is (and there are services of the worship of God here) because there exists in history a peculiar community. This community exists as affirming and acknowledging that there is a God, that he has a will and purpose and exercises redemptive force in history and something of this can be known and obeyed. This community is an historical data of enormous complexity, variety, scope and creativity. It has shaped entire cultures, it has informed whole ways of beholding and dealing with the world, it has proposed to man's reflection massive intellectual systems and it has penetrated minds and disposition and human purpose with specifiable and energetic force. This activity, this history, these affirmations peculiar to this community are a proper inquiry for university attention. And this university includes such.

(Sittler refers to the two lessons/readings for the day: Psalm 25 – “Wait on the Lord” and have faith...; and in the New Testament, - “Be not anxious,” –serenity and sobriety.)

If a person were asked what he most desires in life, he would find the answer hard to come by. Ultimate desire, just plain, raw desire, is steady and volatile stuff. It continues to bubble unceasingly within every vessel of concrete purpose and intention which we dream up to enclose it. It always seems to continue bubbling when the enclosures for the fulfillment of desire have a seeming adequacy. When a man is able to state what it is he really desires and begins to make a sentence about it, he knows while the sentence is forming that he is not saying what it is and he cannot. He knows that concrete purposes are always penultimate. The full reality of man's desire is elusive, steady, relentless, almost unnamable.

A university is a product of this volatile desire in life and orders its work along paths always changing and always freshly rich with the good, the promising and the necessary that seem right to do in virtue of things that men desire. Men desire to know. The

university is committed to knowledge, to gain and verify it, to increase the sum of it, and to transmit it, honor it against all unknowing and uncaring, and to have delight in it.

Men desire order - not only outward order, but to learn the way of mind and sensibility whereby it might comprehend what tends toward order; not only outward order, but to learn to distinguish the better from the worse, the central and the steady from the peripheral and the passing, and by life discerned about things as they have been and are, learned perhaps to cast some light upon novel things and ever-emerging forms of disorder.

Men desire justice. A university serves this desire, not by enactments which are more just than those that presently prevail but by the excision and laying bare of the anatomy and etiology of injustice – socially, economically, and every other way. A university is always an effort to find the meaning of justice, remembering that justice is a vision before it is a matter of law. Justice is always the effort to see men clear, to understand men's needs, potentialities, desires, in privacy and in their multiple relations in the world.

In the Old Testament, righteousness, truth, goodness, and justice are all aspects of a single conception. Righteous means “right-ness.” Justice means something close to having things right. In this chapel through the years is added this old testament, as it were, this voice of rightness, righteousness, to the symphony of university studies.

All these things are related to what men ultimately desire, but none of them alone adds up to, nor do all of them together, constitute or secure the quieting of what it is that men ultimately desire. We live and work and feel and think relentlessly forward to desires which transcend all conceptual statements of what they are and actual achievements of what they have believed them to be possible to be quieted by. In the history of our culture there have been efforts to specify by name what it is that men most desire of themselves or their world.

Illustrations: In Hellas, it was the large-minded man, the well-proportioned man. In the Renaissance, it was the magnanimous man, at home in all worlds.

Israel never stated the problem that way. The tradition out of which this chapel speaks in order to add to what is said in other places in this university- the way in which Israel understood the problem was never like that. Israel never assumed that the self could realize selfhood or its desire by a maturation or a reportioning of the given vitalities of the self, from the self, for the self or for the self among other selves. (For Israel, as it confesses in this 25<sup>th</sup> Psalm) the self is always a self in a world whose own selfhood is a creature of a creator and life that does not stop short of the vision and obedience in this Creator. This is to realize the self.

This 25<sup>th</sup> Psalm is simply incomprehensible apart from that assumption at the beginning. Let me point out two words in the Psalm. The Psalm says, “O my Lord, I trust in thee.” It goes immediately in the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse to “For thee I wait all the day long.” To wait in the Lord does not seem a very exciting way to live. It seems a very feckless, unattractive image in contrast to what you have been hearing this week: “....get with it, get going, these are the ways, and these are the ways to do it, etc.” The strange thing is that it is the most active

word in the Psalm, by no means an invitation to total collapse. To wait upon that in which one trusts is to be fiercely active in the midst of the life which he holds to be supported and presided over by the one whom he trusts. Waiting is a kind of resolution in trust at the heart of which there is a stillness not of my making, not of my destroying, although it is of my betraying.

I repeat what I said about a month ago to students who were leaving this university. A university claims to liberate the mind. What is the content of this liberation? We are liberated from loneliness by accepting membership in a larger company, a longer time, a richer conversation in thought and action. We are liberated from stifling egocentricity. But this liberation is ultimately a liberation into the problematic of all liberated positions. This liberation into life's unsystematic, this problematic of all liberations, this conviction that "that's the way things are" is liable to be permanent. Now, to be sure, we make penultimate decisions and resolutions on the way, otherwise we couldn't live. We can be so involved in these penultimate answers to ultimate questions and become so seduced by the busyness within an operational life that we can mask the question from our attention or anesthetize our trouble within it. It is not the characteristic of a university student entering now to be invited to suppose that here is a guaranteed procedure whereby solutions to problems can be found. Life in a university is rather introduction to a life in the world that must get on with some tasks and constructions and approximations and delights for which there are no guaranteed solutions, and a university lies in its teeth if it assumes there are.

Many hands, over the history of our culture, have held what they supposed for the moment to be the answer to man's problems. Illustrations: Dante, Galileo, Bacon, historians, etc.-

This liberation is not a liberation into secured solutions or the way to it, but into life-long residence among the problematic of all liberation.

What is a moral stance appropriate to, indeed required, by that position, if this be the way things are? By a moral stance, I mean something more than merely intellectual; I mean a totality posture in the midst of that circumstance, something that Robert Oppenheimer meant when he said, "Style is the deference that action pays to uncertainty." Whatever that style might be, let it be suggested from this place (which has its own tradition of life's problematic) that these days will require an order of moral courage and moral sophistication that perhaps no other generation has had to bring to this task.

Illustration: In 1066, at the time of the Norman conquest, the jongleur on that day sang The Song of Roland. That text is about Roland, a man of courage who was not a conqueror, a man of courage in the midst of the unconquerable. A modern version by Scott Moncrief has an introduction by Chesterton [*from which Sittler quotes*].

Courage, then, courage in the unsolved, in the just-may-be-insoluble, steadfastness in a life whose problematical character is a pattern and not just a phase. That is a kind of courage in which is fused both the vision of faith and the right function of a university, and that you may see the situation, know that you are not alone in it, find it possible to gain that courage. This is your university's tough and affectionate wish to you on the first Sunday of the term.

*Side B contains “The Nimbus and the Rainbow” from Nov. 13, 1966*

## **1965 Epiphany, Glory and 63<sup>rd</sup> Street Rockefeller Chapel, January 9**

**Side B.** (*Side A contains “Faith of our Fathers” from Sept. 30, 1962*)

The focus of the sermon is on the word *glory*. The sermon was published in *The Care of the Earth and Other University Sermons*, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1964), and republished in *The Care of the Earth*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2004).

## **1966 “The Nimbus and the Rainbow”**

*Rockefeller Chapel, U of Chicago, Nov. 13*

*(This summary is more or less verbatim)*

*Text is the story of Noah and the ark from Genesis.*

When the amusement over the story is over - i.e. imagine an old man, over 600 years, we are told, presiding over a large family and a floating zoo for a period of over a year and all of this in a small boat. The problems of organization and sanitation must have been formidable. – the substance of the story is still there and that substance constitutes an important element in Jewish religious faith to this day, as well as in our Christian community. Something comes to utterance in this story. Is it possible that the substance can again be excised, restated, and the ancient religious plenitude of it made freshly available for contemporary wisdom and right action?

Paul Tillich taught us to tread softly before the mystery of historical meaning and the profound complexity of the modalities of the transmission of all historic things. Every effort to impose upon the reality of historical knowledge a single way of knowing is the mark of the humorless and, therefore, the immature mind.

A university exists for the annihilation of such innocence. Let us ask, then, after the substance of this story by several steps. Where did the story come from? How was the form of the older story transformed by the community whose book Genesis is and what is the proposal about God, man and the world to which the episodic momentum of the story drives us?

First, where did the story come from? Knowledge of the origin of the story is important because only so can one attend to such later transformations as constitute the point of the story in the Scripture version. In the Babylonian story, which stands behind and shines through the Biblical one, the tale of a great deluge illustrated a more fundamental belief, namely, that all of life exhibits a struggle between chaos and order. The battle between chaos and order is an incessant one. It is water, particularly, in the Babylonian story of the flood which is the agent and principle of chaos. Turbulent, all-encompassing,



irresistible, and confusion-making water is the principle of chaos. But this origin is to be known only in order that we can now attend to how the myth is managed in the scriptures of Israel. What a community does with a story is a kind of paradigm of how myth becomes history, history becomes a matrix of faith, and faith engenders action.

What the community did with that story was to unfold into huge new dimensions of meaning the older tale. The community did this in three ways. 1) The older story had nothing to do with humanity. The struggle between chaos and order is there depicted as going on above men's heads and out of their hands. These two mighty principles endlessly thud it out in timeless eternity. 2) The older story had nothing to do with or to disclose about history. Its scope and terms do not focus upon human historical life and all of its unfolding pageantry. 3) The older story had nothing to do with will, choice, acceptance or rejection of a possibility. Neither God nor man is really involved. Freedom, the mark and the burden of the human, is simply not in the old equation.

Observe now the transformation and how myth becomes the matrix of faith. The eternal fixity of principles becomes the historical openness to freedom. God is the actor in a completely human symbolism. He sees, he hurts from what he sees, he resolves to do something about what he sees. He makes a proposal to a human being, a particular human. The man's name is Noah. This man is Soren Kierkegaard's "existing particular individual." The ordeal in this story is not timeless and indeterminate. It has limits and the limitation of the action is set by the initiator of the action. One instance of that is the symbolism of the detail: the waters rise as the fountains of heaven are open but the waters do not rise absolutely to the vault of heaven. Fifteen cubits above the highest mountains; that's a lot of water, but it is not absolute water, there is a limit. The actor who turns it on is the actor who turns it off.

The whole action in the transformed story is drenched in decision. It is volitional, through and through. God, for the evil imaginings of men's hearts, decides upon the deluge, and Noah, a man in an act of will, responds to a proffered possibility. Each has his responsibility and the covenant at the end of the story is an announcement of that responsibility, a monument to it and a celebration of it. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.

How shall we understand that rhetoric of the good rhythms of the given? The scope of the covenant of grace is identical with all that is. The scope of the covenant of grace is made not simply with this or that man, or with this or that people, but all that is, nature and history. Each man in his place, in his private and societal knot of decision, over it all, bends the covenant of God. Reflect then upon what that covenant and the grace which it includes, what that might mean for us and require of us. We get to that by piercing through the image of the rainbow, which is a sign of the covenant, and comparing the rainbow with that other Biblical figure of incandescence which is the mark of the presence of God, but which has a quite individual form and locus, the halo or the nimbus. Observe that between these two, in their difference and in their sameness, there is a lure of the symbolic which suggests more than is said. Whereas the nimbus is the sign of the precision of grace, the rainbow is the sign of the theater, the scope and the plenitude of grace.

The nimbus encircles the head of a person to say that here is one who heard, who trusted, who accepted, who dared what he trusted and became by grace a kind of personal incandescence of a response to grace. Mary, for instance. "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..." This listening, this acceptance, this daring to be the vessel and to bear the burden of grace- this in Christian art is always signed with the sign of the nimbus.

The rainbow is the sign of the scope of grace. The great story in Genesis does not end with a man, Noah, encircled by a nimbus. It ends with a kind of cosmic nimbus from God, bent in incandescence around the whole creation. God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations. I set my bow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." It is here being said to us that the life of history and the life of nature are not separate. The life of nature has been drawn into the destiny of man's decision as history. The processes and outcomes of both are drawn into the crucial alembic of the decisions of man. A man, Noah, could listen or he could deafen himself. He could obey or not obey. Because he listened and obeyed, a little island of responsibility and care floated once upon the surface of chaos.

We are hemmed in by problems whose solution demand(s) such an evaluation and use of men and events and things and nature in its structure and process as this legend sets forth. What this legend says about man's responsibility for the earth is exactly in other language what the Bulletin of the Atomic Sciences is saying month after month. The bow of God's promise and power and grace is, for instance, over the city. According to man's decision, the city can become a theater of grace in which humanity can be most richly realized, or it can become a humanly intolerable hell, a stifling intersection of procedures for industrial process and for, in Chicago's instance, conventioners' frivolity.

Or, the bow of possibility is over Lake Michigan. How that magnificent givenness shall go is according to the elevation of evaluation by which we regard it. It can remain a gracious counterpart to the crowded city, (an-sic) open, seeming illimitable, always clean, and always there, to talk back and modulate the fevers and foolishness of crowded lives in a city, or it can be turned over to sewage and the little waiting algae. From symbol to evaluation to decision.

Isn't the history of culture not always a clear line, but it's always a line, and men can do what they will to one another in our time. It is now possible for the first time for man to do with the earth what he chooses. Men can do with or against one another. They can do for or against the fecund earth, the clean air and the clean water. And then the level of their evaluation as to what they will to do becomes the pinion on which the future really turns. The present cadre of radical theologians, with their appeal to a holy secularity, are not really repudiating transcendence, they are only relocating and domesticating and making it vivid.

They are simply announcing its presence, its power, its promise where the ancient story of Noah proclaims it always was and where the Christian assertion of an incarnation acknowledges its residency.

A halo, then, for Noah. His obedience to God and the year he put in deserves one. But beyond the halo, the story talks of the glow of the holy over and within the evil, the problematic always a possibility within an alluring before chaos and the sweat. Is that what the bow means? That bow that the story speaks and which may have been in Hopkins' mind when he wrote that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God...?"

## 1968 (?) **The Doctrine of Grace** *Place unknown*

Earle Lectures, based on the material which would ultimately become Essays in Nature and Grace, published in 1972.

**Tape 1. Side A.** (First lecture) Sittler begins with an introductory background lecture before tackling the Biblical material and the scope of the doctrine of grace. He discusses the "current tumult in Christian theology" in issues related to the sacred and secular, the death of God, etc., as set forth by Cox, Altizer, Van Buren, Hamilton, etc. He reviews the WCC's Faith and Order studies on the meaning of Christ, grace and nature, beginning with the gathering in 1936, and how the doctrine of Christology enlarged through the years.

**The doctrine of creation is presupposed as the necessary setting for an adequate understanding of the doctrine of Christology.** The almost exclusive elaboration of the doctrine of Christ under the article of redemption is both reductive of the Biblical scope of the testimony and of the richness of the catholic theological tradition.

The image of faith's life as life in the body is ignored, in the interest of controlling dogmatic notions. The testimony in Ephesians, Colossians, etc. suggests that the pattern of creation, redemption, sanctification is disruptive of the organismic speech about the presence and power of grace. The language of the fourth Gospel, particularly when read contrapuntally with the Epistles, is embarrassing to a too quick dogmatization of grace.

There is a richness in the **theology of the patristic period.** We need to attend to the eastern fathers, their unity of images. The Orthodox ideas have a strange relevance to contemporary problems and the church. Western theological thought has ignored or suppressed much of this strain.

**Dissatisfied with the doctrine of grace as generally understood, Sittler lists meanings, explanations of the scope of grace.** Especially in the Lutheran tradition, we concentrate on man as sinner and the Holy Eucharist as a holy mopping-up operation for our private indiscretions. If the doctrine of grace is restricted to the realm of privacy and interiority, this will no longer meet man's interests or concerns.

After a pause, Sittler continues, in mid-sentence, referring to the **widened scope of our understanding of nature and the universe and how this relates to our doctrine of grace.** We need to recognize the importance not only of who man is but where he is, how man is in the world. The systems of Christian ethics

are also related to the doctrine of grace. Sittler also talks about the **importance of finding truths in contemporary literature. Grace is always a strangeness, a gift, a surprise.**

**Observations on "theological method."** "Don't start with the method, but live with the data for a long time." Sittler tells the story about Tillich and his comments on theological method. Sittler, speaking about himself, says, "I do not have one sufficiently clear to deserve accreditation by the reigning theological club."

Every man has a dispositional bent which, when acknowledged, goes a long way toward understanding what one historian has called "the mystery of the mind's attention." Sittler states that "a systematic rigidity has always been strange to my nature."

### **Tape 1. Side B.** (Second lecture)

Sittler introduced, and then he begins talking about the **Dimensions of New Testament Christology**. He speaks about the "Glory of God" in the Old Testament: the term for the presence and power of God in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word for "the glory of God." Sittler then goes on to talk about the Christological momentum in the New Testament.

**Observations on "Style":** Sittler states that he does not hesitate to use the word "style" in Christian discourse. (A Frenchman said, "Style is the man himself.") Sittler offers the following designations of styles of rhetoric:

1. Christology which operates with a rhetoric of recollection. The testimony to Christ takes its momentum from the vocabulary of the hope of Israel.
2. Rhetoric of participation and reenactment. Sittler talks about the concept of faith as participating in membership in the body, which body is continuous with the head of the body. This is a theology of the mystical body.
3. Christology for nature. The realm of redemption can not be conceived as having a lesser magnitude than the realm of creation. (The Christology of cosmic presence and energy.)

**Paul and the gnostics:** There are two problems with Ephesians and Colossians: questions of authorship, and the peculiar terminology drawn from gnostic discourse. However, Sittler says the writing seems to be in organic continuity with what the author has been saying all along. The gnostics set limits on the work of Christ, but Paul said the work of Christ has disarmed the demonic powers; Christ is eternally preexistent. He is the image of the invisible God. The work of Christ does not exhaust its efficacy or its intention within the world of privacy or moral solitude or individual existential relation of a man with God. The demonic powers in all parts of the universe have been disarmed by him.

*(This is the end of Side B. However, Sittler has not finished his lecture.)*

### **Tape 2. Side A.** (Third lecture.)

Sittler **summarizes the first lecture:** Explains why the inquiry about grace is

important. Talk about God may not be the best way to find a fresh way of relating the reality of God to human life. The term "God" has so many meanings that it points to a blur that stands, for many, for a mighty assertion without a specifiable content. But grace makes the issue inescapably concrete. Grace affirms that the fundamental power, source, and end of all things is the power of love that wills toward fulfillment all that is. It is the substance of the Christian faith that this love has become present in history incomparably in the presence and authority of Christ.

**Summary of second lecture:** The effort being made is to recover the scope of this presence by a reinvestigation of the earliest witnesses to the grace of Christ in history.

**The intention of the third lecture:** When men were moved by a receptive stance before nature, then it was natural for them to praise the grace and power and love of God. **But how shall the world understand grace when man is no longer a receptor but an aggressor in relationship to nature?** It is one thing to speak of grace to a pastoral society and another to a genetically masterful, technically sophisticated time in which the creation of life itself is a possibility. **An adequate doctrine of grace must relate us anew to the fact and right use of the actual world in which we are now living.**

Three questions remain: What is this future man? Who is this coming man to whom this appeal for a gracious understanding of human scientific creativity is addressed? What is man at the core?

The Gospel is irrelevant to many because it does not address with vision, praise and judgment these actualities which constitute the structure of modern man's operational life. We have a gospel of consolation for the weary, but a very slight gospel for the vigorously constructed, not much of a gospel for man's creativity, for his joyous exercise of corporate and constructive efforts with other men to transform the world. A gospel only for desolation is simply not interesting. To men who rejoice in the openness of nature through scientific knowledge, to new forms of creative order, toward a finer human fulfillment and a better use of the earth, it is a fact that the catholicity of the gospel may have been shrunk to a doctrine of grace in our time which is not available for dealing with man who exercises positive works and thought toward a new ordering of the world.

*(About half-way through side A, there is no more of the lecture, but it is not clear that Sittler had finished his presentation. Nothing on Side B.)*

## **1969 Centennial Symposium at Augsburg College Feb. 4**

The subject is the **care of the earth and the theological underpinnings for a Christian ecology.**

J. S. begins by explaining how he came to his understanding of how a Christian ought to regard the world. "Grace was not invented by Jesus Christ. It is continuous from the Old Testament through the New Testament." The OT "Hein" is the same as the NT's "charis," grace. Western Christianity's interpretation of grace has not been completely faithful to the riches of the NT. It says that grace restores man to God by forgiveness of sin. However, there is another strand in the NT that says that the means of grace should not be reduced to Christ on the cross. Christ is that in whom all things hold together. In the Eastern (Orthodox) tradition, the Christ who greets you is never Jesus on the cross, but is Christus Rex, Christ alive. In this tradition, Christology swims in an orbit which does not ignore the moral situation of man before God nor the cruciality of God's action for that situation-... that is the axis of their worship, but not the outermost dimension of it. The whole cosmos is the habitation of the grace of God.

Sittler discusses the influence of Irenaeus on his own thought.

What is the appeal of modern art? In modern art a thing is permitted to be itself; it evokes from humanity a smile of recognition, an acknowledgement that we are fellow creatures, rejoicing in the ISNESS of things, with affection for the thingliness of things. Example of his point: the significance of the stainless steel altar rail designed by Mies van der Rohe in the chapel at ITT.

The scope of grace, the place of grace must be declared in the field of our operations as modern men. We must domesticate the occasions of grace within the living of life in the modern age. Ends by quoting 2 poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

## **1969 The Intolerability and Inevitability of Establishments**

*LSTC, Feb. 5.*

**Side A.** To begin, we must come to grips with the meaning and force of and the relationship between terms. **Establishment:** The word must be rid of certain suppositions having to do with organization, legitimization, legalization, self-consciousness. But that there are such things as establishments is a fact. Efforts to specify their boundaries and power is a tricky business. Sittler reads a sociologist's definition. We must make a **distinction between establishment, bureaucracy, and tradition.**

Establishment may be almost invisible, but a bureaucracy has high visibility. Bureaucracy constitutes the procedural arm of the establishment. The establishment decides upon the form of order, the bur. exercises the achievement of order. A bureaucracy may become so large and acquire such momentum that an establishment may fail or not be locatable but life goes on just the same because of the efficiency of the bureaucracy. Sittler quotes from a letter from Sidney Mead at Iowa on the topic.

When an establishment is under fire, where does the bureaucracy stand? It appears to go with the establishment immediately, but in the long haul, to go against it. Why? By force of habit, reasons of security, contiguity with personnel of the establishment. But

ultimately, they find common cause with rebellion against the establishment. Any establishment tends to make the realm of the human and the private expendable in terms of power. When power is the issue, the realm of the human and personal has to give way.

Quote of Aldous Huxley: **Who writes our history books? What is the relation between the mass of little people and the pageantry being enacted by the relatively few big people?** What bearing does it have upon our present discontents? Sittler then quotes Mead, Shakespeare, Sandburg.

What do these observations bring to our **reflections about peace?**

We need a new way to talk about **tradition**. What the church has meant by “tradition” has been what the historians have meant by their “Big People” history. But the *actus tradendi* (the energy of the Gospel from one generation to another) has gone on despite what the Big People were doing at the top.

How might we envision **peace in our time given our establishments?**

Establishments are inevitable because men need order and continuity, and establishments are also intolerable. Without power, nothing is accomplished. However, pride in power leads to arrogance, rule becomes rigidity, right by virtue of momentum secures ruling power.

Given the contemporary world in establishment hands, no **theological term** that has grown out of another kind of world can serve theology without radical reinterpretation. Every term must be re-measured as regards its sufficiency for meaningful use in contemporary culture. T. S. Eliot said that there is a limit to what may be learned from experience. Let’s take a specific term:

**Evil.** Evil as it operates in an establishment has a new dynamic added to the ancient power to which the Bible bears witness. We must ask how the forces which encourage and demand war are produced by the establishment. Augustine said that evil comes as a perversion of love. Our affections are wedded to establishments which secure our desires, enhance our self-understood roles, offer the continuation of our pleasant establishments. The affection with which we regard the good of our own establishment may be the occasion for evil of a subtle and more devious kind. The energies of life are in full rebellion against all rigidities toward which establishment tends.

Evil is not only a determination of the will but a function of those very good affections which we create by virtue of our existence within establishments. This kind of evil is of enormous subtlety, a product of the ossified good. What the establishment comes into being to secure, it always tends to stifle.

Analyzing student frustrations and rage, we see **the relation between the establishment and man’s hope for peace**. We also want what we can’t have without war. Illustration: Everybody wants a university but a university gets its survival funds from a system that may be incapable of admitting into actuality the values it exists to celebrate and serve. A university lives from the skimmed-off abundance of the very system that fights against what the university exists to criticize. Our generation has seen that the addition to the military-industrial establishment (both

admittedly sinners) of the university which has traditionally claimed relative purity, that this is an event of the last decade.

In the years ahead, **we must be reflective upon what kind of evil comes into existence and threatens human life within corporate structures** to which our affections attach us and which evoke frustration when our affectionate nurturing of them makes them stiff. Such reflections will not authenticate the hopes of those who find adequate redemptive powers within secularity. Sittler says that he does not fear the growing secularity of our time. For secularity has only to mature to curve inward upon its own problematic and confirm the suspicion that human structures are themselves productive of the very questions of love and evil and redemption and grace and salvation, which remain the fundamental Christian vocabulary. The Gospel of grace and judgment has nothing to fear from secularity. It has only to fear the ossification of its own forms as these have been identified with the establishment. Secularity, in its own analytical quest for clarity and in its own experience of its own potentials, will curve in upon itself in order to know that love is really not enough.

**Side B.** Discussion. First question: Are you concerned with constructive alternatives to the existing establishment? For example, participatory democracy?

Sittler: I didn't feel I had time to talk about that. Participatory democracy is a political notion, but political establishments are not the only ones which evoke a sense of deprivation and rage. (There is also) an economic establishment.

Question about the "little people" and the establishment, esp. in relation to the writings of Erik Fromm. Some other questions are hard to hear.

Sittler's responses include these comments: We must walk a thin line between attention to what the establishment means by existing: continuity, order, competence, history, momentum. This is what tradition is at its best. It must also be assessed for what it is always tempted to become.

Question: How do we relate your model of the establishment and the bureaucracy to the church? Sittler says the model doesn't work well with the church.

## **1969 Time, Space and the American Experience** *August 13*

### **Side A.**

Sittler begins by describing the course established at the University of Chicago Divinity School, "The American Experience," designed to be a common starting place for all students who come to the university with varied experiences. The course asks, "Is it possible to see what constitutes the American man in his American particularity?" There are three teachers for the course: an historian, a literary critic, a theologian.

One of the themes for the course is the **non-eschatological character of American life**. Death is rarely a subject for preaching. There a relationship between the spaciousness of the place of the American enterprise and the outcome that American people recognize reluctantly that not all things can be accomplished by motion or by the expenditure of sheer energy.



### **We do not confront the matter of limitation and boundary.**

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Frederick Jackson Turner wrote an essay “The Frontier and American History.” All previous ways of interpreting American history had to be called into question because perspectives of the early efforts to understand American life had understood American life to be an extension of European life. Turner insisted that American political forms had grown out of American situations. The main thrust of Turner’s address was a profound truth:

### **The frontier was always available and has been a formative influence in unfolding the pageantry of American life.**

The living space of Europeans had been divided among nations. Borders (seas, mountains) were fixed. There was a sense of being closed in. The situation in North America was different. The settlers knew that what was settled was not what was available. Illimitability of land was a part of the American consciousness. American literature breathes an air which blows in from an open frontier. American humor owes its vitality to the same thing. Sittler talks about the “language-shaping vastness of this illimitable land.”

Illustration: Moby Dick. Sittler reads from the novel. He points out that there is a close identification in the quote of the expansiveness of God himself, the Creator, the close relationship of that and the American man’s understanding of his democratic institutions. God himself was a democrat, on the side of democratic institutions.

Another illustration: Walt Whitman’s poetry.

### **Side B.**

**The frontier mind and technology.** The spirit that conquered a huge land is a spirit continuous with that which today plays with technology. Technology for the common man in America is a stronger and longer arm to conquer a wilderness with. Evidence of a spirit that has never had to come to terms with boundary, limit, the end. The promise of technology is a new frontier.

### **How space and time are related in our American experience.**

Sittler references Sidney Mead’s essay in 1954: Space has overshadowed time in the shaping of the American mind and spirit. Sittler also cites De Creve Coeur, “Essays to the American Farmer,” (1782): What then is this American, this new man? What was new was not to be separated from the experience of space. What freedom Europeans could find was in the context of time, time within a given space. Sittler quotes Stephen Vincent Benet, “The Western Star,” and Francis Parkman’s Journal. Sittler describes time as the awareness of passingness, and discusses Americans’ concept of freedom as movement in space....

Can a spirit and mentality nurtured upon the availability of open space even envision and successfully attack the **tasks that now confront us**? Can operations in a closely woven technologically organized, ecologically integrated and delicate structure, can these be

rightly guided by the same cast of mind? **Can the spirit that won a continent sustain a national community?** Sittler believes not.

**Time in history stands for maturity, discipline, order, choice.** Time is the symbol of a givenness, a boundedness, within which a more human society has got to be attempted by a discipline of the mind and the spirit. Sittler quotes Santayana's "Cape Cod," and Whitman.

## **1969 Time, Space and the American Experience** *August 13*

Sittler delivered a shortened (one tape-side only) version of the preceding lecture on the radio on a program called "From the Midway," a University of Chicago weekly program.

## **1971 Theology and Ecology** *Lenoir Rhyne College, April 19*

### **Side A.**

Neither the law nor technology can solve our environmental problems. We must acquire a new vision of the world. How can we accomplish a change in spirit to deal with the crisis?

Man's dominion over the world has been interpreted as a divine sanction for whatever depredations he has wanted to work on it. Explanation of the Biblical understanding of creation. "Proposition: Unreflective assumptions are harder to explode than the operating principles of a society."

Discussion of the nature of man, the importance of relationships in terms of our identity. Psalm 104 is an ecological doxology. We must relocate our doctrine of grace out of the doctrine of redemption back to the doctrine of creation.

Grace is God's good will. "We must spring the doctrine of grace loose from its entrapment under Christology."

Man's understanding of his own identity, i.e. his psychological health, is tied to his relations to the world as nature.

*Authors quoted: David Brower of the Sierra Club in a March, 1971, NEW YORKER; Lynn White ["The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis"] in SCIENCE, regarding the theological roots of our ecological crisis; Shakespeare's metaphors and similes from the natural world; Loren Eiseley; Richard Wilbur.*

### **Side B. American Space-Time, space and the American experience; the role of technology; our concept of freedom.**

Sittler begins by describing "The American Experience," a course he

taught at Chicago with Marty and Gunn (sp?). Themes in history, literature and theology were interpreted particularly for those preparing for the ordained ministry. From this experience, Sittler gained insights about eschatology, time, and space, the power of the frontier and the power of technology.

The power of the frontier in the consciousness of Americans was the incarnation of the sense of the illimitable.

The role of technology: The spirit that conquered a huge land is the same spirit that today plays with technology. Technology is a longer and stronger arm to conquer a wilderness with; it can whip anything. We've never had to come to terms with boundaries and limits. The promise of technology is our new frontier. (*Cites Sidney Mead's essay about the American people, their space and time, in the JOURNAL OF RELIGION, Vol. 34, number 4, 1954.*)

Their experience in space was the formative power for Americans. Their existence in space as opposed to their fathers' existence in time in one space was a difference. The "ties of time" were broken. We can no longer escape from moral decisions. Sittler describes an "interior flight to the suburbs."

We must use this understanding as an analytical tool in our moral crisis. Our concept of freedom is "freedom of flight." The mastery of whence we have come and the importance of geography in intellectual and cultural life is to break the tyranny of provincialism, to come into interior freedom.

Does our background fit us for dealing with today's problems? Sittler says no. Time stands for maturity and discipline. He recommends Santayana's "Cape Cod." During the last decade, the breakdown in law and order was a human breakdown in charity and an acknowledgement of our fellow manhood.

## **1971 "Shaping the Future": Nobel Conference at Gustavus Adolphus College**

*(There are 3 tapes in this series: The lecture by Sittler; the closing panel; the banquet highlights. The quality of the tapes is not too good, particularly the tape made of the closing panel session. Sections of this tape are unintelligible. The proceedings of this conference were published as Shaping the Future: A Discussion at the 1971 Nobel Conference Organized by Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN, ed. John D. Roslansky. Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Co., 1972)*

### **Tape 1: The address by Sittler.**

He begins by challenging several assumptions: that students' assumptions are the same as their teachers'; that there will be a future for man; that man can shape the future in a way that is acceptable to nature and satisfactory to man.

"We must rethink our whole way of knowing." Our images of 'shaping' are all wrong. "To shape the future" is anthropocentric. There must be a **new encounter between**

**science and religion regarding man's place in the world.** As St. Augustine said, there is no entrance into truth save by love.

The doctrine of creation, man, nature, and history are combined into one bundle: ecological unity. Quotes Richard Wilbur, "Advice to a Prophet." **Progress** is not sacred but an optional goal. We must recognize the importance of understanding finitude, our limitations.

Limitation is a precondition of creativity. The world is the theater of God's grace.

**Tape 2: Closing Panel.** Participants were Norman Borlaug, John McHale, Glenn Seaborg, Joseph Sittler, Antony Weiner.

The tape includes a hostile question addressed to J. S. complaining about his lecture. "Why didn't you speak in terms students could understand?" The questioner accused Sittler of being an intellectual show-off. Some of Sittler's response is unintelligible. Sittler is asked to comment on Seaborg's "complete faith" in science and technology. Sittler says it is, rather, a well-founded confidence, not faith. The word faith should not be used in this way. A question follows about wisdom and science.

*Very little discussion on Side B of this tape.*

**Tape 3: Banquet Highlights.**

The entire banquet program was taped, including musical entertainment and introductions. Each of the 5 major participants was asked to sum up his own **highlight/reflection of the conference.**

Sittler's begins with an amusing "evening lesson" about "Joseph's experience in St. Peter." The highlights for him were the absence of simplification, the call for courage to face ambiguity, the call to hope, the open communication among participants. He, in his address, was reintroducing the church's tradition concerning the doctrine of the grace of God which includes God's grace in nature.

## **1973 "Suffering and Splendor"** *LSTC Chapel, April 5*

**Side A.**

Text is from **Romans**. Sittler points out that the New English Bible, from which he reads, uses the word endurance rather than patience, and splendor rather than glory.

The lectionary system's chief disadvantage is that it asks us to preach bit by bit on something that did not come into existence in pieces but as an organic whole.

In Paul, each word receives illumination from every other word. Anything that Paul says has as its proper commentary everything that Paul says.

In our passage for today, suffering and splendor belong together. Christian suffering is not occasional pain which comes and goes; it is not episodic. It is an inescapable tautness

in the Christian life. Suffering is not something which happens to us. Suffering characterizes and is a component of the Christian life. **Suffering of the life of faith is of the character of faith.** As before God, we see enough never again to be without a lurking remembrance of what we have seen, that is, the splendor, but in that seeing, what we see remains a dimmed beholding which in finite time never becomes the absolute clarity that one longs for.

**Splendor** is the light that the Holy gives off. That which lighted the face of Moses, enshrined the Transfiguration story in the Gospel, which shimmers throughout every intersection of God and men on their pilgrimage through life, and which shone in the hearts of those who walked to Emmaus. That eschatological existence between a seeing that cannot be forgotten and nevertheless living one's whole life in the unforgettable that cannot be wholly grasped, this is the interior climate of the Christian life and this is what Paul means by suffering. It is also the story of all history, all nature, and all theological reflection.

**To wait and to hope.** The Hebrew root of these two words is the same. Suffering characterizes all that is. All is also included in the splendor. Only now are we ready to see what Paul says about hope and God's spirit. Hope is the steady character of faith. Faith moves within hope. To see is no longer to hope. If we hope for something, we do not see yet and then in waiting for it, we show our endurance. Blessed assurance is always given in the context of blessed endurance.

In Paul's paragraph about **the Spirit**, the spirit comes to us in our weakness. Paul illustrates this endurance in hope by using the illustration of the life of prayer. We believe that in prayer we should, for a moment, have that tautness between suffering and splendor relaxed. But that doesn't happen. We stumble in our guilt, inarticulate, and God is within us, praying with and for us. It is a spiritual greediness that wants a special delivery torrent of spirit that shall enter our lives to give us blessed assurance and permit us to escape blessed endurance.

This pericope points to the next section, a mystery about foreordination which Paul does not unwrap. He moves from mystery to doxology, from astonishment to praise, from acceptance of the mystery to adoration of it.

*Side B is blank.*

## **1973 Dies Theologia - Pastoral Conference** *LSTC, May 9*

### **Tape 1. Side A.**

#### **New accents in theology. How theology has changed.**

Bob Tobias begins the session. Participants should have read Nature and Grace as background. He introduces J. Sittler who says that he wants to demonstrate concretely, rather than abstractly, about changes in theological thinking, using a particular theme.

“I have tried to be open to changes in philosophy, sociology, technology, the use of language, access to cognition. I also depend upon Biblical language, episodes, parables, miracles, the whole Biblical story. Let me demonstrate how I’ve been compelled to think.”

A question presented itself to me [Sittler] at least 20 years ago: **How may theological address shaped in a classical or antique world be made to people whose experiences of the world are so radically different?- not just the world of history or reflection, but the world of nature.**

What is the duty that Christian people have as regards **the environmental crisis**? There ought to be a word from God on this, something in Christian tradition. We must demolish 3 assumptions, that technology alone can solve the problem it has helped to create; that legal structures are adequate by themselves; a resolute morality is enough to solve the problem. A morality which does not spring alive out of a religious vision becomes a dull duty. Morality never fills the space that the term “faith” describes.

Sittler was driven to ask what is that fundamental covenant (or) understanding which might, if reinterpreted, awaken people to their relationship to the world in such a way that the revolution in men’s treatment of the world might take place at the center, not at the legal surface or the technological modifications or the moralistic inhibitions so that their eyes are newly opened to the creation, in such a way to be moved to deal with it in love?

Sittler found in the **doctrine of grace** an adequate conceptuality and a sufficiently lively reality whereby to attack this problem. In reviews of Nature and Grace, the Catholics, Orthodox and Southern Baptists express no surprise in Sittler’s use of the doctrine of grace to bring to bear on this problem, but the Lutherans have. Probably because the Lutherans use “the grace of God” almost solely in relation to the second person of the Trinity. We have not been able to see creation itself as a realm of grace.

There is joy in the world apart from sin and redemption. This has a rich tradition in Biblical speech, but is almost excised in Lutheran thinking. Eastern Orthodoxy has always said that the grace of God is dispersed throughout the whole activity of the Holy Trinity. Christ is the clarifier of the grace of God, he is not the inventor of it. Grace is found in the Old Testament as well as the New.

Using this illustration, we can see how a contemporary theologian has to change: A much profounder use of Biblical material; increase in historical knowledge; Biblical scholarship; our provincial windows have been opened; particular force of scientific culture.

Another step: **the importance of the sermon.** Faith and culture intersecting.

#### **Side B. Questions and answers.**

Q: Richard Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture. Sittler’s comments on book.

Q: Carry analogy from culture to nature. Sittler says he has never talked of nature as a source of grace, but of it as a field of grace, a theater of

grace. I don't learn about the grace of God or my eternal redemption from the lilies of the field, but when I know redemption, I look at lilies differently.

Q: Talk about the phrase in the creed, "Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son..."

Q: What does what you have to say on nature and grace have to say in critique of something like Key '73? (Calling the nation to repentance; Jesus is the answer.) Sittler says Jesus is not the answer, he is the question. Jesus continues to trouble me more than he pacifies me. We are deep in a fat idolatry about America.

Q: On preaching and the responsibility of the hearer. Sittler: Let the people know you understand the conditions of their life. Dramatize the Christ/culture problem. Speak to a particular movie; what can the Christian faith say to this? Other illustrations, suggestions. Unwrap the depth of human problems and intersect them with the Gospel.

**Tape 2. Side A.** Questions and answers continued.

Q: Doctrine of grace and the environmental crisis. Sittler: The fundamental determiner in how I will deal with the world will be my understanding of my relation to the world. I must delight in Lake Michigan before I use it. Abuse is use without grace.

Q: How do you square a sense of obligation with grace?

Q: Media, communication, perception. Sittler says nothing can compete with the astonishing story of the Gospel. Preaching has changed in style and composition.

Q: Preaching and social issues. Sittler: We must challenge the presuppositions by which people live.

*Side B is blank.*

## 1973 Reflections on Christmas

**Side B.** (*Side A contains Sittler's Reflections on J. S. Bach at Carleton College in 1974.*)

*The Reflections on Christmas was broadcast in Dec. of '73 on "All Things Considered." Sittler's comments on this tape were also used on a tape produced by St. Olaf College in 1990, "Advent and Christmas: The Seasons in Word and Song," with musical selections by St. Olaf choral and instrumental groups.*

"All aspects of the story flow together to constitute a story in which all the concerns of humanity are fused and brought together and given a tender symbolization. The story's force and appeal resides in the magnificence of language."

Sittler recalls an E. B. White essay about Christmas in which he speculates about the effect of Jesus' birth if the story had been reported by a modern-day journalist.

The aspects of the story:

The language

New beginning, new possibilities in the birth of a child

Mary, symbolic of motherhood  
The shepherds: the message was addressed at the level of the common life.  
The animals: God so loved the whole world.  
A picture of a human possibility in contrast to the brutality, selfishness, injustices and all the other cleavages of life.  
The tenderness and beauty of the story.

## **1974 LSTC Mid-winter Convocation** (4 Tapes) Jan. 29-31

### **Tape 1: Sittler and Goerss Scope of Reflection**

**Side A. - Sittler.** The topic of Sittler's address is not stated. The tape begins in mid-sentence, with Sittler saying that Luther is not adequate for every situation. He explains that what he is trying to do in this speech is to suggest what tools are presented to Christian theology by the vision of the cosmos and what is possible for us as reflected in theology to do with our received traditions.

Citations:

1. The liturgy: "Our help is in the name of the Lord," ...Who made heaven and earth." The magnitude of reflection is right
2. W. Pannenberg: Long quote from the Crisis of Scriptural Interpretation: Theology must organize truth and knowledge.
3. L. Easley: The Immense Journey- Concentration upon the world as history.
4. H. Richard Niebuhr: Radical Monotheism and Western Culture- a quote about the religion of humanism.

One of the major revolutions in our time is the interpretation of the meaning of the word 'experience.' J. S. talks about the importance of vicarious experience through reading literature and history. "I went to sea before I ever saw the ocean."

The mystery of the Godhead declares that the knowledge of physical and psychical worlds will go on, but the scope of reflection about it can be exciting and affirming. As theologians, we must not operate in a closed order.

### **Question and answer session.**

Questions asked: Should seminaries require capability in the natural sciences of their entering students? In light of what you have said, how do you interpret Jesus' statement, "Are you not of more value than they?"? Is psychical research valuable? What is the difference between theological reflection and scientific speculation; the difference between the scientist's approach and the theologian's approach? (Professor Matthews is invited to respond here.)

**Side B:** Continuation of questions and answers. Sittler quotes a scientist-"We have now come to a place in our partial understanding of the universe that total comprehension may be ineffable. We may end up being Peeping Toms in the keyhole of eternity."



*End of Sittler's presentation; the rest of this side is the beginning of Goerss' lecture on the "Eight C's."*

**Tape 2. Labeled "Goerss tape."** *Side A is all Goerss' presentation.*

**Side B** begins with the end of Goerss' presentation, goes on with hymns and announcements, then Sittler begins talking about the importance of **staying relevant for the current generation**. He explains why he proposed that Dr. Matthews, from the University of Illinois, be invited to give a non-theological lecture (on science) before his own lecture; Sittler hopes that might be repeated as a format in future convocations.

Sittler lists some of the theologians from his younger days who were influential. He reminds his audience of who became important- Barth, Bultmann, J. A. T. Robinson.

*There is no more on this side, although only half the side is full.*

**Tape 3. Labeled "Hoyer and Sittler Tape."**

*Side A is all Hoyer's presentation.*

**The Task of Theology-**

**Side B.** Sittler. "Theological reflections upon the structure and process of the physical world. Sittler offers a response to Dr. Matthews' lecture of last evening. "The rhythm of theology." Theology is always tempted to curve inward upon itself, but theology can't fulfill itself by an ever-fresh reflection upon its own past.

Theology has 2 phases: a) the reenactment of what the fathers have done; attention to the particular, and b) construction which extends theology into all areas open for reflection by knowledge of the world around. A theologian mustn't be too narrow. Cites Paul Ricoeur essays about the meaning and interpretation of texts. The importance of speculation in theology. Theology is not philosophy nor metaphysics. Its fundamental is a great story. Man's encounter with God is always symbolically unfolded forward into ever-fresh events, encounters and understandings. That is the task of theology.

Example in Mark: Peter's confession, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." Jesus rebuked him because it was an invitation to stasis. Can we bring the story of the natural world into responsible theological reflection? Sittler wants to give the parish pastor practical ways to do this, but the tape ends before he does.

*While he is talking about the world-view of each generation, the tape ends. He is cut off in mid-sentence.*

**Tape 4.** *Is this a continuation of Sittler's presentation on Tape 3/B?*

**Side A.** As the tape begins, Sittler is talking about **confronting change, theologizing on the move**.

He wants to make 4 points:

1.) As life possibilities multiply, identity confusion increases. For our children, who have a different worldview than we, the ancient transmission of the symbols of

meaning and faith and trust and love have a rocky road to travel in reaching them with their ancient elements.

2.) As knowledge grows, norms of truth and meaning lose their prestige. The accumulated experience of a people stiffens out into habits of thought and action and this stiffening out of the multiple accumulation of a way of living and beholding and judging provides comfort for those at home in it and anguish for a coming generation who don't.

3.) We assumed that there was something eternal and rational in the way life was organized, but in the 20's and 30's, alternate ways of men's relating to one another emerged.

4.) Exposure of cosmic theater in which our reality has the reality it has (the impact of science). The mind has a longing for oneness, a need to seek a total vision of everything. ...search to find a pattern identical with all things.

Theological terms discussed. Sittler emphasizes the importance of "theologizing on the move." There is no home for faith. Abraham's faith was formed on the way. Story of Jesus and the lepers- "As they went, they were healed." The healing takes place between hearing the word and undertaking the pilgrimage.

1. **Doctrine of the Trinity.** It was formed because it was necessary. Sittler offers an insistence on the ONENESS of God. Christocentrism is the virulent heresy in the Lutheran church. The doctrine of the Trinity intersects modern thought, especially in biology and physics. Read Arthur Koestler's Roots of Coincidence in which he argues for the transcendent, the oneness of all things. Eastern Orthodoxy talks about the energies of God (Irenaeus). Western thought had to deal with the same thing through the Doctrine of the Trinity.

2. **Christology:** The church reached into Israel's experience to find a vocabulary to describe the presence of God in Jesus; then, it reached into the world and life experience for additional vocabulary. (The language of Teilhard de Chardin.)

3. **Doctrine of the Holy Spirit:** The soggiest doctrine of all. We're less clear about this than any other. Read Barth's Credo (aka Dogmatics in Outline), W. Pannenberg's essay on the Holy Spirit in his Apostles Creed. Sittler begins reading a quote from this which is continued on side B.

#### **Side B (of tape 4).**

4. **Eschatology.** "That yet unfolded into which the reality of God is always coming with his always-coming kingdom." God does not exist as a static existant. The Holy One is not a finished product nor is what he is about finished. R. Jastrow, in Bright Dwarfs and Red Giants, says that someday our world will end. How does this speak to our views about eschatology? Christian thought about death and eternal life has been shot through with an individualism which, in all other aspects of our theology, we modify. We are members of a body. Egocentricity is at the center of our notions about immortality, and egocentricity is

the ultimate evil. The promise of the eternal is that we shall all be changed.

### **Questions and answers:**

What are some recommended books on eschatology? Sittler mentions one (unnamed) by Boros; recommends Thielicke's Death and Life.

Doesn't the account of the transfiguration show that there is no extinction of personality? Sittler says the Jew wouldn't understand the phrase, 'extinction of personality.'

Comment on the BOOK OF CONCORD and its relevance for today. Sittler:

"I subscribe to the Augsburg Confession, but I don't live in the same time as Martin Luther did. But I do not find it constricting. I have a sense of humor about the reality of history. To live Christianly is a problem; life is not soluble.

## **1974 Mid-Winter Convocation, LSTC** *Jan. 29-31 (4 tapes)*

These tapes cover the same event as the above tapes, "Mid-Winter Convocation, LSTC", but include additional material. Tape 1 in this group is the lecture given by Dr. Clifford Matthews, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle.

Sittler introduces the "Scope of Reflection" Lecture Series for this convocation by explaining that he wants to ask what kind of theological response ought the Christian community be making to the new understanding of man, his world, his environment, etc., as that new understanding has been researched and brought to our attention by the efforts of science. The first lecture should be a reportorial lecture on fundamental methods and concepts in contemporary science. Having heard Dr. Matthews give such a presentation as a guest lecturer at Carleton College last year, Sittler thought he would be exactly the right person to begin our series for this convocation.

Dr. Matthews' lecture follows, on the rest of Side A, on Side B, and then is concluded on Tape 2, Side A.

*Sittler's lectures begin on Tape 2, Side B, and continue on Tape 3, Side A, and on Tape 4, Sides A and B.*

## **1974 California Lutheran Founders Day** *(2 tapes) April 1*

### **Tape 1. Grace and a Sense for the World**

**Side A.** (Begins with devotions and an introduction.)

The fundamental change in the 20th century is man's **scope of reflection**. "The theater of life's play has become vast." "The fortunes of men's minds follow the fortunes of their bodies." What does this mean for Christian theology?

Sittler talks about his participation in the ecumenical movement - the Conference on Faith and Order. "The **ecumenical movement** taught me that the reality of God and man, the meaning of Christ and the church cannot be fully elaborated by any one church or separate tradition." He talks about the progress of the study; finally, in New Delhi, the theme was expanded to Christ, the church and the world.

Sittler says it is not enough to think "What does Jesus mean to me?"

We must ask: what is Christ Lord of?

*(At the end of the first side of this tape there is a small bit from tape # 2, Side A.)*

### **Side B.**

On this side, a panel responds to Sittler's lecture and asks some **questions**. Sittler says that this is a tough time to be a pastor.

"How can we be true to the Gospel in the world when people want to talk about "my spiritual potential"? "What does it mean to be a human being?" Finding one's identity.... "His 'isness' is his 'doesness.'"

Sittler talks about his book, Nature and Grace. It was not meant to be used as the entire understanding and scope of grace. He tells a wonderful story about his father's fussing about an unmarried young mother in his logging camp congregation. Sittler's mother said to his father, "Joseph, keep quiet! It is such a LITTLE baby!"

At the end of side B, the beginning of the second lecture starts with Sittler talking about **New Testament language about Christ**. He refers to C. H. Dodd's book. Again, at the end of this tape, there is a snatch of an unrelated lecture.

### **Tape 2.**

#### **Side A.**

**New Testament language about Christ.** The church was groping for a language adequate to its experience of Christ, a rhetoric of sufficient amplitude. Sittler cites Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and tells an amusing anecdote about Barth's class in Basel, when Barth was speaking about interpreting Biblical passages. Barth said, "There's always the possibility that the man meant what he said!"

Israel wrote Deuteronomy before Genesis; she knew the Lord as redeemer before she knew the Lord as creator.

Christ is the clarifier of the presence of the eternal God. Sittler recommends John Reumann's book Creation and New Creation.

Sittler continues with some remarks about his involvement in the **environmental movement**. Neither technology nor laws alone can solve our problems with the environment. In response to those who say that God will not allow his creation to be destroyed, Sittler says we have the freedom to be damn-fools.

During the Reformation, the Christology of the reformers was concentrated in the 2nd article. But grace has always been an Old Testament word, as well. The gifts of nature are also grace.

**Questions** from panel and audience: Relationship between history and nature.

### **Side B.**

Where is freedom in grace? Sittler says that solemnity is not necessary to sobriety. (Story about John Courtney Murray and his martini.)

Abuse is use without grace. Sittler talks about the lifestyle that becomes a Christian. It doesn't have to be uniform, but "his bearing is a testimony to his faith." Enjoy the common life but with a quality of joy different from the affluent.

In response to another question, Sittler comments on the Lutheran liturgy. He discusses, in this connection, law and gospel thinking... Our liturgy is rather lugubrious... Sittler is not sure that our approach of coming to the proclamation of grace by first confessing that we are up to our necks in sin is right.

Continuing with comments on the liturgy: Contemporizing the old is a dubious procedure. Leave the old as it is. Instead, write new[ones]; no synthesizing! Sittler mentions the beauty of the Church of England collects.

Sittler offers some comments on the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues.

Sittler discusses the role of the Torah. The typical Lutheran understanding of the God-man relationship is negative. Luther had a restricted understanding of the law. We now have a better understanding with more objective scholarship about the role of the Torah. Sittler says that he is not a typical Lutheran in regard to his interpretation of the distinction between law and gospel.

### **1974 J. S Bach** *Carleton College, April 21*

**Side A only.** (*Side B contains the 1973 Reflections on Christmas*)

"A non-musicological approach to Bach's music," according to Sittler.

The first music Sittler heard was Bach. He knew the organ maker Holtkamp in Cleveland at the time Holtkamp was in the process of building a baroque organ suitable for playing Bach. (*This is a nice story*)

"The strength and truth of a generality depends on the precision of the particular."

Sittler speaks of the liturgical tradition Bach was a part of, and talks about the importance of paying attention to a concrete particular and the unfolding potentialities of the given as opposed to gaseous generality.

We think that the processes of creativity are hampered by reigning traditions; however, the limit that quenches is actually the discipline that releases.

The significance of Bach for the religious community: The ORDER in his music appeals to today's disorder; we now lack CLARITY. We are unclear about our identity and priorities.

Man's historical life can be drawn into a pattern by an eternal object. The historical can be redeemed into beauty and truth by the allure of the eternal. (Other examples, besides Bach, are from the works of Keats and Hopkins.)

A religious lesson from Bach: "I cannot offer my work to God if I must please everybody!" Soli Deo Gloria!

## **1974 Wisdom and the Numbering of Days** *Rockefeller Chapel, U. of Chicago, July 7*

### **Side A.**

This will be an elucidation of the meaning of the term *wisdom*. As we heard in the reading of Psalm 90, there is a connection between being aware of time and the gaining of wisdom.

Time, as it is used in scripture, means not simply clock time. In the profoundest sense, it means the awareness of mutability, the pathos of our historical unfolding, the irreversibility of life experiences. It is time in that sense that is presupposed in the Biblical use of time and wisdom.

In his essay, "Time, Space, and American Religion," Sidney Mead wrote that the enormous space available to us in our American experience has led us to overdevelop a sense of the possibilities of spatial expansion and dulled our sensitivity to time. American religion has seldom become a profound, spiritual religion. It has become moralism. Moralism is the way one uses religion to glue a republic together. When we could spatially slide out from under our ethical confrontations with injustice, we have not had to reflect on difficult problems about how a community is constituted when it can't run to the frontier or the suburbs. There is a connection between the spatiality of a people's experience and the way in which their religious sensibility develops.

How is the word *wisdom* used in Psalm 90:12? Wisdom is a holistic word. The heart is used to specify the sensitivity to profoundest understanding and relations, and wisdom means never simply "understanding," or to "gain information." A man is called wise in the Bible not according to his understanding but according to his conduct of life.

The dean reads a passage from Robert Oppenheimer about style. "Style is the deference that action pays to uncertainty. It is style through which power defers to reason." Sittler says that this is the reflection of a wise man. Style may be the equivalent word in contemporary literature to wisdom. In the classical meaning of the word *style*, style points to the holistic reality of the person.

What is the connection between style, wisdom, and the numbering of days? Sittler quotes from the Ecclesiastes passage read earlier in the service: this points to the brevity of life,

to the fragility of our hold on our accomplishments, to the pathos of passingness, of history, and our common mortality.

“Teach us to number our days” means teach us to know, accept, and even rejoice in our mortality. Teach us to know the numbered character of all things mortal. That, the Psalm suggests, is the precondition of wisdom. Sittler finishes by referring to the passage from Romans, also read earlier. All things are the Lord’s. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.

*(Side B contains “Reflections on Prayer” from August 12, 1979)*

## **1974 Conference on Aging/Reflections on Aging and Death** *Sept. 25*

Aging and death are not prominent themes in American religious reflection. We have never been an eschatological people. Our buildings are worn out at 30 and torn down. We have had illimitable space and resources. Aristotle said that all profound philosophy is a reflection upon death. Older generations grew up with a presupposition that there was a force outside, but as we gain more knowledge, the explanation of things can be derived from within the system. There is no need for God, no logical necessity for transcendence.

As a result, what becomes of Biblical images, i.e. resurrection, eternal life? Note A. E. Housman poem written for his funeral.

It is hard to understand the naked egocentricity of the Christian’s picture of eternal life. The shattering of the egocentric life is what the Christian is to be about. Not, “What will I be after I die.” The whole of Christian imagery of eternal life ought to be an acknowledgement that there is a potentiality for the human spirit which transcends the solidification of your precious identity.

As I get older, I [Sittler] ask myself, “What have you been? What have you done?” Back in the 60’s, the students were especially concerned with identity. They would ask, “Who are you, REALLY?” They assumed the identity of a person is something recondite, partly secret, wholly masked, and we walk around with this secret identity successfully masked from all beholders. I am not discontinuous with what I do. My identity becomes steadier under the threat of its dissipation. I am constituted by my questions and wonderings, not just by exterior relations.

We do not die all at once. The idea of death does not descend upon one, but grows up within one. Note W. Pannenberg’s Apostle’s Creed.

How shall I think of eternal life? “He is a new creation.”

We must think of eternal life in a trans-egocentric way. Don’t start thinking about eternal life with the resurrection, but with statements from the Old Testament: “He is gathered to his fathers;” in Sheol, “there is none to praise Thee.”- Only the self is there.

Study I Corinthians.

## **1974 Lectures on Theological Method** *(13 Sessions) LSTC*

Session I (1 tape)      Sept. 30  
Introduction to course; definition of terms.

Session II Luther

Session III Luther

Session IV Calvin

Session V Calvin

Session VI Schliermacher

Session VII Schliermacher

Session VIII Schliermacher and Bonhoeffer

Session IX Aulen

Session X Aulen, Pannenberg, and Rahner

Session XI Aulen

Session XII Barth

Session XIII Tillich

## **1975 Spirit and Creation**

*Brent House, University of Chicago, January 22*

As we pursue this topic, we must take our bearings from the understanding of the Christian community and the Hebrew community about the Holy Spirit.

Biblical material is essential.

There has been no course on the Holy Trinity at the (University of Chicago) Divinity School in the 17 years I [*Sittler*] have been here.

Harnack, in *The History of Christian Doctrine*, says that the **Holy**



**Spirit was irretrievably diminished in virtue of the theology of the reformers.** What has taken place is a diminishment of the doctrine so that what we understand as the Holy Spirit is a principle of knowledge; a super-natural, not empirically available, hardly nameable, effulgent holy gas, which exists between supernatural and natural, by which the incredible is made credible, the unbelievable is made believable, the believed not-to-be-true is nevertheless gulped as truth. The Holy Spirit is reduced. When we understand this shift, we understand how the charismatic movement has developed.

Pannenberg, Rahner, Augustine, Hefner, T. de Chardin are all good on the Holy Spirit. Sittler quotes from Pannenberg's Apostles' Creed.

Sittler talks about the way the **spirit of God is used in the Old Testament**.

It is a term used to designate the reality of God in his creative activity and presence. Read Psalm 104. The psalm does not speak of the spirit as a supernatural principle of knowledge but is simply the life of God.

The **theater of the spirit's presence is ordinary life**. Things move toward a spiritual fulfillment. All organisms seek to transcend themselves, said de Chardin. A reading from the chapter on death in Lewis Thomas' Lives of the Cell follows.

Note the prophets in the OT, who are "in the spirit" but the OT never assumes this different from the spirit by which all things are made.

In the 4th century, we see **early efforts of the church to elaborate a doctrine of the Holy Trinity**. There was a need for an account for the reality of Jesus. See the third article of the creed: The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life. Notice that the phrase "worshipped and glorified" involves terms which apply to Christian acknowledgement, not cerebration. Phil Hefner explains "God's way of being God" is in three phrases.

**There is no correction of the OT's view of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament**. The residence of the spirit is the creation.

In Corinthians, Paul says we shall be raised a "spiritual body." Does this go back to the Lewis Thomas and de Chardin ideas we spoke of earlier?

Sittler says that, next month, he is scheduled to speak at Johns Hopkins on their topic, "How can we as physicians say anything about eternal life?" The question as commonly put is absurd. Paul says, "He makes all things new."

#### **Question and answer period:**

Why did Paul use the term "spiritual bodies"?

Question about Acts 2:38 (about baptism)

" " a passage in John, "born of the flesh, born of the spirit."

" " the virgin birth.

Sittler recommends an article in the Spring 1974 issue of CRITERION by Paul Ricouer. It is a reprint of Ricouer's sermon in Rockefeller Chapel on the parables. Another question about de Chardin.

Sittler goes on to address Luther, the spirit and the church. The reformers saw the realm of the church as identical with the operating realm of the Holy Spirit. The church is the focal point (the remembering, pedagogical, transmitting, witnessing, worshipping focal point) but it is not the whole arena, either of presence or action. **The theater of the spirit is the creation.**

## **1975 Easter Sermon** *Augustana Lutheran Church, Hyde Park, March 30*

### **Side A.**

This is the feast of the victory of our God. **Easter is God's day.** All other questions (about eternal life, etc.) are secondary. Easter makes the point that if God is victorious, then questions of our own identity and our own selfhood in eternity receive a certain clarity. **Selfhood** is never an isolated thing to begin with. It is a community creation: community with God and all the other selves who constitute God's creation. The self is not sufficient within itself. What does that tell us about the selfhood we shall have in eternity?

Has there ever been any person who did not know that the reality of his personhood is established by that possibility toward which all his life he is opening? I am not just what I am but what I should imagine myself capable of becoming. **I am not only the self I have but that imagined fulfillment which even in this life allures me but is never identical with what I become.** The songs that men imagine are lovelier than any songs they sing. The possible that goes before me as a possible fulfillment which I shall never achieve is as constitutive of my self as the things I achieve. Therefore, that which allures me, that possible which draws me, that promise of God's promise of eternal life, is even in this world constitutive of my selfhood, and when we say "This is the feast of the victory of our God," the important statement is not "what kind of body shall I arise in?"

If God is victorious, we should leave the secondary questions in his hands. Even the body in which Jesus arose was not a resuscitated corpse. We shall all be raised BUT we shall all be changed. **Any possible identity in eternity with God can be neither discontinuous with the selfhood in life but must follow the line of our selfhood's tilting forward into a fuller selfhood in eternity to be fully realized.** Paul says, if then you be buried with Christ, then you are also raised with him. In Colossians, if then you be raised with Christ (notice the verb form- not the future) - if in your relationship to God through Christ now, the resurrection is not simply an event in the future but it is a word that characterizes that beginning of a process of the fulfilling of the selfhood which God promises to complete in eternity. It does not just begin at the grave.

In Romans 8, **his spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.** The negativities we experience in our present life are an affirmation that in the victory of God anything is possible. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard what God has prepared for them that love him."

(Some music follows.)

## 1975 Maundy Thursday Sermon

*Augustana, March 27 (but a continuation of the tape above, starting near end of Side A)*

This meditation will be based on the hymn which we have just sung, **“Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands.”** Verse two begins, “It was a strange and dreadful strife...” Sittler mentions the comment of a young parishioner, “Jesus died for us. I don’t see how it makes any difference.” There are two ways to transmit meaning: 1) Propositional way 2) Dramatic way.

**The death of Christ comes to us only when we understand it dramatically.** The propositions of Paul are not untrue but the church has always known another way to talk of that death and they used that way before Paul ever wrote or before the Gospels were written.

### Side B.

In Philippians, note the New Testament song, “Though he was in the form of God...”. Theologians have attempted by reflection to fill the gap between that man’s death (Christ) then and what does it mean for our dying life now. Note the Old Testament passages about the Passover; the death of the pure one. In the New Testament, we have the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Theologically, there have been 3 or 4 principal ways, taken from Scripture, in which men have tried to say **how the death of one effectuates the redemption of others.**

1. Ransom. Christ is a ransom paid to the powers of evil to rescue all from the devil’s grip. This image does damage to the doctrine of God. What kind of a God is this who makes a deal with the devil?
2. Substitution. Christ is a substitute for us.
3. Christ is an example. But this doesn’t answer my young friend’s question.
4. In the Old Testament, the big generic word for mankind is ‘Adam.’ He falls into temptation and breaks the divine connection. Why is Christ called the second Adam? In the second garden, he prays, “Not my will but thine.” The figure of the second Adam suggests that God in human form recapitulates the whole tragic error and overcomes it in his second Adam.

An event in eternity has taken place; it will never not have been. The record of man and God has been played over again by the man of God’s own choosing. In our hymn, Luther says the fundamental meaning of the death of Christ is that into the solidarity of the human reality of death life has entered.

Sittler illustrates by summarizing an 8<sup>th</sup> century poem, The Dream of the Rood. The language in it is closer to Beowulf than to Paul Tillich, and close to the New Testament.

## 1975 Pentecost Sermon

*Augustana Lutheran Church, May 19*

Rite of **Confirmation**. Confirmation is a stage in a process, part of a structure. Let us reflect on three terms: **affirmation, acknowledgement, confirmation**.

The fundamental thing underneath all the Christian faith is something that God has affirmed. It doesn't start with us at all. "I have informed all things that I have made with my breath, my life." (in the Psalm for today.) All things belong to him. In Christ, he comes where we are in order to put us where he intended us to be. The fundamental affirmation that underlies this whole act of confirmation, in fact the Christian life itself, is not what I say or you say or what we say to each other, it's something said by God before any of us were. "This is my creation. I will not abandon it. I will relate myself to it so that, despite its sin and alienation, it may fulfill that for which I intended it."

The Christian community is defined as all persons who acknowledge that. Acknowledgement of an affirmation: where does it occur? In infant baptism. The affirmation of God does not depend on my acknowledgement of it. Something has been done for you - this is addressed to the infant at baptism.

Confirmation. Confirmation doesn't create grace. It confirms the reality of God and his grace which you now take over as an accountable person. The importance of the Third Article: you can't believe by yourself. You can't prove the existence of God. How does the Spirit work? Sittler uses the radio as an example: in order for an instrument to function properly, it must have good design and manufacture and it needs to be plugged in to the current. The very life of God is in all that he has made. We need to be plugged in to the reality of his word, the church, the sacraments. Note the sentence in the rite, "The Father in heaven for Jesus' sake, renew and increase in you..."

## 1975 LSTC Chapel *June 4*

**Side A.** Service begins with confession, kyrie. Lessons read: Deut. 18:18 ff.; Romans 3: 21 ff.; Matthew 7: 21 ff. Part of hymn on tape.

**Sittler sermon: The problem of separating law and gospel.** As we are saved by grace, we may also be seduced by grace. It's good to have Old Testament passages in the lectionary, but that increases the torment of being a responsible preacher. When we preach symphonically out of the Bible and not just episodically, trying to penetrate to the meaning of fundamental themes, and not just picking up juicy bits of homiletical temptation here and there, we find ourselves plunged into a torment from which there is no release.

Let us reflect on **the theme of the 3 passages when they are read together**. The Deut. passage says that God presented the Torah as a demand.

In Romans, the righteousness of God is now manifested apart from the law. Grace-drunk Lutherans interpret this as the annihilation of the law. The passage from Matthew is totally confusing. The Lutheran temptation to be in grace may lead to a sanctimonious form of disobedience. "If you do not the things I command," says Jesus, "you shall not enter the kingdom."

These reflections coming together illustrate what I mean when I said that **to be a responsible preacher of the Gospel is a tormenting business.** Especially now, because as if we were indulging in a kind of frantic flight from the difficulties of dealing with things both insoluble but indissoluble, we flee to the bosom of Jesus. **To be a Jesus person is a devout way of coping out of the God relationship.** The word "Jesus only" is a fundamentally blasphemous statement. Jesus himself had no interest in "Jesus only." He said, "I must do the will of him who sent me."

To understand grace as a sentimental relationship whereby if one wallows deeply enough in that relationship, a parking lot space at the local hospital will always be secured is devotional blasphemy [*cf. Sittler's "Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation"*] which ignores and denies the thrust of the church's meaning when it puts these 3 lessons together. Calvin was right: **our business is with God.**

**The law is a primal form of grace.** God covenants out of grace to lead his people. There is no grace which does not have in the background as a formal program for its gracious reception the doing of the law. When an issue which is both insoluble and indissoluble constitutes a life-long torment for the preacher and theologian, it is just possible that the only way to resolve that which is insoluble is to thrust it into the mystery of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper where the command of God meets us and the grace of God invites us to participation in His solution of our insoluble.

*Side B is blank.*

## **1975 Sermons on Romans VIII** *Augustana Luth. Church, July 13, 20, 27* (*Printed in FAITH, LEARNING, AND THE CHURCH COLLEGE*)

**July 13:** Sittler begins by remarking that he has ducked preaching on this text in 45 years of preaching because he was not certain he had a grasp on its meaning. What we do not fully understand remains to haunt. Keats- "A huge and alluring vision strides before me."

However, some things in the chapter are not fully obscure, either:

1. Nature is not complete, is in motion, never static. We also share this unfulfillment.
2. God has subjected it in hope. To wait and to hope in Hebrew are the same verb.
3. We are related to this process of unfolding, waiting.

Not all troubles are negative. The coming into birth of the better often involves the groaning and travailing of the less good.

This passage is a part of Paul's great speech about the nature of the spirit of God.

"The earth is the Lord's." Adam was told to tend the land, not develop it.

The methods of practical men are ultimately destructive, and in the long run, the visionaries are the more practical. The rape of the earth is blasphemous. What would happen if Christians and Jews really believed what they said?

**July 20:** "The Spirit." Is the spirit a private pipeline to God? No!

Observe the first word in the text: 'Therefore.' What lies behind this? In chapter 7, Paul asks, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me...?" We are all within the grasp of 3 mighty structures:

1. Fact of evil.
2. We live in the midst of demonic forces.
3. Death.

Paul is not talking about private piety, but the structures that imprison finite man. There is no condemnation because God entered into the world and came through alive. The Spirit is the power of God by which we are inserted into that victorious life of God. What our spirit dreams as possible the disclosure of God in Jesus Christ declares as actual.

**July 27:** (*Sermon begins after tape has been running for a while.*)

In these times, Christian faith is a matter of inwardness, intense privacy, intense individual belief. This is not in the catholic tradition nor in the Bible. Ultimate meaning cannot be personal because my person is not identical with reality. I am a PART of nature and history.

Paul talks about the whole creation. God has come among us with a personal word. The only reason there is a continuing tradition of the Christian faith is because we never made it simply an analgesic for privacy, an aspirin for solitude, or Ben Gay for hurt in the gut.

We believe it because it points to that which constitutes deeper understandings of the nature of human life, transcendence, sin, reality.

Paul says, do what you believe. The Lord is the giver of life. If you believe that, then let your belief guide your living. Paul also talks about waiting. It's strange about the Christian community- it almost never mentions the Jews except during Holy Week. Yet, the history of Judaism is the richest commentary Sittler knows upon the meaning of the word 'to wait upon God' in the Bible.

Paul ties himself in a knot. "He calls us, then he must predestine, he justifies, etc....," and he gets himself in a box he can't get out of. "What shall we say to all this?" Paul passes from doctrine to doxology, from anxiety to adoration. He stops arguing and starts singing. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God."

## **1975 Installation of Pastor Hofer at Augustana, Hyde Park, Oct. 19**

**Side A.** Sittler's sermon begins with some thoughts on **ministry and the office of the ministry**. It is not a higher ministry in terms of its moral or even theological content, but it is specific because of its function. What is the particular office of the ministry to which our pastor is being installed this morning? The church has called it the ministry of word and sacrament. What is the specific ministry to which this man was ordained?

There would be no church at all if the story had not been kept alive. The ministry of the word is the ministry of the continuing office in the church which **keeps the all-powerful story told and re-told**. The content of installation goes back to the content of ordination. Sittler begins to talk about the church's proposal for a new order for ordination; he explains his discomfort with it, but is then cut off.

*No more on this side.*

**Side B.** *Continuation of service.*

## **1975 Walnut Hill Lutheran Church Dallas, TX, Nov. 2-4 (6 tapes)**

This series of tapes is difficult to follow because of the order in which the material was transferred to the tapes. Summaries of the sermon and talks are in chronological order with an indication of which tape and which side each presentation is recorded on.

Sittler was invited to Walnut Hill as part of the congregation's celebration of its 25th anniversary. Sittler had visited the church three years earlier and spoke on the prodigal son.

Sunday morning service, Nov. 2 "**One Great Family Service**"  
(Sermon by Sittler.)

**This is on Tape 1, Side A.**

The tape contains the entire service up to the time of the anthem following the sermon. The **topic of the sermon is "All Saints Day."**

Sittler begins by talking about his enriching experience in the ecumenical movement for the past 35 years. In Lund, 1951, (Faith and Order) he was involved in 8 days of discussion about worship. He tells a story about his conversations with the representatives of the Orthodox Church and their understanding of worship, their belief in the aliveness of all who have ever been: "a mighty cloud of witnesses." They gave him an appreciation of the value of the church's constant remembering, and talked about the divine liturgy going on before God. The church is ecumenical in space AND time. There is a difference between recollecting and remembering.

History of the church in the U. S. in the past 25 years. Upsurge in church attendance was a cultural phenomenon of very little religious significance. The church sat on its hands while profound injustices were screaming for attention. Then came the 60's, both terrible and marvelous. There was no word from the church about civil rights.

**In the 70's and beyond, we should focus on 2 words:**

**1. Truth.** The church must ask, "What are the values of your life?"

(The church) must be dedicated to telling the truth, to defining love and justice. It has to do more than say "me, too" to the statements of the culture about values, love, justice and truth. The church of the future may not be a church people want to belong to. Good. The church is not a place for people to feel comfortable. If people don't have to change as members of the church, it is not the Christian church.

**2. Understanding of worship.** Our gathering will be an embattled people who know some things the world does not know. Worship is not an aesthetic to make you feel better. It must be a tightness around the truth, critical about what it means to believe in God, Christ, and the Spirit. "...joyful and grave worship which shall announce the difference to the beholding world."

Evening Program Nov. 2 **Population and Birth Control**

This is recorded on **Tape 1, Side B.**

Ethical reflections for the Christian in the face of the population explosion. Ancient teachings didn't answer questions no one was asking. What kind of behavior is the norm if society is to survive? Sittler talks about natural law, the meaning of ethics, the Ten Commandments, the Gospel. The Gospel (Christian ethics) says the law is not the final word, but "God is with us."

Population limitation is a necessity. What does the church teach? Sittler talks about abortion, brings up the Roman Catholic position, says that in some cases, abortion is a tragic necessity. The natural law of starvation will prevail if population is allowed to grow unchecked. Abortion ought to be the last step in population control. The Gospel helps us ask the proper questions but doesn't have pat answers. We have no clear Biblical directive in some matters of ethics.

*Questions and answers on abortion. Tape ends in mid-sentence.*

**Pastors' Seminar** Mon. morning, Nov. 3 (9:15) **Tape 2, Side A**

Sittler begins by talking about the **ecumenical movement**. What is the present state of the conversation among the various churches? Don't measure the vitality or reality of ecumenism by external signs or the frequency of international assemblies. There is doubt, now, among all the churches as to their own historical adequacy as containers of Christian reality, including the Lutheran church. There has been a change in vocabulary when Lutheranism is talked about; it is regarded as a critical principle within Christendom rather than as a constitutive form. No church is identical with Christ's church.



The best effect of the ecumenical movement was to curve us in upon ourselves with deeper examination. I (*Sittler*) discover that I need to find out more about myself after I talk with representatives of other churches. Illuminates inadequacy of self-knowledge. Sittler gives a history of the ecumenical movement's worldwide gatherings, beginning in Lusanne.

To be a Lutheran is not identical with being a Christian. Regarding the ALC and LCA, we ask questions in common about important concerns. "There will not be a structural merger, but we will discover that theologically we have come together, so that we might as well come together structurally as well." We already have arrived at a common life; any sense of the absoluteness of the tradition has been modified. To be in the ecumenical movement makes you a more grateful Lutheran (or whatever tradition you're in). We need a holy sense of humor, knowing that no one church is identical with Christ's church.

*Questions from audience.*

Discuss the ecumenical movement in light of "the church is the place where the Gospel is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel."

What is it that we have that is the "critical principle"?

Sittler: Luther's doctrine was formed out of the conviction that in all there runs a common thing: the address of God to his alienated world, and the address is grace. The focus of that grace and the content of it is Christ, and those who receive and acknowledge it is the church, although they are not the only receptors or acknowledgers.

Two powerful bodies in Christendom which have contributed to Biblical scholarship-Roman Catholics and Lutherans.

**The Lutheran church's task and duty** is constant Biblical study. Keep it honest and profound. This is what we owe the church. We must make our theology permeable to Biblical truth, even if it jolts us. We must be able to say we may have been wrong. Lutheranism represents an old, highly refined way of asking every kind of question. Luther never used the Bible as an ethical punch board.

Sittler cites Paul Ricoeur: the meaning of the text lies out in front of the text, as well as in back of, within and under. It escapes the intentionality of the writer and takes on a life of its own. Sittler says the parables are like that.

**Pastors' Seminar** Mon. a.m., Nov. 3, con. **Tape 3, Side A.**

**New form criticism;** redaction criticism. Recommended reading: Roy Harrisville's Gospel of Mark; Norman Perrin's Introduction to the Old Testament; Krister Stendahl on Matthew.

Question regarding the **charismatic movement** and its use of scripture. Pannenberg's and Barth's writings on the Holy Spirit demolish the reigning notion of the charismatic movement.

Question re **law and Gospel**. These categories now seem to be a method for Biblical interpretation. Luther needed to use them because of the situation at the time. The Lutheran fathers' understanding of the law does less than justice to the Old Testament. See Ernest Wright's The Challenge of Israel's Faith and The God Who Acts.

**Pastors' Seminar** Nov. 3 12:30 session **This is on Tape 4.**

**Sides A and B.** Sittler begins by recommending 2 books- Pannenberg's Basic Issues in Theology (esp. the essay in Volume I, "The Crisis of the Scriptural Principle") and Moltmann's The Crucified God.

He continues by picking up the theme of **law and gospel**, how they relate to contemporary life. **Care of the earth**, relationship of man to creation. Comparing Luther to Calvin.

On Side B, Sittler mentions his Essays on Nature and Grace. He asks about the environmental situation in Texas; discussion follows.  
*This side of tape is only half full.*

Evening Session Nov. 3 7:30 PM **Environment and Responsibility**

**This is recorded on Side B of Tape 3.**

Sittler starts with the definition of ecology. (Sittler says he used the word 'ecology' in an article ten years ago and was told to change it because it was arcane.)

Sittler discusses the difference between ecology and environment. Sittler explains how his interest in the environment developed.

Does the Christian community have a particular responsibility to the environment? The Bible is full of the materialities, the actualities of life. Mentions Lynn White's article, "Historical Roots of the Environmental Crisis" [*published in the Journal Science in 1967*]. Sittler doesn't wholly agree with White because the church is also the father of conservation and preservation. See Rene Dubos' The God Within.

*The tape ends in the middle of Sittler's response to a question about advances made in cleaning up the environment.*

**Pastors' Seminar** Nov. 4 9:00 A.M.

**This is recorded on Tape 5.**

**Side A.** Why is there renewed interest in the **Sacrament of the Altar? Worship, Liturgy, Language.**

1.) There is a need for trans-verbal character of the liturgy; need for trans-verbal communication because of the debasement, banalization

of the language. Language has lost its credibility. Media manipulation partly to blame.

2.) Fragmentation of natural forms of community. Work community is fragile, meaningless.

What changes has the church made? The mode and availability of the Sacrament was changed by the Reformers, not its substance. There is an effort, currently, to renovate sentence structure to intersect idiomatic speech in the liturgy. Keep hands off Elizabethan English! We can write our own (liturgies) afresh, but not rewrite the old. There follows a discussion of language as carrier of theological depth. There is a story about Sittler's discussions with the Orthodox in Lund about worship (*story also told in Sunday's sermon at Walnut Hill*). Their central image for worship is eternal praise and glory around the throne of God; Christ in glory, not on the cross. The church is ecumenical in time as well as in space.

Sittler discusses Pelikan's distinction between Traditionalism versus tradition.

There follows a discussion with audience about liturgical language. (Hard to hear.)

**Side B.** *Discussion continues on the following topics:*

- Liturgical language
- Holy Communion- frequency and practice
- Lutheranism as a critical principle, particularly as related to the state of the church during the Third Reich. Categories of law and Gospel, civil order and religious order. Complex question.
- Place of Formula of Concord.
- Interpretation of Ephesians I: 9-10. Unity referred to here is not about the church but a vision of the unity of the cosmos. See Arthur Koestler's Coincidences. Sittler says, "A cozy little Jesus religion is not enough." Story about Karl Barth during the time that Sittler was attending a 3 month seminar of Barth's, on the interpretation of scripture.
- Lutherans know Romans and Galatians but are shocked by Ephesians and Colossians. Recommended reading: Father Mersch's The Whole Christ; Bonifazi, Pannenberg.
- How does the enemy of God fit into cosmic unity? Problem of **origin of evil**. See Karl Barth, S. Kierkegaard, particularly The Concept of Dread.

*Tape ends in mid-sentence.*

**Pastors' Seminar, continued.** Nov. 4 (A.M.)

**This is recorded on Tape #6.**

**Side A.** Continuation of discussion from Side B, Tape 5, on the **origin of evil**. Real purity of heart must do battle with impurity of heart. You can't have good without the possibility

of evil. "How can I thank God for the grace of holding me if I've never been dropped?" Good has no meaning without evil. A pastor should acknowledge that there are some insoluble problems, should share personal doubts, questions and weaknesses. Sittler then talks about new problems in ethics, as a prelude to his presentation scheduled for this evening. Conception, abortion, suicide are still being talked about in the old way. Christian man is just as confused as secular man about these new ethical problems. There is nothing in our tradition to help us confront new ways of dying. "How do we locate grace within judgement?" We must reassess the meaning of suicide. Example from THE CRUEL SEA (Montserrat): "A man must do what a man must do and say his prayers." Thielicke's book on ethics is the best of the old books, but not so good as James Gustafson's. See Christ and the Moral Life and Can Ethics be Christian?

*Side B of this tape is blank.*

Evening Session Nov. 4 7:30 P. M. **Contemporary Medical Care and New Ethical Problems**

**This session is recorded on Tape 2, Side B.**

What is health? How do we define life? What are the guidelines for right action in the face of prolonging life?

What constitutes an individual? What role ought the individual to play in his own destiny? (ethically)

**Other topics addressed:**

Ethics of natural law.

Religious ethics. Jesus pushed the law forward into new situations.

Religious ethics are not everywhere the same.

Papal statement about the use of extraordinary means to prolong life, but what are "extraordinary means"?

What is death? In our new situation, the old guidelines do not intersect contemporary circumstances. What is the good? There is neither a clear good nor a clear evil. Uses example from this morning's session- CRUEL SEA. Mentions the recent double suicide of the Van Deusens and the difficulty the theological community had facing this and discussing it.

Is there a grace of God available for the loneliness of judgment?

**1976 Bicentennial Reflections**

*Augustana Luth. Church, Chicago, July 4*

The recording includes much of the service as well as Sittler's sermon. This was also the 4th Sunday after Pentecost. The first lesson was from Ezekiel, the epistle, from II Corinthians, and the gospel, from Mark 4:26 ff.

**Side A.** No sound for a while, then this side contains the confession, kyrie, a hymn, the collect, the lessons, a hymn, a solo ("Shall We Gather At the River"), a hymn, a prayer, the Eucharist and choir anthems sung during Communion.

**Side B.** No sound for a while, then **Sittler's sermon** begins. His first reflection is nostalgic, a celebration of July 4 in years past.

He then goes on to reflect on the lessons for the day, two of which have a common theme: shoots planted in a new place. The (American) colonists came to a new Eden. Quotes the passage which includes the phrase, "...a city set on a hill, a light in the wilderness."

The settlers (Puritans and Pilgrims) didn't expect to stay in America. They expected to be called back home to complete the "unfinished Reformation." Sittler quotes Samuel Danforth, "We have been dispatched to this place on an errand for God and for history." We have betrayed that notion as a people.

In this generation, the communist notion and the democratic ideal are fighting for survival. Both have a profound moral basis, but what is the difference between the two? There is no "errand from God" in Communism, nothing transcendent to history itself.

In his second inaugural address, A. Lincoln said, "The Almighty hath its own purposes." We must never identify our purposes with His purposes. We should not assume that our way is the only way or the best way.

Every person loves his country. Sittler talks about the meaning of love of country and quotes G. K. Chesterton: Beware of a man who loves his country for a reason. We love our country for itself. When one loves something for itself, he loves it better, serves it more wisely, and is devoted to her interest more fully. When one loves his country because it is home, then he is free to love his country by remembering what she was meant to be: "To actualize a new possibility; on an errand for God amidst the miseries of a needy human race." We have sometimes betrayed these possibilities. (Example: a recent TV documentary about migrant citrus workers in Florida.)

Let us remember that the heart of an anniversary is to recall its roots. Refers to the passage in Ezekiel: "I the Lord will take a sprig from this place." Ends with the Danforth quote.

*Then follows the Prayer of the Church.*

**1976 The Emergence of Value** *California Lutheran University, October 22*

## Side A.

The tape begins with a brief worship service, national anthem, choir anthems, introductory remarks, recognition of those in the audience, and the presentation of a distinguished service award for higher education to Sittler. Sittler's remarks followed:

He began by reflecting on the nature and the purpose of a college, and about the liberal arts ("knowledge functions to liberate.")

Sittler was asked to speak about a **value-centered education**, but he chose, rather, to discuss how values emerge. He was uncomfortable with the idea of a value-centered education, " a wrong method into inquiring how values come to be." First, value is essential to all ordering.

Values cannot be imposed; a college is not a retailer of already-formed values. It can only do its thing in such a way that values emerge by the intersection of the mind with concrete data. Imposition of values is intellectually and methodologically wrong because all imposition evokes hostility. The students' confrontation(s) with data are invitatory to the emergence of values.

Illustrations: There are **civic, aesthetic** and **moral values**.

Example of a civic value: the love of country. (Chesterton's observation, that one should never trust the man who loves for a reason.)

Example of an aesthetic value: Passage from The Merchant of Venice. What makes this passage beautiful? (One must learn in college not simply to honor the imposed value of the beautiful, but to enter in the impact of beautiful data to my own spirit and head.) The task of the college is to help the student to understand why a thing is beautiful.

Example of a moral value: Sentence from The Book of Common Prayer, "The burden of our sins is intolerable."

**Side B:** Continuation of reflections on moral values. The outcomes of our present behavior will be disastrous.

A college, with that self-understanding and that commitment to the actualization of what it understands, will always have to carry on a gallant struggle with the culture. The culture will never support the kind of critical attack on popular assumptions which constitutes the charter of a liberal arts college. This calls on us to understand what we mean by value and what we mean by that intersection with concreteness which is the placenta for the emergence of value. This is a lonely task.

*After Sittler's remarks, the program ends with the college hymn and benediction.*

## **1976 On Theological Education** *LSTC*

### **Side A.**

A brief reflection on theological education. Sittler's main point is that theological education must prepare pastors to deal with the problems and issues of the day and to respond to the particular situation the church finds itself in, as well as to help pastors with the task of preserving and recollecting the Gospel story. "Lay it to the heart of Jerusalem." The pattern of a generation defines the pattern of theological education. What is the reality of God that is right for right now? Today, our problem is sheer phoniness of language; this coincides with the search for meaning. What does it mean to have peace in the midst of concern?

Theological education is a truth-telling craft. Speak the Word which is as big as the problem.

*Sittler's reflection is the third on this tape, preceded by a shortpiece by W. Wolbrecht on the Seminary Life Appeal; and one by Fred Lubs on CPE.*

*Side B is blank.*

## **1976 Meditation by Joseph Sittler at the Closing Worship of the Pacific Southwest Synod Convention** *[At the time, Sittler was Scholar-in-Residence at California Lutheran University]*

Sittler begins by quoting Winston Churchill on the eve of Britain's entry into WW II: "The gathering storm and the closing darkness."

Sittler is going to talk about the creativity and fecundity of the darkness. There is a gathering darkness in the world and in men's spirits. Perhaps we will have to pass through it to a new kind of sanity. There is also a gathering darkness around the church. The rest of this century will not see a growing and triumphant church; the church will be leaner, tougher, and a church knowing more what she means.

In the history of the people of God, the theme of light and darkness marks the two giant magnitudes between which the whole story of the divine redemption swings. Creation, Jacob's wrestling, Job's story, and Jesus' birth...Except for the darkness, one could not know light when he saw one. Have you not come to know your children, not when you have shared their bright, luminous happiness, but when you have had to follow them into some darkness or other?

The glory of the Lord shines in the darkness (think of the shepherds). Jesus took the cup on the night he was betrayed. To give you an analogy, to help your thinking of communion (the Eucharist) in a fresh way: remember in Shakespeare's Henry IV, the night before the battle of Agincourt, Henry filled the cups of the soldiers and they drank to St. Crispin's Day. The soldiers, in gathering darkness, drank in defiant joy, to the possibilities of the coming day. The church has been reborn over and over again out of the darkness.

[*Can we understand*] a new dimension in Holy Communion: the Lord lifted the chalice as a kind of toast of defiant hope in God, who is the Lord of all things. There are many dimensions in the meaning in the sacrament – recognition, repentance, remembrance, acknowledgement, obedience, joy....

## **1976 (probably) The American Experience in Space and Time**

*Arizona*

[*This tape is a bit difficult to hear. Sittler wasn't close to the microphone*]

### **Side A.**

Sittler here offers a reflection on man in space and time. Our forebears lived in a relatively closed space. Time was terribly important to them. An historian in 1733 (J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur) wrote, in “Letters From an American Farmer,” that the American is a new kind of person because the old relation of time and space has been reversed. Sittler relates his experience in Heidelberg with German students who ask him to read aloud from some pieces of American literature such as *Look Homeward, Angel* and Walt Whitman. They were fascinated by the concept of illimitable space in America.

The always-present frontier (until very recently) has shaped the American character. Does this explain certain problematics we confront now? When you live in a closed space, a culture is disciplined toward involvement, toleration; you develop a sense of the past.

Many of the virtues of our American experience are another side of our difficulties. The frontier creates admirable qualities of ingenuity, rugged individualism, etc. Are the virtues nurtured by the frontier adequate to deal with our changed circumstances? Our whole history has been a “flight to the suburbs,” as it were.

*Question and answer period:* An audience member disagrees with Sittler, using illustrations from WW II, at Auschwitz, etc. More discussion follows, but it is cut off at the end of Side A.

### **Side B.**

Discussion resumes. Sittler says that creativity is fed by limitation. A long question, hard to hear, seems to point out that there was intolerance in Europe.

## **1976 (probably) Reflections on the arts, on education** *Original title, place, date unknown*

### **Side A.**



The tape begins with Sittler talking, in mid-sentence, about the pastor as artist. What is the significance of the existence of the arts for the enrichment of the pastoral role?

At the end of Paul's letter to the Philippians, we read that when a man knows where the center is, then everything is given back to him with a sense of gratitude. The way to true breadth is indeed through the narrow door. A dialectic of repudiation delivers a new dialectic of appreciation. All things and one thing are related.

Sittler discusses the historical background re Lutherans *vis-à-vis* the arts. He gives a critique of the clergy and their sensibility and background in the arts. "Lamentations are not constructive. How does one begin to invite persons into a new relationship with the vivacity, the liveliness, the beauty, the meaning that adheres in the various ways in which the artistic tradition works [*last words unintelligible*]?" All art is rooted in the senses. If we have a theological despicability against the senses, then I don't know how art can ever flourish. We have no theological reason to despise the senses. We have been given these by the Creator to see, hear, and feel. See Joseph Conrad's Preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus*.

--Skips on tape--

Sittler refers to Arthur Quiller Couch, on literature; Teilhard de Chardin. Every artist is up to inviting us to a more profound and particular beholding. "I would have you see." Sittler quotes Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Keep warm men's wits to the things that are." That is the work of the poet. To enjoy God's world is an act of doxology.

--Skips on tape--

Sittler then discusses the subject of general education. [*He says that*] "the most difficult places I've found in which to talk about art, beauty and creativity are at our Lutheran colleges." Sad, but easy to understand. Our colleges now – the church-related, private colleges- have become so expensive that only upper middle class children can afford them. The upper-middle class is traditionally and deservedly the stupidest of all classes. They grow up in a kind of stupor or insensitivity toward things that are. They're protected, insulated, withdrawn. It would be hard to create poetry out of human passion, tragedy, pathos, if one's [*unintelligible*] could afford to live in Barrington. Because there the tragic is either submerged, anesthetized or they can afford to put it in a nursing home.

There is a relationship between the middle-class church-related college and the fact that I find it difficult to make any serious statement at these colleges, theological or otherwise. I can make it, but no one bounces back at me. I can go down to the YMCA colleges (in the loop or Circle campus at the University of Illinois.) and really start a riot with a controversial or engaging subject and get real response. [*The people there*] are much more responsive human beings.

Sittler then says that this raises questions about the church's allocations of huge sums of money for church-related college maintenance. Are we getting back on our investment in proportion to the size of it?

--*Skips on tape*--

Remember the line, “Except as you become as little children...” Look at that line in context. Our Lord did not say, “unless you become childish...” It means to be openly available to the not-yet, to that which is possible, to the unexpected, to the wondrous. That is what characterizes being childlike. That’s where the enhancement of artistic sensibility has got to begin. We must ever remain little children by pushing that question, “Why?”

Sittler then apparently illustrated his points by showing two paintings for the class to see. One was Renoir’s Luncheon of the Boating Party.

--*Skips in tape*--

References to Brahms. What makes it wonderful?

### **Side B.**

Begins in mid-sentence. Sittler is talking about the St. Matthew Passion. What makes it beautiful? Why is it so moving? References to Keats’ “Ode to Autumn,” Shakespeare’s 74<sup>th</sup> Sonnet, John Donne’s sermon on “The Occasional Mercies of God.” It’s beautiful because it’s true. It has to do with the appropriateness of language. The use of art to move with great velocity into meaning we should make much more use of it in our preaching and liturgical life.

Sittler gives an example of what he did when he was interim pastor at Augustana. On Good Friday, he put in the narthex a picture of Michaelangelo’s Pieta beside a picture of a Vietnamese mother holding her dead child which had appeared on the cover of Newsweek. Underneath them he wrote, “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Sittler gave no sermon that night. “Who could preach that well?” After the service, a woman told him that she had never understood why Jesus had to die, but now she did.

Sittler then points out that if he were in the parish again, he would make much more use of film, plays, TV. “Don’t make them the text, but use them to unfold the situation to which the text, when addressed, comes alive.” Prepare the mind to hear the Gospel.

Sittler then mentions the 1976 Presidential candidates, then moves on to observations on architecture.

“Underlying everything I’ve said is the recovery of the truly catholic doctrine of grace.” Read Psalm 104- the goodness of God the Creator. Sittler mentions his Essays on Nature and Grace. He gives some observations on current culture, art and music.

**1977 MALSM Conference** *Pocono Environmental Center, Pennsylvania,*  
*Feb. 26*

## Side A.

Sittler announces that today's lecture will be a response to a question he was asked that morning, rather than his prepared remarks. The question was, "**How did you happen to become interested in the environmental crisis?**"

The question caused him to think about how to unravel the interior structure of an obvious interest. (The symbiotic nature of reflection.)

1. Sittler had an **extraordinary teacher** in grade school who introduced him to poetry about nature, the magic in language, and exercises in seeing.
2. He has a **defective spirituality**. He can't understand what people mean by "spirit" (without a material embodiment), apart from a certain vitality which is inseparable from the material thing. Quotes Santayana: "There is nothing spiritual that does not have a material root and nothing material that does not have a spiritual possibility." (Chesterton asked, "Why does God make the grass an enduring green?") Luther taught that the reality of the Creator invests something of himself in his creation. Ultimate spirit then also became enfleshed in Christ. Sanctification discloses itself by our honoring God as Creator and Son.
3. Sittler has an inborn **suspicion of all substantial thinking**. The Eastern church talks about the **energies of God**, while the Western church's language is substantial and says that reality is substantial. ("Being of one substance with the Father..." etc.)

The Scripture talks about ultimate **realities as relations**: love, hate, redemption, restoration. Biblical language is in relational terms. Tells the story about the time he was in Israel, with car trouble. After the mechanic repaired it, the mechanic announced that the car had been returned to its original condition, using the same word as that defined as righteous in the Bible [*tzedek*].

In the early 1950's, Sittler became aware that man's transactions in the world have an appalling efficiency. He felt his **task was to do theology in terms of the passing situation**, not simply to transmit the accepted theology of the church. What do Lutherans, specifically, have to say about an environmental catastrophe? Since there was very little being said, he decided to. For most people, their operating theology comes through liturgy and hymnody. Sittler went through the hymnal and found only 5 hymns that had a reference to man's self-awareness of the faith that has ecological dimensions.

4. **Man is constituted by his relationships**. The search for identity is the reigning heresy of your generation. German proverb: A solitary person is no person. Sittler recommends a Lynn White essay about the **religious basis of our environmental crisis** [*"The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," published in the journal Science in 1967*] as well as White's Technology and Society, in which he discusses the unexpected consequences of inventions and discoveries. Sittler talks about the misunderstanding of "have dominion." The Hebrew word means "to hold a thing in its proper order." God said this to his people who were

surrounded by Canaanites who were nature worshippers. The Calvinist notion was that prosperity signified divine favor. Although White blames Christianity for the environmental mess, Sittler says White is not entirely correct, because he could give examples from non-Christian cultures which also harm the environment. Sittler has a quarrel with St. Augustine who said that the subject and object of theology are God and the individual soul. Rather, the **realm of theological reflection must be God, man and the world.** Luther knew better. He said that all relationships are infiltrated by social realities.

### Side B.

**Higher education and the Lutheran church.** Theological ideas must intersect with new knowledge. Theology must grow along with the destruction of intellectual innocence. What is the distinction between my world growing up and my children's?: The **enlarged scope of reflection.** "If God is not the God of all, he is not the God of anything."

Sittler talks about when the sun is no more, the destiny of earth. What is the meaning of human life in light of this? What was God doing before there were people? What happens to our notion of eternal life? Life by character has a span, is mortal. What can eternal life mean? (oxymoron). That which is God's (hidden with Christ in God) can never die.

Sittler recommends that people read Psalm 104, an ecological doxology.

## 1977 **The Passion of Christ in St. Paul's Epistles** *Augustana, Hyde Park, March 9*

**Side A.** Sittler is already speaking when the tape begins. There were no written gospels when Paul wrote. In Paul, we have the **most primitive evidence available to us of what the earliest community thought about how God, through Christ, reconciled men to Himself.** Paul's concern is always with God, not Jesus, but, through Jesus, with what is coming to expression in Jesus. The word "Jesus" seldom occurs in Paul. It is, rather, "Christ Jesus" or "Jesus Christ." (Christ's role as the Messiah.) Paul is always seeing Jesus as the transparency through which, out of the obscurity of Jewish reflection, the reality of God becomes clear. Paul talks so little of Jesus- the episodic events, the teachings. He may have known very little of them.

**What is Paul's testimony about the passion of Christ?** Paul's problem: how to fit the old things into the new things. Paul's conversion was in the top of his head, not in the middle of his viscera. Paul saw that God was bigger than he had ever suspected he was. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the God of the whole world. The issue is the astounding grace of this God. God has made an end run around the old line of Israel and the prophets. Back to Paul's problem—he had to take the old vocabulary, the Jewish "warehouse" of conceptions and fit them into the "new thing." Paul's encounter with God was through Christ. But not everything could be fit into the new jug.

Paul sings out most clear, clean and simple when he is singing doxologies. The church was singing before she was celebrating; she made music before she made propositions. The truth of the gospel lies more in the congruity of images than in the verifiability of propositions. Romans 8: When Paul says, "If God be for us," he is pointing to Jesus Christ. Christ is the vehement, historical, present evidence that the God beyond proof, the God of faith, is for us. The truth of that statement lies in its congruity with the human reality. This leads Sittler to talk about the cruciform character of human experience.

*Side B is blank.*

## **1977 Holden Village** *Chelan, WA, September*

**Tape 1.** Recorded on Sittler's birthday, Sept. 26.

### "The Scope of Reflection"

The church in a new age.

What does theology mean? What does theology do?

Reflection about God: biblical, historical, apologetic, constructive (on the margin, looking to the future)

The annihilation of transcendence.

The new situation in space: what demands does this make on the Christian community?

Or on the theologian?

The theology of the cross in light of the cosmic Christ: God became our situation

The best thing written on the Trinity is Phil Hefner's "On Getting It All Together," in Dialogue, 1974-75.

### **Tape 2.**

### "Theology and Ecology"

In last night's presentation, which Sittler called "The Scope of Reflection," he emphasized that the Christian faith must ask after the relevance of its language.

If we talk about creation, we mean more than the chrysanthemums and the bullfrogs and men and women. If we talk about redemption, we must ask: is the ultimate meaning of the redemption simply God's historical action for homo sapiens in this place? Or what is the meaning of Paul's statement that the whole creation groans in travail awaiting its redemption?

Theology is a constant doing. Christian thought from the beginning has asked if this disclosure of God about the source, the structure, the process of things, if this be the word of God and therefore the truth, how does this truth thus disclosed relate to man, to nature, to man as history? In that process, theology has had an enormous and changing career.

God and man are never defined in the Bible. God is what God does in the Hebrew

scriptures. What is man? What is his place in creation? There are paradigms of where man stands: a creature with 3 dimensions: from God, in relationship with the other. God put them in the garden (nature). The Hebrew language has no word for "nature." They never thought of it as over against man. Sittler talks about Jesus' understanding of "nature."

Sittler refers to Lynn White's essay about the theological roots of our environmental crisis and discusses the meaning of "have dominion." He suggests that we look at the language in which the world of nature is talked of in the Old Testament, in which the notion of tending, caring for is a very real aspect of the literary culture of the Semitic world. The Hebrews said that nature was God's, nature was not God. We must keep it in its proper place. "Mother Nature" is not good Christian talk. **Nature is our sister.** This is presupposed in the New Testament. The intentionality of the writer is sometimes obscure, and not altogether consistent.

How did it happen that the assault on nature has become a perilous fact of our modern time? The natural sciences have developed with such an awesome speed that they are the makers of the modern world. Have we a theology of a world ecologically structured? We need a theology of care and delight. Nothing less than a doctrine of grace would be an adequate doctrine to shape the Christian community's mind and practice in a way appropriate to the catastrophe in the environment. The first thing we think of when we hear the word "grace" is the forgiveness of sins, but this is inadequate. Is there no grace in creation? Sittler speaks of the Hebrew "he'in" and "hesed". Grace came by Jesus Christ, it was not invented by him.

In the Old Testament, the glory of God is the light the Holy gives off. The heavens disclose the glory of God, but the heavens do not disclose the will of God. There is a strand in the New Testament that has been suppressed, downgraded, ignored: ascription to Christ which talks of him as being the principal of the created world, the interior life of the created world. If I deal with the world as my father's world, then it will remain a world fit for human habitation. A reverential dealing with the world is the only practical way to deal with the world, for the long-term. Sittler tells a story about his meeting with people from U. S. Steel about the environmental crisis. How do we deal with this (crisis) in our congregations? Another story about the conference at MIT about the environmental crisis in which it was said that people must be changed in the spirit of their minds

*Question and answer period.*

### **Tape 3.**

#### "Issues in Biblical Interpretation"

##### **Side A.**

What do we, as Lutherans, mean by "the word of God"?

The effect of historical/critical study on the church. The Word of God is the

gracious energy of God that calls into being. Scripture is the witness of those who were called into a God relationship. Interpreting ancient texts: What did the words mean then? What do those words mean now?

The heart of the gospel is the dynamic word of the freedom of God in his grace.

### **Side B.**

Begins Joe's observations on "Ethics in a new situation."

The meaning of righteousness.

How does a Christian make a decision in a concrete situation? Example: the definition of death.

"You can't just read the Bible for answers to modern problems!"

Judgments in the midst of ambiguity.

### **Tape 4.**

Continuation of presentation on ethics.

Two case studies presented, from an article by Father Robert McCormick (sp?) at Catholic University.

There is no simple definition of either death or life. Life itself is not the highest value. Meaningful life is bound up with relationships.

We must look back into the Christian tradition to see how it might help us make decisions about these problems; search the literature.

The topic then changes to a discussion about language. There are two kinds of language: designative and evocative. Men (people) will have meaning!

Recommends John Berryman's "Eleven Addresses to the Lord."

What kind of affirmation of the Christian faith is possible in these modern times?

Our human lives are cruciform.

### **Tape 5.**

Fireside chat. Topics addressed include:

Ecology; Teilhard de Chardin; Eastern Orthodox liturgy, the cosmic Christ; loss of the sense of transcendence, rumors of angels; Saul Bellow; state of the United States today, new challenges but no fresh responses; civil rights movement, role of the church, blacks and the Lutheran church; urban situations, problems of inner cities.

What is community? "I have a community with the dead." The past is still alive. Think of what Shakespeare, Keats, and Milton had to say. The whole past that I know is still alive for me. "I have a community in time that transcends my own generation." My liberal arts education stands me in pretty good stead.

Asked to define loneliness, Sittler was not able to. He has never been lonely, which is different from the alone-ness of the individual.

"It's very distressing to see how little impact education has on value structure."

## **1977 Grace and Nature: Adult Education and Worship,**

*Minneapolis, Nov. 14-16*

**Tape 1.** (Marked "C2- #21") Nov. 14.

First topic is the **environment**. What are the resources in theology to help bring about a change in the environment? Sittler talks about his experiences at conferences called to discuss the ecological crisis. The scientific community concluded that "our people must be changed in the spirit of their minds," while lawyers attending an ABA meeting in Chicago declared that a change in the American spirit was needed. This led Sittler to a reinvestigation of **the doctrine of grace**.

Meaning of "have dominion." Lynn White's essay ("*The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*") charged that the religious community believes that man was placed in the world to have dominion over it. This Biblical understanding sanctioned the rise of capitalism. However, Sittler says that the Vulgate's translation of the Hebrew was not accurate. It means "to hold nature down in its proper place." Genesis was written by and for people who were surrounded by nature worshippers. Nature is God's, not God. There is no word for nature in Hebrew. Instead, the Hebrew refers to "what God hath made." There is no notion of a self-enclosed world of nature. Psalm 104 is an ecological doxology. In Romans 8, we read that the whole creation groans in travail, waiting... Not only is man alienated, but evil has distorted the natural world. One interpretation of this is that man's interference with the natural world has distorted it.

Sittler's personal breakthrough:

**The Lutheran doctrine of grace is less comprehensive than the New Testament understanding of grace.** How did this happen? At the time of the Reformation, the church said, "there is no salvation outside the church." Luther's fundamental protest was that the freedom of God in his grace had been imprisoned. But Luther said that God wills fellowship with all that he has made. "A gracious God receives sinners. Period." Good section here on **repentance, forgiveness and grace**.

Sittler mentions the practice of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in his youth. It was a "holy dry-cleaning experience," somber and lugubrious. There was concentration on repentance and forgiveness. The **Lutheran tradition makes grace a property of the second person of the Trinity**. Grace was not invented by Jesus. The Old Testament man lived by grace, too. "*Hesed; Hein.*" Grace is a property of God; it becomes incandescent in Jesus. In the third person of the Trinity, we are told that everything that is exists by the Spirit.

The doctrine of **grace** must be **recovered with a new largeness**. Our dealing with the world is our dealing with Holy stuff, grace-conveying stuff, not forgiving grace which is the property of God in his fatherly forgiveness and of Christ as his agent, but there is a grace in the natural world so that all our transactions with the world are transactions of



grace as well as of science. Christ's church is radically materialistic: God made us of the stuff of the earth.

**The dimensions of theological interpretation** must seek to move in the same orbits as the minds coming into being in the oncoming generation. We must find a way to translate the depth, the richness, the comprehensiveness of the old speech about God, man and the world- to translate that speech over into the kind of "self in the world" that my children are coming to be. Cites Vance Packard's book on psychobiology and genetics. Sittler says there is a deeper and deeper chasm between Biblical, liturgical and theological speech and the vocabulary of the life world today.

Illustrations: #1: What is the church? Sittler speaks about the importance of **liturgical language**. The liturgy is instinct with all kinds of possibilities to enlarge the notion of church well beyond institutional formulations.

### **Side B.**

#2: What is the **love of God**? Does not mean affection alone, but also the creative energy whereby God creates outside of himself those things which he would bring into communion with himself. There is a longing for union with another. Is that what is meant in Romans 8- "the whole creation groans" - ?

### **Jesus, development of OT Christology, the NT understanding of**

**Jesus**. Sittler says that Jesus never identified himself with the "son of man" of Daniel. He didn't call himself the Messiah.

Here there is an aside on the dangers of the lectionary system. (The preacher should) "scoop up the lesson for the day up into the sustained argument" (of the Biblical text from which it is taken.)

Continuing with his thoughts on **Christological language** in the NT, Sittler says it swings out in bigger lines and takes on more and more meanings until we come to the enormous passage in Colossians 1, in which Christ is described as the source, the guide, the goal of all that is. However, our Christology is threatened by making it into a "Jesus-ology." The Lutheran church is a Trinitarian church, not a Jesus church. Don't use Jesus as a source of personal comfort and gain. Sittler talks about the "me and Jesus movement" with an illustrative story about a woman who prayed for a parking space. "What kind of a God relationship is this, based on a parking-space-finding Jesus?"

### *Questions and discussion:*

The **meaning of grace in the Lord's Supper**. Sittler commends the celebratory language of the Lord's Supper in "the red book" (SBH). It is more of a Eucharist, a thanksgiving. Luther's mass was right for its time. But times have changed since Luther and other aspects of grace need to be emphasized.

**Grace** is incomprehensible to the natural man; it must be proclaimed. Grace is a word spoken to discontinuity. When I behold it in discontinuity, then I am renovated and can perceive it in life's structures and continuities, too. In this, Lutherans

are authentically catholic. However, the Old Testament fathers also were in redemptive community with God. (Sittler says he can have no part in the mission to the Jews.) Grace came through the law and we must revise our understanding of the law. In public life, the law may be a creative working of grace, a redemptive working of grace. "I am not the LCA's favorite theologian."

*Another question refers to the regard scientists now seem to have for the natural world.*

**Tape 2.** (Marked C-2- 25) Nov. 15.

**Side A.**

**Adequacy of our doctrine of grace.**

At the time of the Reformation, the Church had grace locked up in the sacraments in the system of penance and priestly absolution, and therefore the reformers' problem or requirement was to break grace loose from the canonized control on an institutional church. But ever since, grace has been understood, almost exclusively, as that goodwill and disposition of God whereby the sinner is reconciled to God and while the adequacy of that is not to be questioned, Sittler wants to question the adequacy of that understanding of grace for the contemporary world. What is it about the contemporary world that leads us to examine our doctrine of grace? Contemporary man is characterized by the complexity of his knowledge of his own constitution. Man is not simply man as history, he is also man as nature. Man is both natural animal and spiritual person. We have been formed for God through God's creation of the cosmos. We belong to the birds and bees, to the rocks and the trees and the sea. Can a doctrine of grace that deals with man in terms only of a kind of hypodermic whereby grace is infused into him by the forgiveness of sins- is that an adequate understanding of grace?

Sittler suggests that we think of grace in another way. Instead of looking at grace as a kind of renovating substance, look at it as the occasion in which the presence and the goodness of God is encountered in our life. What are the resources in the Christian world view and understanding which might relate us in a salvatory, redemptive way to the life of nature?

**Grace and nature:** Sittler says that, "the first time I ever talked this way was unhappily in the presence of a large company of German theologians who, the moment I announced there was some relation between grace and nature, violently resisted and said this is utterly un-Lutheran. And I said I was not concerned to be utterly Lutheran, I was concerned to ask how the New Testament deals with grace and nature. If there is a way in the New Testament that is broader than the Lutheran confessions, then too bad for the Lutheran confessions- which is certainly a good Lutheran point of view. As early as Augustine, the church had words like this: ordinary grace and special grace. By **special grace**, the church meant the very special, concrete humanization of the grace of God which meets us in Jesus Christ. But **common grace** is the other word that there is a grace in the fact that this is God's world. God creates in grace, he not only redeems in grace. So what I am appealing for is a special understanding of grace that has the magnitude of the **Doctrine of the Holy Trinity**. God the creator gives grace. Our abuse, or ignoring, or defiance of grace in the garden means

that there must be a special grace, an uncreated grace whereby we are packed by grace afresh in Jesus Christ in the incarnation. And the gift of the Holy Spirit is but the reminder, the sympathiser, the enlivener who reminds us, calls to attention, revivifies all **occasions of grace**. (Sittler goes on to give illustrations of the occasions of grace.)

(Sittler then examines a sentence of St. Augustine.) In this sentence of Augustine, the whole of the theological discipline is instinct: "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." "**Thou hast formed us for Thyself" is the Christian gospel**. If our formation is unrealized we will be restless. It is a theological obligation to analyze concretely the restlessness of men and women. What are the meanings of the signals of restlessness men send out?

### **Grace, nature and the restlessness of man.**

I [Sittler] am interested in the reality or the presence of the grace of God in the creation. Only the Doctrine of Grace will be adequate to change the spirit of our minds whereby we deal with timber and oil and fish and animals and the structure of cities, urban design, homes for people, places to work, all these mundane, flat-footed concrete things which yet constitute the anchorage of our hearts, the home of our daily lives- these are very important. I am concerned about architecture because I am concerned about God; I am concerned about the meaning of painting because I want to know what makes men restless; I am concerned about decor because there is a relationship between what I live in the midst of and how I think and feel. **The whole world can be a kind of place for worship in the sense of the worth-ship of God's creation.**

Another of Augustine's sentences examined by Sittler: **It is the heart of sin that men use what they ought to enjoy and enjoy what they ought to use.**

To enjoy means to honor a thing for what it is, to consent to its being what it is and not another thing. Abuse is use without grace. This is the absolute, fundamental theological ground for any environment policy that makes any sense.

To return to "**our hearts are restless...**": A first task we have is to increase our knowledge of restlessness- the human actuality to whom we are addressing this word. Here Sittler finds our churches terribly deficient. (Gives illustrations.) He goes on to say, "This shrinking of our educated lay and clerical humanity to the point that I am reporting is the most discouraging aspect of my life. It is not that I expect them (the clergy) to become theologians in the sense of professional theologians or that I expect them to be great scholars, but I expect them to be alive human beings. **This is what I find is the situation which calls a program of continuing education for pastors and lay people, I think perhaps is as urgent as any task which confronts the church.** This generation is proclaiming in a thousand ways where it hurts, where it aches. The task is to find, to sense what is going on and give it a kind of concreteness in expression- which I find sadly lacking in preaching and teaching. The intellectual life within the contemporary congregation is contemptible. The intellectual content of the ordinary sermon is contemptible. I am just floored by the fact that that something happens when one becomes pious. Is the price of piety stupidity? We must be less frenetic in activity and more dedicated to reflection."

### **Questions, discussion.**

*Comments on art, architecture, aesthetics. Illustrations.*

Compatibility of speaking in the vernacular with intellectual content in sermons. Sittler says, "I find no cleavage between the common life and the highest accomplishments of the human spirit." We have this funny notion that Shakespeare is only for theater-goers who have Master's degrees or that the lines of Hopkins or Keats are only for people in universities. He goes on to give illustrations.

### **Side B.**

Practical ideas for preaching.

***Suggestions for readings Sittler found useful in trying to keep the second part of the Augustinian sentence alive:***

Joseph Conrad, Theodore Roethke, Richard Wilbur, Flannery O'Connor, E. B. White, Robert Jastrow, Barry Commoner, Vance Packard. Take a good journal of opinion like Harper's, The Atlantic Monthly, or The American Scholar.

### **Special mention of Richard McCormack's article "To Live or Let Die:"**

A profoundly Christian analysis of life and death, the kind of ethical judgments which are being required in that dilemma which no previous generation knew. Up until now, the ethical idea has been to search the scriptures, the tradition, the moral theology, and ask what is closest to the will of God. As any pastor calling at a contemporary hospital knows, God's will is not clear. And you have to make a judgment and somehow then to have a special grace whereby to live with the indeterminate judgment you do make, and you'll never know if it was God's will or not.

*(The complete text of this tape has been transcribed and is available in the Archives)*

**Tape 3.** (Marked C-2- 22) Nov. 15.

### **Side A.**

First, to wind up this morning's session regarding **grace** and a cosmic Christological relationship to our environment: the **question of verifiability** remains.

If I deal with **nature** as if nature had her own integral life, she responds positively.

The world smiles back if I deal with her in love. However, this is not a theology derived from nature. "There is no entrance into truth, save by love," says St.

Augustine.

In answer to a question about **adult education in the church**, Sittler says he is sad about the state of the clergy's lack of continuing activity and interest in theological education after ordination. When he taught Christian ethics for the first time, he assigned 4 or 5 pieces of literature to his students, dismissed them for 3 weeks so they could read, then they reassembled to talk about the problems they encountered in their reading. "This is how I would work with pastors in their continuing education." The point is not to answer questions that nobody is asking.

Sittler suggests using the same approach for lay persons in adult and continuing ed,

even if the material is brief or modest in size. Discussion follows about practical ways to interest people in further study. Some authors recommended: C. S. Lewis, Fred Buechner, Michael Ramsey, G. K. Chesterton, Martin Marty. A teacher must authenticate by his own enthusiasm, passion, and knowledge that he knows what he's talking about, but Sittler says he doesn't know how you produce teachers like that. He doesn't agree that the "common man" is incapable of reflection.

Next topic: **worship**. Sittler refers to the 3 liturgies (of the Mass) in LBW. He says the liturgies are modern in beat and mode and in their bounciness and vivacity. The Kyrie is impudent, impertinent, more like a demand. But you can't say everything bouncily. Is the content of what we're saying musically able to be accompanied by just any kind of beat?

The way the old chants of the church float with a timeless high impersonality is of the essence of the Christian-God relationship. "This was before I was. It will be when I am gone." God's initiative toward me does not depend on my subjectivity. The old chants are a necessary audible balance to the incurvature of contemporary Christianity. "I am not appealing for mordancy, nor to the return to Gregorian chant, but I am violently protesting against wringing its neck!" There follows an honest exchange of views about the green book.

How do we incorporate the **ideas about grace and nature into the liturgy**? We can't do it until they have become a part of our life of reflection. Use the parish newsletter for also sharing good quotes, pieces that people can think about.

**Side B. Question about communion every Sunday.** Sittler is in favor of it. Discussion follows about that and about the Eucharistic prayer in LBW.

Beginning of another session, a new topic: The approaching **merger between the ALC and LCA**. Sittler discusses **church constitutions**. "When you think about what Christ's church is, how can you make a constitutional statement about it? Can I draw a legal, canonical line around it? The wind bloweth where it listeth. It's like making nets to catch the wind."

Sittler suggests that we settle, for now, on a preamble that admits embarrassment of having a constitution at all and the limitations of a constitution for Christ's church. We do have to admit that we need to define what a Lutheran is, to specify the church as "those who..".

But don't make language do what it can't do. Don't make canonical language cover what it can't cover. The Holy Spirit will always slip through the net and do astonishing things. We must spring ourselves loose from entrapment in our own past. Writing a constitution for the mystical body of Christ knit together by the activity of the Holy Spirit is hilarious. Let's have a sense of humor about what we're doing.

Fred Schiotz replies that Sittler has spoken as a theologian and not as an administrator. He says that whenever you have relationships you need guidelines and recalls the formation of the constitution in the ALC.

Sittler agrees and suggests that " we begin with an understanding of the Word of God in a preamble or prologue, and explain that the Word of God is not the equivalent of Scripture. Sittler says he's had it up to the neck with being called less than a normative Lutheran because he does not have a doctrine of Scripture which is reductive of historic Lutheranism. He says,

"I long for the day when there will be a Lutheran Church in America, and I more deeply long for the day when there won't be any Lutheran church at all. One holy church would not be identical with the Augsburg Confession's definition of theology or the faithful, though I can't conceive of it not including certain accents within Lutheranism.

I've never been to a church convention in my life and that is not one of my principal regrets. When I was a parish pastor, my congregation wasn't big enough. When I was a professor, I wasn't safe enough. I'm not the LCA's favorite theologian."

Next topic: We may be living in a time when the **dissolution of all accepted theological language is about to be accomplished**. Example: **symbols** now have to be explained. A symbol is supposed to point toward a meaning. The church's language and Biblical language are getting more and more rare and recondite; they need more and more to be explained.

*Sittler is cut off in mid-sentence. The rest of the conversation was not recorded. No more material on this tape.*

**Tape 4.** (Marked C-3- 1) Nov. 16.

#### **Side A.**

Begins with a question from the audience about the **idolatry of faith vs the certainty of faith**. Sittler replies that the Christian community is not a community of the right answers, yet the affirmation of faith is not a "pure" leap of faith. The word 'certainty' should disappear from our Christian vocabulary because it has been permeated by empiricism. The appeal of the Pentecostals is that they invite you to join the idolatry of provable facts. With that, you don't need faith, all you need is to join the club.

That there is a God is not capable of being proved. The Christian story fits with the human story. The truth of the Christian faith is not severable from the meaning of the Christian faith. Meaning appears only when the risk is taken. Jesus says, if you do the deed, then you will know the truth. The truth of the theory is established in the experience in the practice. The people who guarantee you a package will win- at least for a while. Our church is too smart to play dumb. We've been here too long to sell ourselves down a Bob Schuller river or whoever else is out delivering pre-packaged security.

The word **faith** has been corrupted. It connects hope and God himself. Luther said

that faith is trust, a trust in God's unknown, unfelt, untried goodness and mercy. The word 'faith' is not synonymous with 'religious community.'

*Some questions which follow are hard to hear.*

Long discussion of **Jesus' role**. Was he God? Sittler commends the reading of an introduction to the New Testament every 3 or 4 years, to keep up to date. "Don't swallow them all whole, however." Recommends Norman Perrin's first three chapters in his Introduction to the New Testament; also, Pannenberg's Crisis of the Scriptural Principle, and The Kingdom of God and Theology. Jesus wanted to bring Israel's faith forward, to push it further- which was really pushing it back, beyond legalism, to the covenant.

We resist this notion of having to have a lifelong struggle to the light. The Lutheran church may be the last stronghold of that truth, along with the Catholic mystics. Recommends Roy Harrisville's book on MARK. More discussion on how to speak with others about Jesus.

### **Side B.**

When you're liberated from **literalism**, you're liberated to see how language works. It does no good to attack literalism, but tell the story in such a way (with its meaning clear) that literalism will take second place.

The **role of the pastor and lay persons** in a congregation. Sittler says, make a distinction between power and authority. He talks about pastoral ministry.

## **1978 The Christian Faith and the World of the Arts** *University Lutheran Church, East Lansing, MI, January 15 and February 13, 1978*

Sittler's talks will be about why and how he came to be "one of the people in the theological craft who has attended to the arts."

### **Tape 1. 1/15/78**

#### **Side A.**

Early Christianity had no particular interest in nor made an effort in the field of the arts, as far as we know. This was, in part, because of their background in Judaism which forbade creating images of any kind; the adornment of the temple was craftsmanship, not created for its own sake. There is no word in the original Hebrew for "art." There was no word for nature, either. Israel talked about "the creation." The whole world was a theater for the Godhead.

The homilies of Clement and Origen achieved the level of art in their sheer refinement and beauty. The first people in the West who were artists were the Minoans and Greeks.

The second reason why the early Christian community did not develop any surviving memorable art- they didn't expect the world to be around for very long. St. Paul expected the kingdoms of this world wouldn't be around for very long. The first Christian art was in the form of mosaics. The earliest were in Greece. Fine examples can still be seen in Ravenna and on an island off the Italian coast, and other places in Italy.

What was the Western church's relation to art? From the time of Gregory onward, the church was an organized, catholic church with a great homogeneity about it. It commissioned art, mainly in the form of stone carvings for adorning their houses of worship. Norman Christian churches can still be seen. (Sittler gives examples.)

When we look upon the relation between the medieval church and the artist, we come to the first theological point I want to make. When we come to the Reformation, we have a countervailing principle at work which accounts for the fact that the post-Reformation church, except in several areas, has not been an artistically productive community. There's a theological difference. The Roman church never regarded the world of nature or transactions with the natural world as being hostile to the Christian faith. They did not see in the world of nature or men's refined craftsmanship operations with that world, they did not see anything innately idolatrous or threatening to faith or diverting of the mind to worldly things. St. Thomas Aquinas said that grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of grace believed that the whole of creation may be anything in the realm of creation, may be an occasion for the recognition of, the grace of God. The world of stone, of wood, textile, painting- all of these could be realms whereby God and his grace could be acknowledged and all the energies of the Christian life-world could be celebrated. Take Notre Dame in Paris, for example. The world of the demonic (referring to the gargoyles, etc.) was lurking just below the surface of ordinary life. This world was very real to the medieval mind (including Luther's). The medieval church had an open attitude toward nature, or man's transactions with nature, whereby he sought to transform it or to make it a medium for the expression of his religious devotion or his religious fears or the characters of the religious drama. Stained glass achieved the position it did in the medieval church because it was the picture book for the illiterate. The role of the sermon was almost non-existent for centuries. Sittler recommends reading Mont St. Michel and Chartres.

The great princes of the church were patrons of the arts. Much of the great art produced was commissioned. Artists were super-craftsmen. Sittler speaks about Michelangelo's comments about his teacher, Verrocchio, "He loves to lay his hands on the common facts of life- the utensils of farm, home, kitchen... He makes the common things of earth to glow as with a far-off brightness." The whole world was transparent to another world. There was no such thing as purely secular art. In Chaucer, the Christian story has become the common story. The "holy" nun is an adulterer in the presence of God. They even swore in Jesus' name. Shakespeare was never an explicit Christian poet, but his references, metaphors and images were often taken from the religious life, the Christian drama, in secular conversations. Sittler refers to The Merchant of Venice and Hamlet.



## **Side B.**

The line between secular and religious did not exist. The (Christian) religious story so permeated the culture. The whole world was innerpenetrated (Interpenetrated? –hard to hear) by powers beyond itself. Pagan festivals were dry-cleaned, refurbished to become Christian festivals. Sittler tells a story about A. R. Kretzman (sp.?) who explained that in Gothic churches, the window sills slope down because they accommodated the crossbowmen (thus called the “bowmen’s pitch”) when the church became a fortress in times of war. They provided the right angle for shooting.

What happened in the Renaissance? Sittler recommends chapter one of Walter Symond’s book, The Renaissance in Italy to learn about the emergence and creativity of the Renaissance period. The period was a recovery of the abundance of the antique world. What happened between the ancient (antique) world and the Renaissance? The voyages of discovery, new technologies, inventions, among other things. At the same time that the authority of the church was declining, the lure of the secular world was ascending. The world was “reborn.” In the relaxed catholic (Catholic?) enjoyment of the world, high craftsmanship began to pass into very high art. Take, for example, Masaccio and his representations of ordinary life, or Andrea del Sarto, whose mistress was the model for his paintings of the Virgin. Religious paintings had a direct earthiness about them. Artists working with metal created human figures on doors which were in movement, not stylized or static.

When we come back (for the next session), let’s look at the phenomenon of art that follows the Reformation. It’s a mixed bag. We’ll see if there is a theological difference in how the Christian church understood the natural world. Was there an understanding of that that emerged from the Reformation that changes the way the Christian community dealt with the natural world and the result in the field of art.

(The rest of Side B is a recording of the St. Olaf choir concert that was given in connection with this event.)

## **Tape 2. 1/15/78**

### **Side A.**

We have been talking about the way the early and medieval church related to the natural world and how that relationship permitted and encouraged the appreciation and development of the various arts. This is a judgment (and is debatable)- I ascribed that to the fact that the church catholic in the West had a positive attitude toward the natural world. There was nothing in the Christian faith that demanded a negative evaluation of the natural world or natural human life, and therefore they moved with great creativity into that life. Their doctrine of grace was a Trinitarian doctrine: this is God’s world, whatever God has made provides an occasion for grace in all transactions of life. All works that aim at beauty, truth, candor, and the celebration of life- all are occasions for the grace of God. It is his world, and he meant it to use it, to enjoy it, even to manipulate its possibilities to the praise of his glory. As the hymn says, “In all life thou livest, the true life of all.”

How did man's freedom to relate himself to the natural world receive a jolt at the time of the Reformation? The 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic church in the West had brought the grace of God under the control of the church. You could not be "in a state of grace" unless you were in proper relationship to Mother Church. All the sacraments of the church were packages through which the grace of God was made available to people. To be sure, they acknowledged a kind of grace of God in the Scripture and the preaching of the word, but that had suffered a great decline during the late medieval period. In Luther's attack upon the church, that became an issue. In order to gain the freedom of the Gospel, to make the freedom of God in his grace available to everybody, he had to break it loose from its entrapment within the sacraments of the accredited church. Luther went straight to the Scripture and said that the doctrine of the word of God, that is that God is gracious, that he is gracious toward all that he has made, that kind of grace must not, cannot, be contained within an authorized historical institution. The control of grace within an historical institution is a reduction of the fullness of the grace of God in a way that is inauthentic. Whoever hears the word, whoever is penitent, does not have to have this word accredited only by the church, nor this penitence declared authoritative and valid by the church. In his treatise on the sacraments, Luther said the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the great sacrament of grace and if you are not in communion with the church, that grace is not available to you. But the event of Christ is the event of grace. Whoever is in Christ is a new being, he lives in grace. Luther concentrated grace at the point of Christ. That was necessary for Luther. He had to celebrate the Word in order to secure the freedom of grace, the availability and power of grace. The polemical situation at the time made that necessary. He had no other authority he could call upon. If he were going to attack the most solid, impenetrable establishment of the 16<sup>th</sup> century he had to do it by saying "The Word."

By the word of God, Luther never meant just the Scripture. The word of God is inseparable from the Scripture but it is not identical with the Scripture. In the Old Testament, the word translated "word" is never just a thing written or spoken. It is dabar; the word of God means the power, the energy, the creative work, the availability of God to anyone who calls upon him. The report of that and the record of His doings is the Old Testament. When you come to the New Testament, it becomes logos. The logos becomes flesh and dwells among us. The New Testament community wrote the N.T. as witness, record, report, memory-it's the work of those who remember Jesus. In Jesus, the Word becomes flesh.

But the word of God was before the Scripture. Even in contemporary Lutheranism, when we identify the word of God with the Scripture we reduce the word of God simply to the Scripture. In an effort to secure it, we actually reduce it. When we read in the Old Testament, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made," you get a statement of the dynamic. The Eastern church puts it this way: The word of God means the creative energy and grace of the creator himself. As this becomes a written word, it is translated into language, report, episode, miracle story, witness, but this identification of the meaning of the word with the Scripture was polemically necessary, because they said, "What is your authority?" Luther picked up the book and slammed it down and said, "It is written." Therefore, to him, there was no other center of authority and that has become a Lutheran principle to this day. "Sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola Christus." Luther was

right about that, but the difficulty is that tended to entrap grace into the second article of the creed. But that is not adequate. Grace also belongs to the first article. The grace of the creation is also a legitimate grace of God.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, the old theologians made a distinction. They talked about ordinary grace and extraordinary grace. Ordinary grace is the fact that we are created at all. We are given a life in a beautiful world. Then this grace becomes incandescent, personal, present, in Jesus, so that we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That is extraordinary grace. Created grace=ordinary grace; uncreated grace=Christ himself.

Post-Lutheran and post-Calvinistic Protestantism has tended to see the world not as a theater of grace, to see the world as a neutral, if not hostile, thing. Therefore, to be a Christian means to withdraw from the world or at best, not to take the things of this world too seriously, to regard transactions with the world as a necessary but reluctant thing we have to carry on, but the real center and core of human life is in the transcendental relationship to God through Christ. That accounts for the growth of pietism. Pietism was a way to secure and guard one's Christ relationship by keeping it unpolluted, uncorrupted by, even unrelated to, farming manufacturing, anything your vocation called you to, you had to be careful to keep an indifferent attitude to these things of the world. That creates an unfavorable attitude for the world of the arts. That is why post-Reformation Protestantism has not been very productive or very creative in the field of the arts.

About 12 years ago, I was asked to chair a commission for the National Council of Churches to do a study of the church and the arts because of the growing feeling of alienation between the world of the artist and the people of the church. Besides theologians, the commission gathered together artists (in drama, architecture, poetry, music, painting, etc.) for a series of meetings. Amos Wilder worked with me on this. After a year of meetings, the commission tried to articulate why the artistic community feels that the Christian tradition is not for them? It doesn't affirm their work. It likes to use their work for their own purposes but it doesn't understand, approve or affirm them. It's because the artist lives by the things of this world. It carries on a love affair with sound, tone, texture, movement, language, sensation. They take seriously the concrete actualities of ordinary existence. They feel the church encourages people to go through the world of sensation holding their noses and stopping their ears. To be a Christian means you have to reduce the dimensions of your common humanity. The artist does not necessarily think the world is salvatory or redemptive.

Sittler talks about Philip Johnson and the Saarinen.....

Reformation churches did produce some great art- especially music. Why? New musical forms were developing. Music was an appropriate medium to express a powerful affirmative note of the freedom of God in his grace. It was not all solemn, internal, mystical music. The Protestant contribution to art has been almost exclusively music. We have not been in drama, the novel... There is very little creativity in the Protestant world that can trace its release to the Protestant reformation or the Protestant point of view. With that as background, we now move to the second more important point of what I wanted to say.

What has all this meant to me? How has the world of the arts been useful to me in forming, lubricating, and enriching my life as teacher and preacher? Sittler asks a member of the audience to read Conrad's introduction to The Nigger of the Narcissus. First, Sittler talks about Conrad. Joe, the reader, is hard to hear at first, but he soon becomes louder as he reads Conrad's words about the task of the artist. Sittler interjects comments from time to time, including some on Lord Jim. Sittler says, "The realm of art is like John the Baptist who goes before the face of the Lord to prepare his way." The preacher, according to Sittler, has both substance and target. The substance of his preaching must be the mighty acts of God, particularly in the Incarnation, to preach the tradition of the Gospel of Christ's church. Unless the material is so put that it fits into the contours of the listener, into the experience and recollection, the memory, the inside of the listener... unless it fits that with a kind of congruity, it remains abstract, it remains pure proclamation. My interest in art is not non-theological. Art has fascinated me because it has educated... (end of Side A)

### **Side B.**

Art supplies a multiplication of one's identity. The self is constituted by its relations; art is a way of multiplying and enriching those relationships whereby my selfhood takes on the dimensions of humanity. Don't read "in order" to do something- to expand, refine, to know more words... Read for the excitement of the thing itself. Art has its own honor; it will not be used. Take it on its own terms. Don't read Conrad in order to write sermons. Read Conrad for the expansion of the self. He'll deliver goods you never asked for. The same with poetry and drama. Art is good for what it is, don't ask what it is good for. Sittler tells the story about memorizing the Catechism before he was confirmed because he was expected to, not thinking much about it. But he remembered it years later when he encountered Hume and Kant in a college philosophy class, and those long-ago memorized words took on meaning.

Reading, beholding, looking, reflecting... these things silently make their contributions, they add up bit by bit to accumulated insights, perception of relations, so that when we do preach, art equips us with the material by which we make Christian statements concrete and don't let them float around in gaseous generalities. For example, if we want to talk about fear there's plenty in the literature of the world to give a concrete picture of fear in words that your people know what you're talking about and recognize it.- They can respond, "Yes, that's what I mean by fear, I've been there." We (the preacher) get up and say "In all our fears as in all our delights..." What the hell, give them a fear!

Art is an inexhaustible adventure into the increasing of our humanity. (Joe, the reader, reads more of Conrad's introduction.) Sittler then points out Conrad's sentence, "I would have you see." Sittler tells the story about pastors at a conference on preaching where he was a presenter and they seemed indifferent to and unengaged in what he and the other speaker were saying. Sittler asked how many of the 45 pastors who were there had read a work of imaginative literature in the past year. Only 3 raised their hands. How many regularly read a really good newspaper? Not many. How many take and read a good journal in Biblical or theological studies? Three people raised their hands. Sittler said to them that if "we were physicians and practiced our craft thus disengaged from the

fundamental materials with which our mind ought to be cultivated constantly, we ought to lose our license. If your people do not listen to what you're saying, entertain the suspicion that it may not be because they're not righteous, it may be because you're so damn dull."

This is why I keep beating this drum regardless of its modest popularity - that the work of the artist is the most telling signal the world sends up. If you want to get your antennae out to what's cooking, then attend to the arts. And I include the art of the film, too. Sittler mentions the sheer humanity of "La Strada" and "The African Queen," commenting on the quiet transformation of Mr. Olnutt (Humphrey Bogart's character) because of the decency, humanity and love of this missionary sister.

One more thing: We (as pastors) have to develop a kind of ability to accomplish enough detachment to reflect. This is the biggest danger of ordained ministry. We get thrown into the ecclesiastical meat grinder of the local programs in such a way that the very capacity to reflect is weakened and smothered. You have to develop the thing, keep it stubbornly alive in the face of the facts. The best way to reflect is to ask "What's going on here?" Why did the film maker make this? The writer write this? Nothing is without significance.

Sittler tells a story of having dinner with Joe Anderson, his wife and son. The son described himself as a 'Hobbit pusher.' Sittler says that Tolkein is not his dish, but he is the dish of a good many young people to whom he speaks. The Tolkein phenomenon represents a profound dis-ease with the whole course of our culture. Tolkein creates a world out of whole cloth. Why is this created world so fascinating to my children? That means something for the kind of address from the Christian faith which might intersect the mind to whom Tolkein is significant.

Sittler also tells a story about seeing the film "Midnight Cowboy." His children described the movie as "cool" but weren't able to tell Joe what they meant by cool, so Joe went to see the film, thinking he might be able to discover what "cool" meant. When he came home from the movie, the kids were waiting for him. Joe said to them, "I'm going to give you 24 hours, and I'm not going to give you dough for another movie unless you tell me what you think that movie means." Joe said that they scratched their heads and had a committee meeting, and they came back the next night when he came home and told him that "we know it but we don't know how to put it." Joe replied, "I saw it, and all the way home I figured that's what you would tell me. So I'm going to tell you what I think and you tell me whether I'm cold, warm, or hot. The movie may mean many things, but one thing it said to me was that you don't know what you need until you've lost what you thought you wanted. My middle kid said, 'That's not bad.' From her, that's an A+. I think I did teach them something, even if only to look at things and ask, 'What's going on here?' The movie is making some kind of statement."

That kind of language is used by an architect, too: What kind of statement does the building make? Banal, slick, upper-middle class, kitsch....

Tomorrow, I'm going to ask you: has any intersection you make or have made with the arts, in what memorable way has your preaching been enriched or your insight deepened by something which you were taught there or picked up there?

**Tape 3. 1/15/78**

**Side A.**

The first part of this tape is too soft to hear, but eventually we hear Joe asking the group for examples of how some artistic accomplishment has provided them an insight which enabled them in speaking or teaching to make concrete what would have, without it, remained abstract. An example from the audience is Man of LaMancha which provides an illustration of grace.

Sittler says that there will be two themes for his morning address: The first is "time," the second, "The future." The 'time' Joe wants to talk about is not measurable time, but the inward sense of passingness, the "mystery of time." He refers to a thought that many have at a particular time, "If this moment could only be immortal." There is a powerful level of pathos in human experience. Sittler mentions poets who have written about this—Wordsworth, Shakespeare, A. E. Houseman, T. S. Eliot. Sittler then talks about the word *glory*. In the Bible, glory is the word that indicates a particular luminousness about things which the presence of God gives. It is the way of regarding the world in which it is bathed in divinity, bathed in the creativity of its maker. The glory is the interior life of the maker and source of all things. It is reflected from the things he has made. A child sees this; a child has an openness to perceive that things are more than they seem. Sittler quotes a Henry Vaughn (17<sup>th</sup> century) poem: "Happy those early days when I shined in my angel infancy..." another line includes the phrase, "bright shoots of everlastingness..."

The pathos of time is that the wonderful becomes the banal. The glorious becomes the ordinary. The poet is the one who never loses the incandescence, the ability to see the incandescent glory of ordinary things. As an illustration, Sittler talks about Churchill's use of language in his address to the nation in the early days of World War II. (He used a phrase from an 8<sup>th</sup> century poem) A woman in the audience reads a Walter De La Mare poem, "All That's Past," which begins, "Very old are the woods..." Sittler analyzes the poem, its language, rhythm and rhyme.

Sittler encourages his audience to attend to the literature of the past and present in such a way as to isolate and treasure these condensations of human experience which are then negotiable to other people. They make preaching efficient. "I use a lot of literature in my preaching because I can't say it that well." For example, old people need to be understood in their oldness. People are wrong when they say we must divert people from the actualities of life. You can stand almost anything if you make a story out of it, because to make a story out of an event is to relate it to the accumulation of human experience. It is significant, woven into the fabric of human life. People can cope. Sittler's illustrations are Macbeth, King Lear, Hamlet, Lincoln. Sidney Mead, in The Lively Experiment, writes about the role of religion in American life. He maintains that Lincoln was the only President who was a theologian; he had an eschatological sense of

history. Lincoln said, “What God is working out through this conflict [the Civil War] I don’t presume to know and you don’t know either. The Almighty has his own purposes.”

Another example is offered from someone in the audience who is a painter, who does art. He uses the metaphors from that experience- perspective, etc.- to illustrate points. Someone mentions architecture and the imagery of the impermanence of structures. A painting by Winslow Homer is mentioned. Joe suggests that “these things” could be reproduced on bulletin covers.

Sittler observes that symbols related to the church are almost invariably related to the middle class. The church is usually depicted as a decent, respectable, down the middle-of-the-road outfit. He then tells a story about his experience at Augustana (Hyde Park) about the elderly Swedes accepting the changing neighborhood, with blacks making up 30% of the membership of the congregation.

Sittler emphasizes his admonition to look carefully at what’s happening in the world: “I would have you SEE.” Keep your eye on what’s happening in the pictorial world, in pop magazines, etc. He tells about the Ash Wednesday in which he put two pictures side by side in the narthex for worshipers to see before they entered the sanctuary: a picture on the cover of Newsweek or Time of a Vietnamese mother holding her dead child in the same pose as the Pieta of Michelangelo alongside a picture of the Pieta. Under the pictures, he placed the caption, “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” (Joe tells this story on another tape and says that he didn’t preach a sermon at that service, but let the pictures convey the message. After the service, a woman in the congregation told him that the illustration he had placed in the narthex helped her to understand for the first time the meaning of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. )

## **Side B.**

The beginning of Side B is hard to hear, but includes more illustrations for sermons using concrete examples.

Sittler then moves on to his second theme, “The Future.” He quotes Nietzsche, “In the signals of the artist is the pattern of the future.” The shape of things to come send out signals ahead of themselves and the artists are the primary signalers. Joe mentions Wordsworth’s poem on revolution; Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” already saw the deterioration of the Christian doctrine of God, the erosion of the Christian tradition in Western cultural life long before it was seen by historians or theologians. He also mentions Eliot’s “The Wasteland.” Sittler asks, “Are there signals you ought to be paying attention to right now?” He tells the story of Ann’s geography book whose frontispiece is a picture of the Milky Way in contrast with Joe’s geography book with the picture of a reaper in a farm field at the front.

“The fundamental reality in life is energy,” Sittler says. What does this mean for theology/proclamation? We must find language for talking about reality which is appropriate to the kind of thinking and feeling which is coming into being. The Bible never talks about God as a person. The fundamental notion of God is as the ground of all being, the source of all living, that from whom all things come. It is an energetic term.

Our fundamental ideas about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit have got to become energetic rather than static; have got to become cosmic in their scope rather than just local. The thoughts or fortunes of our minds follow the fortunes of our bodies, according to Haroutunian (Joseph). The life-world of the generation now born and entering into its education process is a world whose dimensions will call the dimensions of our language into challenge. Our God who is an historical God is not enough God. You may recall that in your seminary studies your professor emphasized that the God of the Christian faith and of Judaism is an historical God. It was necessary at one time to stress the historical character of the divine revelation but that's been oversold. If God is the God of history only what possible meaning could the word of God have before there was any history?

Then follows a discussion about current films. "Star Wars" and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" are mentioned. Joe says he was bewildered by "Star Wars." Someone in the audience brings up 'the force' idea in this movie. There is no gray, only good and evil, black and white. Perhaps the movie is so popular because it ends in a positive way- "happily". The people in Joe's audience dismiss it as modern "cowboys and Indians." Then Joe asks if anyone has seen a movie in which the future is left with an ambiguous outcome, in which the outcome is uncertain and the challenge is given to us- we can have our hand on the tiller, if we will? Someone answers with "Oh, God" starring George Burns. Joe asks if he is going to make a sermon out of it?

Sittler says that he used to alert people in advance about an upcoming sermon which would focus on a theological point in a particular film. That would give his congregation a chance to see the movie first. He talks about a beautiful little film, "Sundays and Cybele," which he used to illustrate the text for the day, "I have called you by name; you are mine." You don't have to preach over 5 minutes, the film has done your job for you. A person's name =the identity of the person. Discussion with members of the audience continues. What is our responsibility for outcomes? What does God do and what does he give us to do? How does that God operate in history?

After a break, Sittler talks about making ethical decisions. He tells the story of a terminally ill woman, a friend, who asks Joe to tell the doctor she wants to be unhooked from all the machines. (This story is repeated on another tape in greater detail.) The problem of Christian ethics is moving from doing the will of God in determinate situations to making judgments in the midst of indeterminate situations. The components are mixed, there are arguments on both sides. You must have eschatological serenity in the midst of this indeterminacy. Joe recommends an article by Robert McCormick (sp.?), SJ, in a 1971 issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association in which he gives guidelines for a Christian in making ethical decisions vis/a/vis advancements in medicine.

**Tape 4. 2/13/78**  
**Side A.**

There is a new understanding of space and time which makes a demand on theological speech for the expansion of the fundamental Christian vocabulary into dimensions which



are more than historical. God is the God of the world as nature as well as the world as history. If man appeared only when he did, God must have been God of the whole pre-human evolution of the world. Instead of making evolution a phony battle (and the battle is really over) let us take it seriously and understand the reality of God in such a way that he is the Lord of the process as well as the result. The outcome in the reflective human being is not the end of God, either. It is not yet certain what we shall be- we who sit here. There is every reason to affirm that the process which has brought us to this point is an ongoing process. The evolution of man is not finished. The mind-set of our time is ready to think theologically in those terms and I think we should be in the vanguard of that kind of thought and not always catching up with theology but let theology be the pioneer in directing and informing human thought.

The environmental crisis is an awareness that the threat to the ecological structure of the world is what is at issue. Sittler suggests that pastors should preach sometime on Psalm 104, which is an ecological doxology – “create a picture of a holy ecology.” The ecological structure of the world is God’s creation and an attack upon it without care is blasphemous; it’s not only uneconomical, dirty and polluted, but Christianly, it’s blasphemous.

A woman in the audience reads Richard Wilbur’s “Advice to a Prophet,” which Sittler analyzes. He says that when man wants to say something very important about himself he’s got to connect himself to the world of nature. There is a bigness in him whose only analogy is in the bigness beyond himself. Here’s a linguistic habit which discloses what Karl Rahner calls man’s anthropological transcendence. He is formed for that which is beyond himself. As Augustine said, “Thou hast formed us for thyself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” The celebration of transcendence is not a gaseous statement for religious people, it is a report about humanity. Humanity means more than it is. Its reality is more than its actuality. The common people know this as well as the eggheads. There is a meaning lurking in life which is beyond the accumulated meanings of my own existence and that of my associates and my culture.

Going on with the Wilbur poem, Sittler says that man’s identity is not simply human. It is formed by his residency in the natural world. Man is ecologically in the world of nature as well as in the web of historical life. He gives an illustration from the TV program NOVA. That program on the space age reported that NASA is developing procedures for collecting natural resources from space to use when we’ve run out on earth and for living in outer space. Quoting Wilbur, “How should we be?” in those circumstances? References in literature would be irrelevant...

(We have) a religious, holy obligation to live in the creation in such a way as not to destroy the structures which are constitutive of our own selfhood. Titles related to this topic are Loren Eiseley’s Immense Journey, The Unexpected Universe, and The Firmament of Time. He gives a sense of the mystery of life, writes like a poet. The best book on the ecological structure of things is Barry Commoner’s Closing Circle. Sittler also recommends Red Giants and Bright Dwarfs and Until the Sun Dies, originally BBC lectures by Robert Jastrow. Also, Rene Dubos’ The God Within. Chapter 1 of W. Pannenberg’s first volume on Studies in Theology (correct title?), “The Crisis of the Scriptural Principle,” asks what’s happening to our understanding of the Word of God in

relation to the scripture and how the future will deal with this problem. Sittler mentions his book Essays on Nature and Grace. A woman in the audience volunteers comments on The Immense Journey. Another participant recommends Amos Wilder's Theopoetic and The Language of the Bible (or Scripture), calling the latter indispensable for the preacher. Sittler says that some of these books would be good for adult education programs.

When Joe taught a course on eschatology recently, he had his class read Red Giants.. They all reacted to the following paragraph: “ The life of a star is about 9 billion years. Our sun is a star. It has probably ‘been’ for 4 ½ billion years, which means its lifetime is half gone. The brightness of a star results from the interior combustion of its nuclear fuel which gives off heat and light. When that fuel becomes exhausted, a bright star expands, begins to glow with a reddish color, and in the last billion years will expand into a red giant as the nuclear fuel is exhausted, the gravitational pull is released; the sun will fill the whole space of our heavens, the temperature on earth will be 4,007 F., all life will have ceased long ago- “—so that when we talk about the future, the future is not infinite. The future of the earth is at most 4 ½ billion years; the human future much less than that.

What’s the meaning of this, eschatologically? Does God die with the dying sun? If he’s the maker of heaven and earth, the sun is but one of the minor stars within the Milky Way. What does the notion of resurrection or any kind of immortality for our spirit in virtue of Christ’s resurrection, if we are in him, we are a new creature...(sic) We shall be with him.

How shall we talk of this to Ann with her geography book? The mind asks about the outcome of things, not just the next decade. We want to know whence and whither... Sittler talks about life- the Nicene Creed declaring that the Holy Spirit is the “Lord and giver of life”. When you try to make a definition of what life is, you can’t stop short of force. There’s something cooking here, or *someone* cooking, as a Christian would say. The death of one minor planet, earth, will be a micro event within the magnitude of life. Sittler talks about the death of a star and then the rebirth of a new star. There must have been a time when things were not. There must have been a time when the cosmos was formed- out of what, God knows, we do not. We’ve got to expand our terms of life, death, the future, eschatology, to the size of our present knowledge of the cosmos. Biblical language is organic. It is process language. It assumes that God inaugurates a process that is always going on, not only historical, but natural.

### **Side B.**

The tape begins with Sittler talking, in mid-sentence, about neutrinos and quarks and charmed quarks. Scientists are getting poetic in their language, using imaginative language about the structure of the physical world.

Questions from the audience:

The first question can’t be heard, but Sittler responds by talking about the change in textiles being used for liturgical vestments and paraments. Why, he wonders. There is a discussion about liturgical art. Who makes the judgment about what is good? The discussion includes comments about church architecture. Sittler criticizes the chapel at St. Olaf. He talks about craft as opposed to art, and preaching as both craft and art. Jerry Pelikan used to say that the three theological virtues are faith, hope and clarity.

Craftsmanship has to do with compression. Put your craftsmanship on the detail of the job, not on magnitude. Pick a theme, term, idea, episode, and unwrap it.

Another member of the audience says that he offended a parishioner last Sun. in his sermon by calling TV preachers “popcorn preachers of cotton candy Christianity.” Sittler invites discussion about that. There is no cross in the superficial, success-oriented triumphalism that is presented.

Sittler tells about watching “detergent dramas” on TV once when he had some free time in San Antonio. He watched soaps from 9:00 AM-2:00 PM for three days. What are they talking about, he pondered. What are the themes? Though they move at a molasses pace, the themes are not trivial; they deal with the eternal themes of loneliness, anxiety, betrayal, infidelity, the tragic nature of death, the hollowness of life. They are important themes, but the development of the themes is in a scenario that is too sanitary: there are never any dirty dishes in the sink, no kids’ junk lying around, the women are beautifully adorned. They are technologically slick, upper-middle class. The solutions are inappropriate to the problems- they don’t have the same magnitude.

Is the problem of human loneliness fundamentally soluble within human terms? At one level, yes. We are creatures who need human companionship. The human creature is a lonely creature by structure. “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” What makes the fire in the boiler of religious faith is loneliness. Complete communion with, complete life in God, is not available under the conditions of history and humanity. “Hope thou in God...for I shall yet find him; he shall yet help me..” But yet that doesn’t occur in this life. We are metaphysically, ontologically lonely. Human love has its limits. I do not absolutely understand my wife. That’s for no lack of effort on my part or no access of subtlety on hers. Human beings are never utterly transparent to one another. There is a mystery at the base of the personality. There are deep structures of difference, and a marriage doesn’t annihilate these, it discloses them and teaches us the patience of living with them. The TV drama never takes up that kind of thing- loneliness against a transcendent background. The themes of the soaps indicate that what we’re talking about on Sunday mornings is not hogwash.

Another audience member tells about a couple he was to marry who didn’t want him to use the phrase about the promise to be with each other in joy and suffering in the ceremony. The joy was OK, but leave the suffering out. On another occasion, when he was preparing his confirmation class for the confirmation service, some of the parents and their children didn’t want the phrase “patience in suffering” used in the service.

Sittler says he is radically disturbed by what’s happening in the liturgical life of the church. He says, “I know it is necessary to find contemporary idioms for things which are characteristic of our contemporary life and speech, but the church should by nature be conservative, in that she conserves, she has a sense for the ability of certain language to contain much and long and bear constant repetition without cloying. Some of the language is so “with it” that next week “it” will have passed by, and it won’t be “with” any more. I do not have any notion why we say, “And with you also.” If one says “And with you,” the *also* is implied. I got so annoyed with this a year ago, I wrote a caricature of a contemporary worship which began, instead of “In the name of the Father, Son and

Holy Spirit,” with “Well, God, Father, Son and Spirit, here we are again. Amen.” The confession began, “We are just a bunch of slob.” Sometimes it’s good to use a light touch.

Another question: What about the place of movement in the liturgy? Sittler likes lay readers reading the Gospel in the midst of the congregation; the “really” lifting up of the host and cup during Holy Communion. He’s for them, not in terms of liturgical cosmetics but because they are eloquent of what the word says. They are pedagogically helpful. If habits are broken slowly, people put up with the fractures. It’s when you start messing up the whole barnyard at once that you get into trouble. Sittler tells a story from his days as a parish pastor. “I had a parish for 13 years and I didn’t know until I left that they had never used wine until I got there. This was an old General Synod congregation in the grape juice belt in Ohio. I was uninformed about that. In my father’s parish we’d used wine, so I got a bottle of wine, prepared it and served communion. The people thought, well, he’s young and doesn’t know any better and they were too polite to say anything and they finally got to the point that why should they say anything at all, it’s OK. If I’d made an issue of it, I would have had a fight in my first week. “ Another story from his parish days: He had been wearing his father’s black robe- Joint Synod of Ohio vintage- but it was wearing out. He wanted to wear a surplice and cassock, so he told his congregation that as much as he loved his father’s robe, he couldn’t hold it together any longer. It was in the midst of the Depression and he told his congregation that he couldn’t afford a new black robe, but could get a cassock and surplice for \$35, so was that OK? They told him that was his business.

Another question, about process, process theology. Sittler says that process theology was endemic at the U of Chicago while he was there. While he learned from it, he is not a Whiteheadian, by any means. “When I use the word ‘process’ I mean rather a term referring to that which is alive, present and working. That’s what Luther says, that His Word is a mighty, active, living, working thing. If you use the word organic rather than process, you’re close to what I mean. Our (Lutheran) church came into existence not leaving Christ’s church or the catholic church but putting the declarations of the truth of the Gospel, in all their generative vitality, at the center of the church’s life. That is the meaning of the Reformation. It was a freeing of the church, freeing God to deliver his grace as he will, in the Gospel. We are a catholic church. The Augsburg Confession is an important witness of our fathers to this constitutive center of our church but that’s what it is. What is the norm by which all faith and practice shall be judged? The Scriptures, the Word of God back of the Scriptures. The tape ends before Sittler is finished talking.

## **1978 Equipping the Saints for Ministry: Parish Ministry Leadership Conference** *August 6-8*

### **Tape 1. Side A.**

"Equipment" as used in the Greek text means "furnishing," i.e., internal competence. "Saints" are those who are called to acknowledge and respond to the grace of God.

**Theological reflections on the subject:** "At LSTC, they call me "Old Brooder.""

We must think of **theology as a discipline of the mind**. It is a reflection on the constitutive events of the Christian community, including the community of Israel. We must think of theology not only as a having but a doing.

Sittler does theology in relationship to the surrounding culture. He gives a biographical background to explain his approach to theology. His preaching was often to the unchurched and to non-Christians because he preached and taught on college and university campuses.

In the future, our teaching and preaching will have to be different; it won't be to the children of Lutherans. Gives examples from anthropology, physics, chemistry. The search for the one behind the many. A world is making demands on us. Our teaching must swing in the dimensions of men's experience. "Our minds follow the fortunes of our bodies."

*(The next lecture begins on this side.)*

Most people nowadays don't even know what the Christian faith is all about. **The transmission of the tradition is different now**. Be aware of changes. Keep an eye on the culture. What statements from the Word of God intersect with that culture? Example: watching soap operas in San Antonio. See Joyce Carol Oates and Saul Bellow.

**What does all this mean for our teaching and preaching?** If God is not God of all, he is not God at all. The **doctrine of God** can not start with man.

(Sittler mentions the "Lutheran idiosyncrasy" of Christocentrism.) We have a God for privacy but not for society. We must expand our doctrine of God to include the God of creation, the God of all that is.

## **Side B.**

Look at how the **doctrine of Christ** unfolds in the Bible. Jesus could not be comfortable only in the garments of Israel's expectations. He was moving beyond it. (See Ephesians, Colossians) The language about him swings in even bigger circles, in cosmic dimensions. Finally, he is the Lord of all that is. The **Holy Spirit** is the Lord and giver of life. We should have a new penetration of the Scriptures, and put aside sophomoric notions about it.

## **What are the demands on us as Christians in contemporary times?**

One demand is in **contemporary ethics**. Sittler talks about his position on the ethics committee in the medical school at the University of Chicago. The Christian faith has always been called on to give guides for life, to tell people how to act in various

situations. There is nothing in Scripture to give us help in how to deal Christianly with some current problems. Ethical inventiveness is needed to deal with such questions about birth control, the care of severely retarded children, when does death occur, etc.

We are called upon to substitute responsible judgment for clear direction. You don't know what the will of God is. The judgment may be wrong. Do we have a Christian symbol that is useful? The offertory in the service is our response to the hearing about the grace of God. Ethical judgment is a kind of offertory, in the hope it is what God would wish. If not, we know we have his forgiveness. Other examples: genetic manipulation; the death of a child. In this terrible moment, the Lutheran theological tradition is the profoundest of all traditions at this point: the theology of the cross. God knows the horror of death. He is with us.

*(Next day's lecture begins on this side.)*

**The relation of man to the natural world.** We Lutherans were drawn into the American phenomenon of Biblical literalism. We are made in the image of God; we are made for relationships; man's relationship with the natural system.

Sittler talks about the false translation of "have dominion over." Nature is God's but it is not God. Lynn White's book [article: "*The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*"] accuses Christians of being the cause of the environmental crisis. St. Augustine: Abuse is use without grace. The use of the word stewardship is not adequate for our purposes to help people think anew about nature and grace. See Psalm 104. All things hang together. The language of Lutheranism is mordant. We have a rich language for sin, a thin one for blessedness.

Richard Moe (a member of the audience) reads Richard Wilbur's "Advice to a Prophet." The poem is a good instance of how theology can intersect with the problems of modern life. In Wilbur, you have implicit catholic western theology.

## **Tape 2.**

Continuation of discussion of the poem. Sittler tells the story of his experience on the committee designated to clean up Lake Michigan. The Jews never had a fight about whether or not Genesis was a literal document. They are the people of the book. They alone of the Catholics, Protestants and Jews took Sittler's concerns seriously. A rabbi said it was blasphemous not to save the lake. Why has the Lutheran church had no theology for nature? There is a need for new language for new problems. Read Wilbur's poem contrapuntally with Genesis 1 and Psalm 104.

*Side A concludes with the closing worship, Alvin Rogness, speaker.*

*Side B is blank.*

## 1979 The American Experience in Space and Time

*Grace Lutheran Church, Evanston, IL, March 25*

### Side A.

**To what degree does the place of our residence shape our religious ideas?** Frederick Jackson Turner's essay, "The Frontier in American History" (written around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), emphasized the importance of the frontier. For hundreds of years, people lived in an enclosed space. Our forebears came from closedness to almost illimitability. This gave the possibility of mobility, of carelessness toward the earth. Sittler contrasts space with time, talks about the pathos of the passingness of time.

Sittler offers some genealogical background on his own family. Some years ago, he visited the town from which his forebears came, Sundhausen, near Colmar, in Alsace (now in France). He discovered records indicating that people with the name of Sittler had lived there from at least 1430, up until 1900. His particular family came to America in 1703 to the port of Baltimore. They then eventually moved to southern Pennsylvania, on to lower Ohio, to southern Illinois, etc.

Europe was a closed space. When our forebears came to America, they didn't know how big it was. What does the presence of space do to a people? It gives the possibility of mobility. It creates a habit of "Throw it away." It is not necessary to take care of space if space is an illimitable quantity. Is that concept of illimitable space evident in our literature? The early sermons of our New England preachers used the analogy of the frontier: heaven is like the dream of what lies ahead in our country. The poetry of Walt Whitman, in content and style, is distinctly American.

In Heidelberg, in 1936, Sittler discovered that there was a Thomas Wolfe Society. The students in that group asked Sittler to read from American literature about the pioneers and the immensity of American space.

Experience also comes to us in time (passingness, mutability).

What aspects of our American life, particularly our moral behavior, have been influenced by the fact that we have lived our lives, for three centuries now, always on the brink of a spatial alternative? American history is a long story of the flight to the suburbs. We have moved away from our problems created by human difference, ignoring the fact that it's only by the fusion of difference that you get richness. We have too long regarded the stranger as the alien. We have been indoctrinated by the virtues of the frontier and they were admirable: a powerful sense of ingenuity, the virtue of independence, rugged individualism. But the frontier is gone. We live in a deeply integrated, interdependent society. Those "old" virtues are catastrophic for modern society, except they be conjoined with virtues we have been taught are optional: openness toward difference, hospitality toward the alien. **We must deal with injustice, the redistribution of the goods and services of the earth.** We are curved backwards among ourselves.

### Side B.

*Questions from the audience.*

On new frontiers: outer space, the ocean depths; mental, spiritual frontiers; electronic frontiers; escapism through drugs and alcohol..

Sittler says we must reflect upon the stupefaction that comes from unlimited availability of goods, services, and amenities.

Does the frontier mentality have anything to do with the lack of speaking about eschatology in American churches? Sittler mentions that Sidney Mead says that the core spiritual hope of American Protestantism may live in the black community.

Discussion between participants and Sittler about environmental degradation, finite resources.

Question: What can we do as Christians to deal with the problems we have been talking about? Sittler discusses the meaning of *freedom*. We'll need a reconceptualization of what is truly human. Sittler is also asked how he copes and how he educates himself toward openness. After replying that he's not sure that he copes very well, he lists his family, his reading, various educational resources, and also reminds himself of Luther's sense of humor. His last comment on the tape is that he spent the last week in Minneapolis, at the headquarters of the ALC, conferring with others about the ALC's plan to commemorate the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's Catechism.

## **1979 Faith and Culture**

*Place unknown, but this seems to be presentations made to faculty and administrators of Lutheran church colleges. (ALCF?), May 29-31*

### **Tape 1.**

#### **Side A.**

(Sittler says that his reflections will overlap what Dr. Matthias (previous speaker) said.) **How can we help the student outgrow an adolescent theological condition?**

What is the growth we undergo in the college years? The student moves into a notion of selfhood constituted by a vaster, profounder world than he knew as a child. He is "bewildered into openness," - an opening up to the mad variety of human experience.

Illustration: Look at Trinity College, Cambridge. What kind of a college is this? It hasn't anything in it, even today, that most of our colleges talk about. Some of the buildings are falling apart, the food is horrible, the faculty not particularly celebrated. Yet, they turn out generation after generation of extraordinarily competent men and women. The students receive one-to-one education, learn to write English with clarity and precision, and read what they're told. That is what a college does: it accomplishes opening outward and unfolding. When we talk about what constitutes the greatness of a college, we ought to think with a certain



creative bewilderment of Trinity College, which has nothing which we think we have to have.

Now, while this growth is taking place, our students are theologically static. They are embarrassed by the simplicity of a religious tradition. They are growing into a post-Einsteinian world with a pre-Newtonian world view which their churches have not addressed. There are periodicities in the church's attention span. It gets all hopped up about the Holy Spirit, piety, or prayer life or community. But, the **doctrine of God** keeps thrusting up with fresh urgency in every theological generation, even though it may not always get the attention it deserves. Students' intellectual maturation demands an expanding doctrine of God. Take, for example, the people of the Jesus movement of a few years ago; they were "snuggling up to Jesus." The figure of Jesus without a doctrine of God is nonsense. Jesus was God-centered.

What can we do about this? Begin with the faculty. (A college is the faculty.) Ask the faculty if they would like to come together to talk about theological enrichment and growth in theological discourse. We can get at this another way by remembering an epigram: If God is not God of all he is not God at all.

Sittler begins speaking about the enlarged scope of reflection, using his example of friend Ann's geography book, comparing it with his.

### **Side B.**

Begins in mid-sentence, continuing with the story of Ann's geography book. What's happening to our doctrine of God? Call the faculty together to talk about **theology in relation to our students' world view.**

Through the Bible, we learn that God is what God does. There is a structure and process in things. You can't have cerebral explosion going on at one level without having demands on the doctrine of God which have expanded to the size of the inevitable question. The Christian faith is quite capable of doing that. Sittler refers to the energies of God, the fundamental force.

Sittler then speaks of the college faculty who are competent and dedicated at the graduate level in doing their jobs, but who are at the first grade (level) religiously and theologically. Student demands on the faculty can't be met in some areas.

The way in which **a college fulfills its covenant with the church** is not simply in terms of how many students go to chapel and whether how many in the dorms stay on their proper floors and all the rest of it, but the important thing is: **does this place have an intellectuality of a theological and Biblical kind? - and of a characterization of worship of the college community?**

*(Only half of Side B is Sittler's presentation. The rest is another workshop or committee meeting...?)*

### **Tape 2.**

### Side A.

Sittler begins by taking the word theology apart. The umbrella word means discourse about god or gods. There is Greek theology, Jewish theology, Christian theology. Christian theology has its roots sunk deeply in the faith of Israel. Note its vocabulary: reconcile, redemption, revelation.

Looking at **Christian theology**, we note that there is:

Biblical theology. (The role of scripture.) Recommends Raymond Brown's book on John.

Historical theology. (The development of the church's intellectual tradition; Christian thought.)

Systematic theology. (Dogmatics; speaks to culture that now exists.)

Illustration: St. Augustine's belief that the proper theater of theology is speech about God and man.

### Side B.

Continuation of illustration about Augustine. The understanding of self as Augustine understood it is no longer adequate. Reinhold Niebuhr said that theology describes modern man to himself.

Sittler says that his preaching has changed. He no longer "proclaims": "This is the word of God and you'd better believe it; the church teaches it, and, therefore, get with it." The word of God as thundering authority is no longer in our culture. It has to testify of itself, by its own intrinsic force. **Preaching is now a proposal of the possible rather than a proclamation of the absolute.**

The authority of scripture is what it always was in the first place- the intrinsic authority of the truth.

Reflections about the confessions and the liturgy. The liturgies of the church are (an) compacted, condensed reenactment of the drama of divine redemption. The liturgy is the form in which we present ourselves to God for His word to us. It is a powerful pedagogical instrument of the church.

### Questions from the audience.

Why present **inadequate theology to children**? Answer: Where did we get the idea that only the absurdly simple is open to childhood imagination? Children can know something beyond playthings. Students come to us with such an inadequate theology because we have not thought the child's mind to be capable of including larger references of the meaning of God, Christ, the church, etc. College faculty and parish pastors are responsible. Pastors on the whole are dull and soggy in the brain. The parish clergy have not, in recent decades, been drawn from the most alert, curious, eager and alive human types we have. Sittler talks about a conference he attended at which pastors never talked about the ideas being presented but instead about their cabins at the lake, the debt on their church buildings, etc.

Sittler mentions the **appalling dullness of some sermons**. It's a miracle of the grace of God that the gospel persists despite us. Until we can get the excitement of the Christian faith translated into the eagerness of the proclamation, we will have to depend on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Dullness is not the monopoly of the clergy. **Faculty can also be dull**. Undergraduate teaching is transmission with allure so that admiration shall be evoked. Gives example of a professor of English at Wittenberg: "He took his students more seriously than they took themselves."

Another question about **the shift away from Christ-centered mission statements in our colleges**. Sittler is critical of the term "Christ-centered." Jesus was God centered. And concerning "Christian" faculty": We can't guarantee the right result by appointing all Lutherans to the faculty. The faculty should be educated persons.

### **Tape 3.**

**Side A.** *(This side is hard to hear because of the background noise. Something previously taped bleeds through .)*

Continuation of questions from the audience. Sittler is asked about **process theology**. He says that process theology assumes that reality is processive rather than substantive. Ductility of constant change. Why has this emerged? Evolution, from the simple to the complex. God is processive. Read A. N. Whitehead [e.g. *Process and Reality*].

Theology is not subject to philosophical conclusions nor is theology operational apart from some debt to philosophical notions or continuities or conceptualizations. Theologians have looked to process philosophy as constituting a kind of pedagogical alliance on the way to help articulate ancient Biblical notions in a way that they communicate them to a contemporary world which is drenched in process.

To illustrate: How old is the world? What was God about before persons appeared? The Old Testament assumes God is the Lord of all life. Sittler says, "just two years ago, it hit me, in the Nicene Creed, "And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life."

How does process theology use process philosophy to give relevancy to theological notions? Theology has always had philosophical alliances. How does this sit with Lutheran theology? "Depends on who you talk to." I find no difficulty in using any philosophical notion that has a clear and rational character to help explicate and clarify by use of analogy."

More questions and discussion about process theology. Process theologians have admitted with a more open embarrassment the unanswerability of some questions, and therefore seem radical. For example, the problem of evil has never been satisfactorily answered. Sittler was asked when he went to the U. of Chicago how he had managed to breathe Whitehead twenty-four hours a day and not become a process

theologian. Sittler's reply: because he never was a fundamental Lutheran. He never understood God as a static dynamo. "My Biblical notions were always dynamic." The session with Sittler ends here. Some unrelated discussion takes up the rest of the side.

### **Side B.**

Begins in (Sittler's) mid-sentence. "...my commitment as a teacher,- the sobriety, the imagination, the steadfastness, the sheer care for students that I exercise in my role as a teacher is a moral announcement in itself." It is not only Christians who have that, but Christians will have a quality of commitment that is a non-verbal announcement of the highest importance. There is a moral quality to dedication.

Sittler says that he can't think of any realm of discourse which does not generate questions which intersect metaphysical thinking. What's going on here?

Question about Lutheran colleges and minority students. How to introduce the faith to students and faculty. Sittler says to ask them.

Question: What can the **church-related college do to be distinctive enough to deserve the support of the church?** Sittler: It depends on the college; their missions should be different, depending on location and circumstance. It should justify its own demand on the church.

Question: What is **unique about Lutheranism?** Sittler: It is quite particular in the rich ethnic mixture represented within. Its liturgical tradition- music and language. Theologically, the center of Lutheranism is the freedom of God in his grace.

Question: What do you say to students who are sure that their actions are directed by God? Prompted by that question, Sittler moves on to talk about what theology does. "I have never been so bewildered or excited: to do theology for a new time."

*Tape ends in mid-question from a participant.*

### **Tape 4.**

#### **Side A.**

(Sittler is speaking.) Let's not be Lutheran patriots. The Lutheran church is my house, but it is not my home. Observations about other denominations, and about Lutherans and African-Americans.

Question about Sittler's statement about proclaiming instead of proposing in sermons. Sittler clarifies his original statement ; he should have said, "Preaching is proclamation engendering proposals of the possible."

Beginning of wrap-up session: Question: Where do we go when we die?.

Sittler says he won't answer the question directly. It's not possible to use empirical speech about non-empirical matters. The meaning of life is time; "eternal life" doesn't make sense. Eternal life is a promise, but we can't say what it is. The Biblical speech about this is metaphorical, analogical.

See Amos Wilder on the language of the scriptures.

Question: What is the role of faith in the course of moral and ethical development? Sittler says the question makes it sound as if faith is a component in the formation of morality. **Faith** is not a kind of entity. It is a place where you stand and view all entities. It is a total tilt. The way of standing and living in the midst of indeterminants. Believing is not the accumulated result of empirically certified seeing. Faith is trust in the unknown, unfelt, untried goodness of God, says Luther. It can't be certified by proof. It cannot be certified by the feeling it evokes; otherwise, faith would be a state of the emotions. It is the acceptance of the promise of God.

Faith permeates life in such a way that we regard things differently. We regard life as a holy theater. Does that beget an ethics appropriate to it? Ah, yes, it does.

Faith is trust.

Illustration: Story of the woman who asked for an end to extraordinary measures to keep her alive. My judgment is an offertory. I don't know what God's will is in this case. If it isn't God's will, we are men and not gods. We do what we can and he will forgive it. This is an ethical position which gives sobriety and freedom. Faith is not piety. It is a place of beholding things.

### **Side B.**

Reflections on the content of the conference. A faculty member says, "We're still too wrapped up in dogmatics. We have to accept uncertainty and see the creativity there. Another comment: There is too much emphasis on our Scandinavian heritage in our Lutheran colleges.

Sittler's wrap-up: **Role of church-related colleges.**

1. The moral responsibility of our church colleges must be discharged in collegiate terms, not in piety; how well it is what it purports to be. There must be a constant pressure toward excellence.
2. I do my religious duty best when I fulfill my role most responsibly. Not in my private role or in the congregation, but in my public role.
3. What we regard with apprehension may be actually a good pressure, a creative opportunity (referring to the role of the church-related colleges.) The question of the continuation of the church-related colleges ought to be kept alive. We should justify in every generation that the colleges deserve to exist.

## **1979 Baccalaureate Sermon at LSTC June 3**

*Text: Acts, Chapter 4*

Sittler wants to reflect on the words *bold*, *boldly*, and *boldness* used in the text.

The term *boldness* is not, originally, a religious or theological term. The term in the Greek language simply means the right and obligation of a citizen of the state to speak with candor, clarity and with a sense of duty toward the community whatever he feels is true and for the good of the community.

In our text, the use of the word *boldness* comes close to the act of the ministry of the Gospel. Brashness can be perceived as boldness, but it is different. Neither must we be timid in the proclamation of the Gospel. Wherein lies this authentic boldness which was evidenced in Peter and John? Boldness in preaching is not a sheer accident of disposition, nor is it simply a rhetorical manner. The boldness of the Christian proclamation comes from the proclaimed, not from the greater or lesser endowments of the proclaimer.

This boldness can be illustrated in an event from church history. Martin Luther was a man of considerable personal force, a man of great courage. He often had to exercise both in the defense of the Gospel. His most memorable statement was “Here I stand.” We have misunderstood where the accent should fall in that sentence. It shouldn’t be on ‘stand,’ or on ‘I,’ but on ‘here.’ Luther was not celebrating courage or the egocentric force of his own personality. “I can stand upon that which is not my own.” Or, to quote John Calvin, “This Gospel is true and must stand against all the powers of the world because it is not ours.”

Therefore, to this class- Our whole charter for ministry is in the passive voice. Recall how Paul moves from his powerful personality which loved to use the active voice, how time and again his language moves back to the passive. “We love, I mean rather we have been beloved; I know, I mean rather I have been known; I reach forward to grasp,” and again he catches his voice and himself, and returns to the passive- “I mean rather I have been grasped.” Therefore we enter the ministry of word and sacrament not in the power of our own love but in the power of that love with which we are beloved.... Not only in the power of our knowledge, though there is power there, but in the knowledge by which we have been known into knowledge; and finally, not because we grasp but because we have been grasped.

## **1979 Reflections on Prayer** *Rockefeller Chapel, August 12*

*[See also an audiotape and videotape from 1981, which are basically the same thing.]*

**Side B.** *(Side A contains “Wisdom and the Numbering of Days” from July 7, 1974)*

Sittler says his reflections on prayer began several months ago after a conversation with a woman who told him she prays about everything, even for the availability of a parking space when she drives to work at a local hospital. Sittler asked how she would react to a woman who might also be praying for a parking space because she has an ill child she needs to get to the emergency room, but doesn’t find a space. Or, to Mary, jogging on the donkey all the way to Bethlehem, praying for a place to stay, but finding only a stable. The woman replied that these women didn’t pray hard enough.

Sittler says that instead of laying out theological propositions about prayer, he’s going to tell three Biblical stories about people praying, and at the end, put the question about the meaning and force of prayer all over again in light of these stories.

- The story of Hannah. (As she arose from her praying, her countenance was no more sad.)
- David and the death of his son. (For who can tell whether God might be gracious to me?)
- Paul and his thorn in the flesh. (My strength is sufficient for you. My purposes are fulfilled in your weakness.)
- Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. (May this cup pass from me.)

To wrap this all up in a neat package would diminish all the marvelous dimensions of all the stories. Is it not just possible that prayer is the ultimate conversation with the ultimate knower and listener? As Nathan Scott said, "Is prayer perhaps flinging ourselves in trust into the awesome indeterminacy of the Holy One?"

## **1979 To ALC Clergy** *Place unknown, October*

### **Tape 1. Reflections on the papal visit**

#### **Side A and some of Side B.**

Sittler begins with an analysis of the particular American situation and our history. Mentions in detail the course on the American experience he taught at the U. of Chicago with M. Marty and Giles Gunn. He continues by saying that the pope brought forth our feelings of guilt that we have not succeeded in becoming the country we set out to be.

The pope is a wholly admirable person. He exhibits the freedom of a disciplined life. He represents a tradition which reminds us of the thinness of our own spirituality. The pope said unpalatable things but still commanded honor and affection. We can't account for the impact the pope had just because of the media hype.

### **Tape 2. The Augsburg Confession and the Doctrine of God**

#### **Side A.**

The doctrine of God is not the principal doctrine in the Augsburg Confession. What has happened between the time of the A. C. and now to alter our ways of preaching and teaching about God? (Sittler tells the story of Ann's geography book.) Man's awareness of his place in creation has changed. The doctrine of God must swing in cosmic dimensions.

Science historian Percy says that we are dealing with things that are ineffable. This is not a normal word used in scientific discourse. The way things are may not be capable of correspondence with the possibilities of our minds; that is, the way things are may not be capable of being transmitted into discourse which has a rational correspondence whereby the way things are can be put into statements of fact.

The liturgies of the church begin with God, the creator. They are theocentric, not Christocentric. They posit the unity of all creation.

Two realities of spirit and matter have been joined together in contemporary knowledge. Ecology also applies to mind and spirit.

The world as history and the world as nature come together in Christ. See Raymond Brown's The Birth of the Messiah.

When the church sings the song of praise and uses the phrases "the mystery of God" and "the mystery of Christ," they are not using superheated, devout phrases, they are using exact language. If that be the kind of world to which the gospel is to be transmitted, it must do it in the acknowledgement of this kind of a theater in which the song is to be sung, but also affirming the meaning and truth of the Christian faith (Schleiermacher). If we talk only of the truth of the faith, we are having to attend that truth claim by methods of verifying that truth which have become increasingly dubious. There were times when the truth of the message did not have to be verified, secured or defended.

Illustration: Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek." Sittler describes his experience with young people in the forest in Oregon. "Weyerhauser owns the timber but these kids inherit the earth."

The contemporary doctrine of grace has reduced grace to the meaning of the Second Article. The Reformers affirmed the freedom of God in his grace because of the context of the times, but we must not restrict the grace of God to redemption. Creation must also be seen as a grace. The Greek charis (grace) is the same as the words in Hebrew he'in and hesed, meaning the lovingkindness of God. God wills in love all things that are. Read Psalm 104, Romans 8. The Holy Spirit gives life to all.

### **Side B.**

The theology of the future will have to deal with God the creator in terms of our knowledge and understanding of the creation and man in terms of his imbeddedness with nature. A new organic language will be needed to match our understanding of our place in the cosmos.

How are the old confessions of the church to be drawn into the intellectual life of contemporary times? The way to honor the Augsburg Confession is to take it apart and ask after the intentionality: what were they witnessing to? Sittler gives some practical advice to pastors about dealing with the Augs. Conf. in their congregations.

### **Question and answer period**

#### **Topics:**

1. Preaching about evolution.
2. Elaborates on his earlier reflections about grace.
3. The authority of scriptures; "intersection of truth with meaning." The Bible is not the automatic authority it used to be. Concerning the fundamentalists, Sittler says that lots of people want this simp-



listic approach to scripture, but we cannot reduce the message, and we cannot deny our catholic tradition. "Let's wait this one out; it can't last for more than one or two generations. The radical historicalness of human life will dissolve it. We will be pushed into a deeper understanding of the witness of the church via scripture." This is an uncomfortable time to be a preacher, in the midst of radical oversimplification, invitations to reduce the Christian gospel to a warm blanket for privacy, withdraw(ing) it from all the concerns for God's creation. This we must not fall for.

4. The Virgin Birth. Not a primary church doctrine, not essential to the Christian faith. It is a way of explaining the relationship of this child to God. Helpful reading: Karl Barth's chapter on Jesus' birth in Theology in Outline, and Luther's sermons on the "Magnificat".

## **1979 Presentations to the Ohio Synod - October**

### **Tape 1. Word and Scripture.**

#### **Side A.**

"When a Christian body hangs the whole weight of its theological understanding of the church catholic on a single doctrine, it better be sure it is well screwed in if it's going to support the weight."

Sittler addresses the Doctrine of the word of God in relation to the Doctrine of scripture. In this country, at least, we conflate the two. However, we should make a distinction between the two. How do we understand each one and the relationship between the two? The Missouri Synod says they HAVE to be conflated to be Lutheran. Sittler says no. We need to clarify this in order to proceed with the merger. The ALC and LCA constitutions leave the issue open to interpretation.

- A. Word of God.- Statement about God= Doctrine of the word.
- this is not a phrase that begins with historical time.
  - precreation identity with the power of God. He goes out of himself to make his will, power and work known and visible.
  - becomes present in Jesus.

*(Sound fades in and out here on the tape)*

Sittler discusses the word 'Glory.'

- B. Scripture (also referred to as the word of God.)
- record of a people's history with the Word and a
  - witness to the power, glory and dynamism of the Word.
- Luther and the word.

- There can be no retreat from historical/critical studies. We are learning more and more about the subtlety of language through the growth of linguistics.

**Side B.**

Questions from audience:

Missouri Synod situation.

Why is literalism in reading the Bible becoming more prevalent?

Sitter: "No thinking required- "just tell me what it says". Understandable in a time of uncertainty.

"Do not let the Biblical text be determined by your own experience."

Books recommended: The Myth of God Incarnate, and Raymond Brown's The Birth of the Messiah.

**Tape 2. The Augsburg Confession (450th anniversary)**

**Side A.**

Historical background. Luther's reason for writing the catechism.

Formula of Concord; Smalcald Articles.

Practical suggestions on how a pastor can teach his congregation about the Augsburg Confession

Meaning of Reformation: recovery of the freedom of God in his grace.

Reflections on the **visit of Pope John Paul II to the U. S.** ("A palatable man saying so many unpalatable things.")

The American religious life and experience are not continuous with the continental experience. In the U. S., our vast space and open frontier are the most formative feature of the American spirit. We could always evade the things we didn't like; we have always had an option to ethicality.

Americans believe they are a chosen people (see the Myth of American Innocence) Since the end of WW II, our value in our own traditions has been shattered.

**Side B.**

There is little to admire in American culture since WWII.

More about John Paul's visit- He is a wholly admirable man with fidelity and courage. He talked about structure and law to people unconsciously feeling guilt about "doing their own thing."

**Questions from audience.**

Missouri Synod's approach to the Lutheran confessions.

Differences between Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology in the 20th century.

"We have overstated the necessity of every generation to have its own language."

**Tape 3. The Future Task of Theology**

**Side A.** Sittler wants to concentrate on two main points in this address.

The first:

The scope of coming theological discourse. The story of Ann's geography book, i.e., the difference between the life-world that you and I grew up in and Ann's life-world, both in space and time. Man reflects on the world in two categories: the world as nature and the world as history. The world as history is a relatively young world. Reflect on how your education and mine has had to do with historical reality.

We talk about God as creator of heaven and earth and then go immediately to his human creation, to our place within the natural world. The change between Ann's and my geography book is designated here. Ann is going to understand herself in relation to the galaxy, not simply the historical world. The world as nature now constitutes the reflective perimeter; the world as nature is now the theater of the younger generations' thought and life and reflection along with the world as history. Long in time, vast in space...

If we're going to say something is important, the Anns of this world will gauge our affirmation of importance not only by historical canon but the category of importance will be given by what does this mean in terms of the great picture of the world as nature. It's the way I see the theater in which we must play out the drama of redemption. .... We have to shape our language of proclamation, of invitation, proposal, by careful attention to the maturing minds of those to whom we make the proclamation.

The story of the drama of redemption has to find a way of announcing, inviting itself and has to find the clues as to how to do that so that it may be believable. Sittler here recommends Robert Jastrow's Red Giants, Bright Dwarfs and Until the Sun Dies, and Lewis Thomas' Lives of the Cell and The Medusa and the Snail. There will be a time when the earth will not be. In absolute terms, man has no future. What does this mean for the will and purpose of God? the redemption of the world?

The second:

Biomedical Ethics. Ethical decisions are now moving from the realm of obedience to the clear to the realm of judgment in the midst of the indeterminate. For a long time, to be ethical meant to know what the will of God is and do it. To be ethical was to obey the imperatives, the law- the law of faith, the law of love. But now, we're called upon to make decisions in the midst of which we do not know and cannot understand what the will of God is. I cannot go to Scripture. It was not written in the presence of contemporary medicine. I cannot go to the tradition of the church because neither the Roman Catholic or Protestant ethical tradition was matured within the presence of that kind of question or situation. In the midst of a situation in which I have no clear, unambiguous and comforting guidance as to what is the good. What is good to do is what *ethos* means. The word *ethics* comes from *ethos*.

Often our decisions must be judgments rather than obediences to the clear. How do we arrive at judgment? Sittler recommends the article, "To Live or Let Die," by Father Robert McCormick (a Jesuit at Georgetown University ) in the Journal of the American Medical Association , ca. 1974. Decisions come down to the ancient and insoluble problem of what is life? How shall we define human life?

Another problem coming down the road- recombinant DNA research.

**Side B:**

A doctrine of God that is an individual, personal subjective shepherd of individual souls is not annihilated – that’s an important reality in the doctrine of God- but if the doctrine of God is only private and personal- a kind of warm blanket for subjective anxieties- it’s not enough God for Ann with her geography book who cannot but say, “What does everything mean? What’s the meaning of the whole theater in which I am a speck in a place, in a world, in a solar system, in a cosmos?” Recommended reading: Langdon Gilkey, W. Pannenberg, Philip Hefner.

The offertory in the liturgy is the response of the people. An ethical judgment made carefully and devoutly in the midst of indeterminacy becomes a liturgical offertory. “O.K., God, here it is. I thought it through as well as I can, I tried to understand the components of the situation, I have said what I have said and I lift it up. If it’s right, accept it; if it’s wrong, forgive it.”

Sittler gives examples of ethical decisions in which he has been involved.

Another proposition Sittler wants to include: The meaning and truth of the Christian faith have to find a trans-Biblical way of securing its authority. How shall they commend themselves to the mind as being true? We’re moving into a time in which the authority (that is, the persuasive force) of what we declare about God and Christ is being deprived of automatic authority. What’s the nature of religious certitude? What does this mean for theological education?

Every generation has to clarify the shape of the culture’s problematic, its questions, even its strengths, and fit the contours of the Christian message to it. “It’s true because it’s appropriate, it fits. It speaks to my condition.”

Many clergy think that the sanctified nature of our calling somehow releases us from being cultivated members of the human community of our generation. We need to complicate the curriculum in theological education.

Questions and answers: about fundamentalists who want simple answers; about DNA research; about ethical decisions. Sittler responds to the last by saying, “The Christian faith has a very tragic view of life. Our fundamental symbol is not the electric blanket but the cross. It is salvific, but it is not salve, and that’s what people want. The Christian faith always intersects the world with a vast NO to the world’s loudest YES. At the same time, when the world says NO, nothing is possible, the crazy Christian faith says, OH, YES. We are in a dialectical relationship to culture, and we don’t like that uncomfortable situation. We want to be cozy with it.”

A member of the audience relates a story that Wold told him about an encounter he (Wold) had with Dr. Sittler. When Wold told Sittler that he wanted to be a missionary, Sittler replied that whatever he (Wold) did in life, God would have to forgive him for it, therefore he might as well do what he wanted to do. Sittler responds: This is a funny sounding thing that has some truth in it. You achieve eminence. I’m supposed to be a good theologian- all that stuff. But people have paid for that. My wife and my kids have paid for it. In order to keep on top, - I’m no genius. To have to keep on top of all this

stuff, I have to work my tail off day and night. Read, read, when I should have been with my kids. They paid for it, and God has to forgive it. In every one of us, there's no achievement here that doesn't have some thing paying for it over here. There's no honor over here of which you are not quietly guilty because somebody over here quietly sacrificed while you collected. That's the way it is.

## **1979 A Christian Perspective on the Victims of Our Time**

*Symposium on the Holocaust, St. Olaf College, Nov. 1*

### **(The problem of evil)**

If a God who is good created all, why does evil exist? The mystery of God. "I create good, saith the Lord, and I create evil." There never can be an answer to the problem, but there are replies. The problem of the existence of evil: it is a structural necessity. See G. M. Hopkins' "Spring." It (evil) is built into the nature of creation. There is no human good without the good having exercised choice. Negativity is required. No beauty without ugliness. The precondition for the existence of good requires choice and freedom. However, this is little comfort to those caught in the grip of evil.

The problem of the absurdity of the distribution of evil: It seems to fall unjustly. No answer, but a reply- see Psalm 23. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" A word of trust follows- "Into thy hands..."

What is the nature of our human responsibility in reply to the existence of evil? What are the moral, intellectual and theological demands made on Jewish and Christian reflection by the events of the Holocaust and history since that time? How must we change?

### **(Lutheran theology and the law)**

Lutheran theology misinterprets the law. How do we properly understand it? Instead of "law," we should read, rather, "the God-given fundamental structures of creation." "Torah" has much more meaning than "law." Paul was a child of the legalistic tradition, but he did understand the fuller meaning of Torah. We must understand the moral ordering of the law. Example: the ordaining of homosexuals. Homosexuality does not continue God's law of life, yet all sorts and conditions of humans are a part of our community under God. Both Jews and Christians are related to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not detached from the law, i.e., the structures of creation. We live under law, within grace.

### **(Relationships between Christians and Jews)**

What must the Christian community think about as it engages in discourse with the people of Israel?-- our Christocentricity; the meaning of Christology for the Jewish community. Jesus always points beyond himself. We must speak of the relation of the

God of Abraham and Jesus' God in a way in which Christology can fulfill its obligation toward the work and person of Jesus Christ without creating a separation between the intentionality, the momentum of Judaism in its own God relationship.

## **1980 Equipping the Saints** *Texas Lutheran College July*

### **Tape 1. Clarification of terms; language.**

#### **Side A.**

Many metaphors are untranslatable. Biblical language needs to be understood in its intentionality. This requires organic images. Sittler offers some examples from Genesis. He also compares the words authority and power.

The term ministry and the term the ministry (the ordained ones): there needs to be a distinction between the two. Illustration: J. S.'s father's ministry in the Pacific Northwest. "If everybody may do it, no one will have the obligation regularly to do it."

The gathered community: how is it constituted a community? By two things: Word of God and the Sacraments. The church has the ordained ones who will see to it as an obligation and vocation that this constitutive word be preached over and over again and the sacraments regularly celebrated, to maintain the fountain of its own life. It is an office.

Reflections on language. Qualitative, quantitative. We need to learn to read organically the images that point us to how we are related inwardly to Christ. See St. Paul. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

#### **Side B.**

Sittler references the Syrian legend of the great king who ruled through his friends. Two rituals designated one as a Friend of the King: eating at table, the gift of a garment. Recall Jesus' words.... "but now I call you my friends." Also note the language of Luther, for example, the almost dangerous statement, "You are to be a little Christ to your neighbor."

#### **Responses to questions.**

Sittler expands on his statement about one's responsibility to the neighbor. (Includes comments on social ministry, the Christian's relationship to the state.) The church can "sit loose in a way that government bureaucracy can not; it can do an end run around precedent... i.e. the Roman Catholic Church, Mother Teresa, etc."

**The freedom we have in Christ.** In Christ, we are freed from a given order to which we must match our performance. God's favor precedes us; it is in our baptism waiting for us. Remember Jesus' exercise of freedom, healing on the Sabbath.

What is needed is a sense of humor about the rigidity of regulations. Kierkegaard said that real piety and a sense of humor before God are very close to one another. We are free in a direct relationship to God which begins with God's grace and the promise of it, and we are free within that grace to move within the world with a perilous inventiveness. Example: Bonhoeffer's decision about Hitler. "The impossible under the law of God becomes necessary." More and more we will need reflective Christians on matters of conscience.

*Tape 2 has no Sittler. Both sides are of the worship services held during this event.*

### **Tape 3.**

#### **Side A.**

#### **The language regarding "Equipping the Saints."**

The equipment for saints is various because each person is different. It is a process, but non-standardized. It is a deepening of the life of faith so it can be communicated.

Examples:

1. St. Augustine. He helped to equip the saints in his time. His message was "Live with joy, die without fear." He helped the church to

OUTTHINK (Doctrine of Trinity)}

OUTLIVE (discipline, morality) }

OUTDIE (tranquility, serenity, no fear)}

the pagan world.

2. St. Francis. Formed a body of people who lived lives of discipline, who knew the meaning of life.

3. Joan of Arc.

4. Albert Schweitzer.

5. Dieterich Bonhoeffer.

All intersected the needs of their time with a strange appropriateness.

"Let's think of ourselves as saints... gain knowledge and skill but then tailor them to the nature of our endowments."

Question from a participant: How do we know when we have received our true calling? J. S. responds by talking about spirituality; the spiritual development of Roman Catholic seminarians. Students at seminary today want a deepening of inwardness.

Defining spirit is hard to do, but we know what it is. Spirit points to an

inward reality. How is this called forth? In the U. S. today, inwardness is coarsened, stifled. Our identity is equated with power, our worth, with possessions. We've gone wrong some place.

How do we equip ourselves to be God's saints in this moment? We might get some idea what the church ought to move more fully to become and we its people more fully to witness to. The great age of the church is over. It never again will be a triumphal, powerful element in men's lives, a powerful voice in culture; its message will never again be a presupposition of culture. That time is gone forever.

In the time of Luther, God was there. Now, the doctrine of God cannot be taken for granted. We've got to BE Christians, believe, preach the gospel in a world from which these presuppositions are quietly gone out of mind. What does this mean, for us to be God's saints..... transparencies in our personhood through which God can be seen?

### **Side B.**

Our first duty is to cultivate inwardness. The rise of the cults, the Jesus movement and the Robert Schullers of this world mean that there is a profound desire for an inward pattern of meaning.

The **task of our community** is to preserve the great story in all of its tragic dimensions. We've been so busy guitar playing, celebrating, dancing and jumping around that we've forgotten that Jesus was executed on a cross. He was not a success. Life is an unfolding.... but there comes a time when the unfolding turns toward its inevitable end. That's what I mean by a tragic sense of life. The depth of the Christian story is not meant for the Mary Poppins mentality of this world. Often our churches have been a cheerleading cadre for Jesus. He did not die in bed; he died crying, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He is our man, dying in faith.

It's a Great Story- the only story big enough to grasp the tragic sense of life.

To be a person means to experience contradiction, ambiguity, sin... even one's own. Jesus became us. How could he solve our problem except by becoming our problem? No one shall ever say of God, "God, you don't know what it's like to be a man."

In the times ahead, the church is going to be a smaller, leaner, tougher church. Recommends G. K. Chesterton who, in his writing, gives a sense for life's tragic ambiguity. Sittler concludes this portion of his speech by admitting that it hasn't been of much practical help but, "the practicalities will come if we get the central vision right."

### **Questions from the audience.**

A question about the church of today: should we deny the American dream (of success)? What does a financially successful Christian do? Sittler recommends Richard Niebuhr's Christ and Culture.

Another question: How can we help young Christians make a transition into a mature faith. Sittler suggests, don't answer questions other than on the level they are asked. Let the questions grow up to the size of the great answers.

*Tape 4 in this series has no Sittler. It's preparation for worship (choir practice,*



*etc.) and another worship service.*

## **1980 The Ministry of the Laity** *Minneapolis, October*

(President Preus introduces J. S.)

### **Side A.**

Begins with observations about his parents. "Father had dignity, mother had the imagination." Mother had troubles with being a part of the ground troops with the clergy as the generals. Several humorous stories about her: the first, about a preacher who didn't say anything, and "he didn't say anything for 30 minutes!" and the second, about the ideas his mother incorporated from the Ziegfeld Follies when she was producing the Sunday School Christmas pageant.

What does it mean that all over Christendom there is a **renewed interest in the ministry of the laity**? One aspect of broader things happening in the 20th century is liberation. The baseline of the human is being broadened - economically, religiously, intellectually, politically, etc. However, the indubitable goodness of a more general participation in events and decisions does not necessarily deliver an unalloyed good. Liberation as such does not automatically mean that everything will be wiser, more prudent, more responsible.

For 100 years ahead, we're going to have troubled times. You can't convulsively tear down and then slowly recreate more humane forms for existence without passing through a time of troubles.

It is a part of the faith of the church catholic that we believe God is working something out in the history of his people which, through torment, confusion and bewilderment, is groping toward the coming of a brighter kingdom. The theater of our reflections must be broadened. Is there something to be specified in looking through things with a Lutheran focus? We can bring to the discussion of the ministry of the laity a good, earthy realism. Consider the word ministry. Every baptized person is a minister, yes, but if we become so enthusiastic about that we refuse to recognize that there are forms of ministry we will be unrealistic. There are distinctions about ministry we ought to be careful to make.

What is the difference between the laity and the ordained ones? Not a moral difference nor in a standing before God. How is the community of the people of God constituted? What happened to make them a community? A story started it: God is gracious, merciful; the Creator of all things is a God of lovingkindness; that was not only spoken but enacted.

What must the community secure that the story may continue to be told? The church ordains certain ones to keep the story going. What is everybody's business is liable to be nobody's full-time business. The ordained are the creative story

tellers, charged to keep the story alive.

We are all children of the story. Luther said that the mother who told the story to her children was as much a preacher as the archbishop of Mainz.

Why is it we have to bring up the question about the ministry of the laity?

We're confused about how we shall exercise our ministry. The role of the laity has always been of theological importance. Sittler then cites illustrations, examples.

### **Side B.**

#### **Ministry of the laity, continued.**

Deep Christian faith, often unarticulated but profoundly insightful, must be given its value in the church. It's the laity in the critical role of their life experience that we need in the church, in their critical, analytical, insightful role. The mission of the laity, in a society that assumes that it is the purpose of wealth and power to increase itself, is to look at unquestioned assumptions and ask, "Is it really so? Is that what creation is for?"

Are there other ways to use power that would be humanly more in line with what the Scripture calls the kingdom of God?

You are at the wrong end of the stick if you ask, concerning the ministry of the laity, "What are the jobs around the church that the lay people can do as well as other people?" **THIS IS NOT THE MINISTRY OF THE LAITY.**

Look at your culture; look at your life. What is this vague unease or disease I feel about what's happening to the way my life is run that gives me a sad sense of loss?

## **1980 Theology Outside the Walls - A Lecture on How My Mind Has Changed, *LSTC, Nov. 16***

*sponsored by the CHRISTIAN CENTURY as part of their series presented every ten years.*

### **Side A.**

Sittler's first reflection is about the "dubious appropriateness" of the title. Our minds really do not change. There is development, enrichment, but not change, although the term is journalistically O. K.

His second reflection is about some of the articles written about developments in theology over the past ten years. Through the years in which Sittler was involved with the ecumenical movement's Faith and Order Committee, he observed an **enlarging area of theological discourse**. Theologians first began discussing the meaning of Christ, then moved to Christ and the church, then to Christ, the church and the world, finally to Christ and the cosmos. Why did Christianity unfold in these dimensions? Technology and

space exploration changed the kind of dimension in which we must talk about everything. Illustration: Ann's geography book as contrasted with his.

Haroutunian's comment, "The fortunes of the mind follow the fortunes of the body." **How do we talk of God in a new time and a new space?** Who is the God who was before the human being appeared? Unless God is the God of everything he is not God enough for anything.

First leading motif from CHRISTIAN CENTURY articles he read in connection with this anniversary: **Our minds have been haunted outward.** It's ironic that this expansion, this larger dimensionness of the doctrine of God should follow so shortly after the themes in the sixties that God is dead.

Second impression from articles: **Political dimensions of theological reflection.** Linda Marie Delloff reads from an article by a Latin American theologian (sounds like "Jose Vanino.") Life is only a function of economic progress. Economic laws are the highest god. We are faced with a total system of death. It is our Christian duty to witness concretely to God's creative concern for all life and against death.

Sittler reviews the ideas in this article, emphasizing the point about the cost we must pay to keep the systems going.

**Side B.** Last reflection: It's hard for Sittler to talk about **'his change of mind.'**

Consider the passage, "Lay it to the heart of Jerusalem." This describes what he's been doing the past few years. ... "not a very systematic systematic theologian." Tells the story of Tillich and his theological method.

Sittler has been paying increasing attention to the theological work going on outside the walls of academe. Deepening attention to unintended theological outpourings from the world of literature. Linda Marie Delloff reads from Berryman's ELEVEN ADDRESSES TO THE LORD. Sittler responds... Talks about cognition by amazement, acknowledgement of the Other, comments on the parables.

Questions from the audience regarding banalization of liturgical speech, regarding authors, poets Sittler would recommend.

One doesn't have to be ordained to be a good teacher or theologian.

## **1981 (?) Conversation with Pastors**

There are four tapes labeled "Joe I, II, and III" which seem to be recordings of sessions Sittler conducted with pastors, probably in 1981. They cover a variety of topics, are informal in style and include dialogue with the pastors. Most of the material covered was covered by Sittler in other places, on other occasions. There is not a whole lot on these that Sittler didn't say elsewhere. The tapes are poor in quality because of a defect in the tapes.

A summary of the recorded material follows:

Questions and answers from pastors.

Changes in the church as we prepare for the merger between the ALC and LCA.

The role of the ordained.

Our confessional statements.

The variety and limitations of language.

Sittler quote: "My first duty to a text is not to subject it to a doctrine, but to hear what the man said."

Discussing the coming merger, Sittler says: "Let's not try to solve all 20<sup>th</sup> century issues by appeal(ing) to 16<sup>th</sup> century statements." He recommends that we get back of the statements, try to figure out what was the energy they were postulating, what is the good they wanted to secure, and then maybe start all over again, to say it in fresh and new ways.

He turns to the distinction between law and gospel. The distinction was a strategic necessity for Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the distinction is faulty. TORAH is a communicative covenant which is also transmissive of grace. (Sittler says his position on this issue has prevented him from being a favored theologian in his own church.) The Old Testament writers understood God's law as a gracious provision for the reconciliation of the lost people of Israel with God, their Lord. The gospel is in the law and the gospel is not without the imperatives that are characteristic of the law. We have to find a fresh way to relate law and gospel. Some LCA theologians have made a methodological meat-axe out of this law and gospel distinction and Sittler does not think Scripture will sustain that. Grace was not invented by Jesus. Grace and truth came by Jesus. *Hesed* in the Old Testament is the same as *charis* in the New Test. The old covenant with the Jews has not been annihilated. Sittler does not believe in a Christian mission to the Jews. He likes the terms "Hebrew Scriptures" and "Christian Scriptures" instead of "Old and New Testaments."

There is a discussion about the constitution for the new church. Is it possible to have a vision of the church of the future that would influence the content of the new constitution? "We are merging warm and living traditions and traditionless floaters. With that, you have to start from square one."

Another topic addressed is the authority of the Bible: Its authority is interior to its truth. You can't say, "This is the Word of God and you'd better believe it." I (Sittler) have never said, "This is what the Bible says and therefore it is true. I simply preached what the Scriptures were saying and let the truth do its own business."

Focal points for contemporary theology. What are the basic, primary, primitive sources for reflection about God? Scripture and tradition- not a static body of data, but always undergoing discovery and new understandings. Importance of the understanding of our natural world, technology and science.

Theology is always a transaction between the source, the historical development and the contemporary moment. We have become aware of the way in which forms of discourse

limit the understanding of a text. The way a text is to be heard is related to language, which is deeply tintured by the culture, which is determined by men's operations with nature, history, etc. Sittler refers to Ricoeur's statement that the meaning of a text is out in front of the text [*cf. Sittler's Essays on Nature and Grace for a longer explanation of that point and its importance to Sittler*]. He cites examples from Paul and Shakespeare. Sittler talks about the art of interpretation, hermeneutics. Theology operates between two dynamisms- the dynamic of the Word of God as it becomes passed on to us, and the dynamic character of historical life.

Johannes Metz talked about the "theology of the subject," the one who does the believing. The group reads aloud passages from Metz' Faith In History and Society, with Sittler's comments interspersed. Metz says the reality of God cannot be dealt with in just metaphysical or philosophical terms. The narrative character of the scriptures has entered with a fresh force in (Roman) catholic theology. Divine redemption comes to us in the form of a story. The group then discusses Metz's point about the increasing solidarity of mankind. Bernard Meland says that the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen an enormous extension of the baseline of the human, the possibility for all people to envision full membership in the human race. Sittler says, in relation to that idea, that the birth pangs of the future are our generation's lot. Back to Metz: The Christian community consists of the living and the dead. More reading from Metz and discussion about nature and history and liberation theology.

*Included on this tape is a story Sittler liked to tell and is included here in case it hasn't been recorded anywhere else:*

On his way to work every morning, Sittler comes to an intersection where there is an African-American school crossing guard named Mabel. On one very snowy, blistery morning, when Sittler got to the intersection, he asked, "What's going on here, Mabel?" And Mabel's reply was, "We's bein' told who's the boss!"

Sittler says he teaches theology backwards. He begins by asking students to read various pieces of literature in which problems are posed, then asks what understandings might address them. "Invite the mind into the ambiguous." He refers to "natural Christians," whose way of living in the presence of God is given with their humanity. They live in unambiguity. "I don't understand them. I have to refight the fight of faith every day of my life."

Responding to a question about the suffering of finitude, Sittler says that it is an acknowledgement of the limitedness of the gift of life. The reality of life is that we die. That's where the suffering comes. Faith meets this by assuring us that Jesus died with us.

On the current direction in homiletics, "telling the story."- the story form of the sermon. Sittler says that often what this means is a dumbification of everything down to the little form of a story or that we pastors have to tell our story, which means I'm tempted to reduce the magnitude of the Christian gospel to the size of that which I have personally experienced. That is a sanctified blasphemy.

*Another story, perhaps recorded somewhere else:* Sittler had a woman in his congregation in Ohio who was very knowledgeable about theology. One Sunday after the

service, during which he had not delivered a very good sermon (and he knew it), she greeted him right outside the sanctuary and then said, “You were very busy this week, weren’t you, pastor?”

Continuing with the discussion on homiletics- Sittler says it is wrong to say that if I haven’t had an experience of it, it can’t be so. A liberal arts education opens us to truths we have not yet discovered. Homiletics is not just proclamation. It’s also preaching as possibility, proposal. “What’s going on here?” “Is it possible that...?” He offers the following advice: there are texts that can’t be made into a story. Look at the text in context. Don’t try to put all three scripture readings on a given Sunday into one sermon. You don’t always have to preach on the lessons every Sunday. Try a series- on a Pauline epistle, for example. That way, each sermon lays eggs for the next.

The group moves to a discussion about spirituality. There is an increasing demand from students for help in developing or cultivating this. A Roman Catholic woman, a student at LSTC, told Sittler that she thought the students there were very nice, but they “had no insides.” He felt she was addressing this issue of spirituality which the Roman Catholic church has done traditionally. How do we in the Protestant tradition develop this? Look at the spirituality of the Eastern fathers in the Orthodox church. There is a transcendent character to it. The heart of Lutheran Christianity is the freedom of God in his grace. If that be the heart, what kind of spirituality is appropriate to that? Sittler says he doesn’t know. “I am not a model of the spiritual life myself.” But it seems to do with the intersection of ordinary things with the holy. Yeats said that everything depends on beholding. (He cites a poem, [by William Carlos Williams], about the red wheelbarrow and the white chicken.) Contemplation can then lead to adoration.

Metz says the language of poetry is the closest to the language of theology. Sittler has the group read and discuss two poems by Gerard Manly Hopkins.

*The fourth tape in this set is damaged to the point that it is not listenable.*

## **1981 New Models for Ministry** *California*

### **Side A.**

Sittler begins by telling about his participation for the past 2 years in an ALC program called "Equipping the Saints, " to strengthen **lay ministry**. Who are the saints? What do we mean by 'equip'?

The primary area of equipment for saints is interior. Is it possible to develop communities in individual congregations in a discipline that provides freedom for ministry, to give support for each other? Sittler believes that the normal urban congregation is not equipped to support groups in this way. An exchange of intimate experience is needed in a smaller group. In past centuries, Lutherans got frightened by the little groups within the church: Olsenius, Hauge, Grundtvig. The church had become so formalized and purely liturgical that these little groups grew up.

A question is asked about how ministry takes shape. Sittler replies with an illustration, remembering a flight into Chicago at night, thinking about all those people below who are acting with unsung honor, with a sense of fidelity to the job. These are people who are not notably good, angelic, or saintly people, but who have a sense for the job. He then cites Wordsworth, "On Westminster Bridge."

The lay ministry movement can blow up in romanticism if we don't recognize the flat-footed nature of daily work. What are the occasions for demonstrating care, giving witness? The way a person does the programmed is important. Not every witness is in the context of a decision. Much of being God's man or woman in the world is doing with honor and care the thing the decision of which is out of his/her hands. Where does the **Christian witness** come in these circumstances?

Occasions for joy are diminished in modern life. However, there is a certain, but moderate, joy in doing the thing right. Joy will have to be found outside the job and resources will be needed to help with this.

Sittler says that the ordinary questions of ordinary people "still bug me more than the academic issues with which I have to deal." These are problems that wrack the common life.

### **Side B.**

Sittler talks about the presence of certain individuals and the difference they make in certain situations. However, you can't assign a radiant presence to every work situation. Share excitement and joy. Plan a campaign against "sogginess." He then mentions a lecture he used to give regularly to graduating seminarians about preventing sogginess in their ministry. (Quality of tape becomes poor at this point.)

There are wonderful stories and anecdotes on this tape, about retired professors, about Sittler's loss of sight.

The **end of education is admiration**. Something important to remember in this age of dullness on the job: remove yourself as the center of admiration. Sittler can't share Buckminster Fuller's optimistic view of the future. "I think we're in for some wretched times." Our economic system is not consistent with the need for preserving environmental quality.

## **1981(?) Sermon on prayer.**

Sittler reflects on the following **Biblical stories**:

- 1) The story of Hannah. "When she had finished, her countenance was no more sad."
- 2) David praying for his son. The child dies. Then, the king arose, went to the temple for worship, went home and back to his daily tasks. David's reaction...
- 3) Paul's thorn in the flesh. "My grace is sufficient for you."
- 4) Jesus: May this cup be taken from me.

[Cf. Sittler's "Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation" video]

What do these stories seem to be saying? Prayer is an act of loneliness in which the whole spirit flings itself into the absolute indeterminacy of God in trust.

## **1981 Alumni Banquet Presentation, Pastors' Convocation *LSTC***

Music and presentations to alums precede Sittler's talk which begins toward the end of Side A.

### **"Themes upon which I have been reflecting"**

1. **The appalling state of Protestant preaching.** What is it about the American educational process, etc. that makes for contemporary preaching's dullness? There is no reflection by the preacher. Too much of his energy is directed outward. There is a lack of "spirituality" in seminary students. They must be taught to fight the texts.

2. **Education in the seminary.** Colleges and universities are places of learning, not educational institutions. There is a difference between learning and education. Sound learning should be taught for life-long education.

The seminary ought to give training, provide sound learning, in order that we can outthink the world. "We can't out-pulpit-pound, out-finance or be as marginally kooky as some others."

We must not be apologetic about the necessity for sound learning. Don't worry about relevance in the beginning, about immediate usefulness. "You don't know what you don't know." A mastery of certain bodies of knowledge is necessary. There should be tension between the seminary and the church. Seminaries should not be simply a preacher factory for what each generation thinks is jim-dandy. Seminaries should have a stubborn continuity.

3. **Meaning of the new religious right.** It has little to do with the Christian faith at all. These people are more concerned with the country's decline. The real reason for their "call to righteousness" is their desire to recover our #1 status in the world. The object is to become #1 again, by becoming righteous. It is a form of idolatry. What do we have to say about the role of the Christian faith in a republic? What does it mean to be a Christian citizen?

4. **Interior dynamics of aging.** One does not simply die. One's life world dies about him. One is educated toward death by the dying of the life world in which he has lived. This is the pathos of all passingness....

We are not jerked out of livingness into death. One is slowly tutored toward his own death. This instructs us in terms of pastoral care for the old; the importance of recollection. Aging is a less tragic time than we sometimes believe. Death is a process, not an event.



## **1981 Equipping the Saints** (*ALC gathering, somewhere in Iowa-?, Feb. 7*)

*(It is not possible to ascertain the order of the sessions at this meeting. The identification labels on the tapes don't agree with the content on the tapes.)*

### **Tape 1.**

#### **Side A.**

##### **(Definition of terms; importance of language )**

Begins with a good story about "Gullickson's objection to my book in about 1946. In 1954, he admitted he may have been wrong."

To lead up to the topic of equipping the saints, one must discuss the importance of language. The most accelerated way to understand what the scripture means is by a fastidious attention to language.

"Equipping the saints" comes from Ephesians.

"Equip" can mean an internal nurture, to cultivate; inwardly to fulfill; order.

"Saints": to be a saint is to be a forgiven sinner, says Luther. Saints are the people of God.

In this case of equipping the saints, we do not mean providing people with exterior additions to their witness.

Wonderful story of Mrs. Kreuger, his landlady in Ohio when he was a parish pastor. She was a real saint. "You say your prayers and you cope."

The English word closest to the Greek EQUIP is ORDER. One should order one's life according to an intention, a goal. We're not talking about what to learn; rather, order yourself to be a harmonious person, a person of integrity, one who knows where the center is.

Something is happening in our seminaries. The students are asking for disciplined ways to develop spirituality because contemporary life is so bewildering, bedeviled by the pace of change, fragmentation.

*[Cf. Sittler's article "The Maceration of the Minister"]*

*Side A ends with Sittler in mid-sentence.*

#### **Side B.**

##### **(Equipment needed by the saints )**

Begins in mid-sentence, with Sittler talking about the frustrations of being blind, and he gives some examples of humorous experiences he has had as a result. Nice stories.

In addressing the topic of equipping the saints, Sittler asks what equipment is needed by the saints, and suggests inwardness and spirituality. The development of inwardness will make such a difference in us that the world will see it. Christianity spread not through a militant evangelism program nor a bureaucratic plan for mission, but through ordinary people loving one another. It was asked of them, "Who ARE these people?" Mentions influence of St. Augustine.

One cannot lay out programs for developing spirituality. How do we deepen our spiritual life?

1. **Order.** (See Genesis. We have order, not chaos.) We have a focal point: I am the Lord thy God. The structure of my life demands that I not live in a mess; God is the name of the ultimate order. How do we order our lives? Not by programming, bureaucracy or reading a particular book. Example: Tells the story about the time he was in New Orleans and observed the nuns going to chapel four times a day. They were quiet, just there, with the crucifix on the wall. The crucifix is the center of emotional gravity. Why did God become man?

The God who wants to be the source of our order must become the horror of our disorder, or he has no authority, no credentials to call me into trust and praise. The eternal order became our disorder and he has the right to say "I am the Lord."

2. **Discipline.** This doesn't have to be the same for each individual. The reflective life is important. The principal work of the ordained ministry is reflection (instead of slapping together a sermon on Saturday night.)

But not only should pastors do this- we should all do it. "I will order my life in such a way to do this."

Don't permit the meaning of the term EXPERIENCE to be confined within the brackets of one's own existence. Education and culture help us to live vicariously. Our reading broadens our experience. "Keep a good book going." ...expanding capacities of one's experience, discovering what is true about human existence. Don't just sit and gaze into vacancy and say, "O Lord, make me spiritual."

*Other thoughts:*

There are masters of the meditative (spiritual) life. Mostly, they are Roman Catholic. The church has fostered this. (Recommends Thomas Merton and the poetry of George Herbert.)

Why do so many of the books and authors I find helpful come out of the Anglican tradition? The Church of England has combined a version of the catholic faith with deep and disciplined culture in our English language. We (Lutherans in the U. S.) are not English-speaking peoples of a thousand years. English authors have combined a theological ordering of life to a literary style in which they talk about ordinary life in such a way as to reflect the Gospel. The language is not theological but the point is. Recommends Charles Williams' All Hallows Eve, The Descent of the Dove.

Human life ought to be more ordered toward spirituality and reflection. More recommended reading: G. K. Chesterton, who offers sound Christian theology and morals without being churchy. Father Brown mysteries; poetry of T. S. Eliot, which asks how shall life be ordered?

Pastors are too busy with administration to devote time to reading and reflection. Open yourselves to the masters of the spiritual life. Read the novels of Bronte, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, in which moral problems are presented and penetrated.

**Tape 2.**  
**Side A.**

**Question and answer session**, with questions hard to hear. In response to the first question, Sittler replies, "Being is a deep kind of doing." He talks about **identity**, finding one's self. "My debt to other preachers is so great that I don't know where I begin and they leave off. I owe gifts to those I have never met." Sittler continues by saying that seminarians want self-fulfillment in exercising their ministry.... "Ghastly! I am not ordained to fulfill my precious self. The things I am thrust to without being consulted about it have done more for my self than if I had satisfied myself."

The Bible doesn't say, "Listen, Lord, thy servant speaketh."

**Side B. Reflections on the ordained and the laity.**

The upcoming merger is forcing us to think about our understanding of the church. Sittler discusses the positions of the ALC as contrasted with those of the LCA, then says we may have another possibility which transcends either one.

What is the ordained one to do? Ministry of word and sacraments in Christ's church which is not identical with the Lutheran church. What is the particular job of this person? What constitutes the church? the word? the sacraments?

The ordained one's clear role, duty and office can not be other than that which constitutes the church, to see to it that these realities and energies are never silent. He is the storyteller. Anybody may do it, but to secure that the story shall never be untold, we ordain people to see to it that it is done.

All of the theologians in the Eastern Orthodox church have been laity; their bishops don't have an ounce of theological competence. We Lutherans belie with our action what we affirm with our language.

**1981 "Keynote 36" Speech - Theology and Ecology**

*District Convention, Iowa, July*

**Side A.**

Sittler begins, "Where did I learn to carry on this loving relationship with the natural (material) world?" He mentions his 6th grade teacher. Language helps us behold just as beholding leads us to beautiful, descriptive language [*Sittler often makes the distinction between "beholding" something, that is, seeing it in its true value, as opposed to just "looking at" it*]. .

What is the Christian motivation for our attention to God's creation?

Sitter tells the story of the 3 conferences he recently attended about the environmental crisis.

1. MIT: The crisis from the scientists' point of view. We must be changed in the spirit of our minds before the crisis can be averted; science is not enough.
2. University of Chicago: assembly of lawyers discussing the role of law in the care and protection of the environment. The law itself isn't enough by itself to end man's misuse of the earth.
3. A meeting of clergy: One mentions his opinion that God will take care of the earth if we don't.

In Lutheran teaching, hymnody and liturgy, we pretty much ignore the First Article and the substance of it. Lutherans have misunderstood the first chapter of Genesis and we don't use the Old Testament as much as we should.

- "have dominion" - care for the earth we are a part of.
- man is a social creature; our personhood is of nature. "A solitary man is no man."

"Why do we have to be pulled kicking and screaming into an understanding of the relationship between Christian theology and the care of God's world? Because of the perverse side of one of our greatest virtues: radical Christocentrism." We have a compulsive fascination with the Second Article, but Jesus was theocentric.

Too often we wrap up our Christian piety and acute egocentrism in a Jesus blanket and call it adequate. It is a perversion of the Second Article. Reason: In the 16th century, what was needed was a corrective to the prevailing emphasis on sacerdotalism, monasticism, sacramentalism, etc. However, Luther is not adequate for every situation in every time and place.

God was in Christ. Although Lutherans emphasize that the Old Testament holds up the law while the New Test. upholds grace, actually the OT is full of grace. God is always a God of grace. Jesus didn't invent grace- grace came through him. The change in the spirit of our minds must come through our understanding of the fullness of God's grace.

The "old theologians" spoke of special grace which referred to the appearance of God in Christ, and then of common grace which referred to grace available to all, into which I am born, before baptism, which meets me in creation.

We must deal with the earth so that it is free to become its beautiful self.

### **Response to questions**

Stable systems should be preserved.

### **Side B.**

*(Responses to questions, con.)*

Who makes the decisions regarding the care of the earth? Specialists develop blindness to the whole picture.

Our present economic system is incompatible with a responsible environmental policy.

The American notion of freedom is associated with mobility.

The city belongs to those who can afford to buy it. What about the rest of us?

Questions regarding the redemptive quality of the land: will the land heal itself?

## **1981 "Love Is Not Enough" Rockefeller Chapel, Aug. 2**

### **Side A.**

Between the story of human life and the story of divine redemption, a contrapuntal conversation is set up. The meaning and truth of the Christian faith isn't thrown at us like a proposition or "the Bible says this and you'd better believe it." Rather, a story is unfolded, of God's effort to restore his bent and hurt creation to himself.

Let us reflect on a single text, "A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another." This seems absurd, because love cannot be commanded. Jesus knew this, yet he said it. As we understand it, love is a happening. What might Jesus have meant?

Three reflections:

Graduates of 1971 met with Sittler soon before the time of this sermon. The class had been drenched in protest and disenchantment. The problems they were (now) having were in the area of personal relations. In (that period of) 1971, young people turned away from their elders and turned toward and grasped one another in deep affection in almost pathological intimacy, because the world of the intensely personal was the only world one can count on. Now, 10 years later, there's trouble there because no one person can be an entire world to another person. These people are discovering that to hang the whole weight of a life upon the impossible drawing from intimate personal relations all worth, meaning, inspiration, importance, joy, all love- this is an illusion. These old students are having trouble finding themselves in a bigger grid of meaning, a larger realm of worth. With all regard for the beauty, of the joy of personal relations, even conjugal love, it is a piece, a dimension, of a world. It is not a cosmos. Our Lord

never denies the importance of loving relationships between persons, but this does not have to be commanded.

Several months ago, Sittler met with representatives from congregations to talk about world hunger. When a problem is too big, the mind cannot really grasp it. Sittler quotes from Wilbur's "Advice to a Prophet." He points out the problem of how to respond. "I can't love 30 million people." He continues, "I couldn't say to this congregation, 'You *must* love these people.'" In the Old Testament, there is a passage, "Let love roll down like fountains, and justice like a mighty stream." Love, justice and righteousness are never separated in the Hebrew Scriptures. Does that mean that love has limits? Justice is love operating at a distance. This kind of distant justice must be what our Lord is talking about. I can be commanded to be just. I am to love those who do not love me.

Sittler talks about his experience at the University of Chicago in the 60's and early 70's. There had been more black students admitted to the university. After about 3 years, they began to pull back, to associate with only other blacks; they established a Black Caucus. Sittler asked one of the black students why. The response was, "We don't want your love (charity). We want justice." Love without justice engenders a kind of bitterness, because that bitterness expresses anger at the contemptuousness of the assumption that justice is something I have a right to give or not to give. Unless love operates in the big and the far, and in the structures within which human life has to develop in this bundle of life, unless it works that way and holds out that hand, it engenders not responding love but only bitterness and anger.

*Side B contains "Reflections on Being Thankful" from November 26, 1981*

## **1981 Reflections on Being Thankful** *Rockefeller Chapel, November 26*

**Side B.** *Side A contains "Love Is Not Enough" from August 2, 1981*

Thankfulness and gratitude only emerge when one becomes aware that there is an enormous grid of dependencies within which, out of which, and upon the foundation of which we all live. It doesn't come easily or at all to early childhood. Gratitude is an adult virtue. This sense that one has obligations, that one has greatly received, that there are potentialities out there toward which one, into maturity, moves, this engenders real thankfulness.

Look at the way the Hebrew and Christian scriptures talk about being thankful. In Deuteronomy 8:10, the Lord commands the people to be thankful. Paul says, "Be thankful." It's the apex of the virtues. Thankfulness means the dawning and the maturing, and after a while, the grave and sober conviction that to live within the world with the knowledge and acknowledgement that our life is in a bundle of life, that we live in a grid- this is the summary of virtues.

We must also think thanksgiving. As we regard the earth, the air, the water, etc., as a given, as a gift, - it has been before we were- we must deal with it so that it will remain after we're gone. (*Sittler continues for a while about environmental responsibility*). We can, in response to short term productivity, abandon reasonable, rational, devout ways of dealing with the earth, but in the interest of a quick buck, we can rape and destroy the earth.

## **1982 Conscience and Capitalism** *ALCF at Wartburg College*

(The group must have been discussing a book by Robert Benne.)

Sittler begins by talking about the **problems with language**. Special vocabularies threaten every effort of universal discourse. "Thingification of speech." He distinguishes denotive speech from evocative speech. There are limits to denotive speech. Sittler questions the use of language in Benne's book: 'better,' 'fuller,' -what do they mean?

Why does **fundamentalism** continue to appeal? (Fundamentalists believe) we should recover being #1, that we deserve the affirmation of God.

**Capitalism** lives on efficiency and growth. Can we afford a system like that in a world with limited resources?

Sittler then returns to a discussion of **language**. Does the construction of language have anything to do with our lack of imagination in finding new ways to live? We must dream of ways of organizing the human community that have no tradition as yet. The liberal arts are a way of life and thought and acquaintanceship with our fathers and mothers, a way of always keeping alive the preconditions of the possible. The diminution of language is at the cost of the richness of our imagination.

The language of remembrance, of care, is expressive of realities no longer negotiable. For example, when we set up courses involving cross-disciplinary competence, let us make sure that the voices of the great Christian tradition are not reduced to the voice of Christian morality. To be a Christian is not simply to be a moral man or woman. Sittler then gives an illustration about a woman with a Roman Catholic background who was at LSTC for a number of years. She observed that "your students are pretty well-trained, very moral, good people, but they have no insides." Sittler says that when he hears some students preach in chapel, they can take a beautiful passage from the Gospel of John and turn it into a rotary speech. A problem: the stoppage of the transmission of meanings from one area of expertise and experience to another. He then tells a story about "my last ALCF meeting."

## **1982 Trinity Seminary Commencement Address**

*Columbus, Ohio, May 22*

Sittler begins with reminiscences, then asks, "What is the **nature of the transmission of the Christian faith?**" Don't diminish the role of speech (language).

Its substance (stories of words and teachings of Jesus) is delivered under the guise of gravity and beauty. He goes on to tell the story of how Krister Stendahl became a Christian.

Quote: "My whole life [*Sittler's*] has been haunted by the reality of Jesus. I can say no wiser or devout word to this class than to let that happen. What do I mean by that?"

1. The **objective reality of Jesus**: The way in which Jesus both wore and rejected the title has always fascinated me. He was never content to shrink the dimensions of his reality to the reality of our expectations.

2. That haunting reality has not diminished; there has been no abatement in the allure of it. Example: the study of the parables. Look at the parable of the unjust steward. Jesus commended him because he was canny or shrewd, which is a better translation than prudent. After 52 years of preaching on this parable I have concluded I have not reached the bottom of it, and that there may be no bottom. It has been said that the **parables** have lasted through 2 centuries because they are marvelously concentrated stories about the way things are. Ridiculous! They are stories about the way things are not. The stories are attacks on our expectations, they pull the rug out from under what we think the nature of things is.

Don't take too lightly the **mystery of Christ, the allure of the figure of Jesus**. This comes straight out of my work as a parish preacher. I had the sense, which was a sense bigger than I was, more compelling than my own sense of vocation, that almost rescued me from absurdity time and time again. I had the sense of the allure of that strange figure just over my shoulder every time I sat down to prepare a sermon. All the pathos and the magnificence of his life must not be betrayed. I must not talk nonsense about this man; I must not make jokes about him or trivialize moralistically the awesome figure who cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

## **1982 Concordia Summer Theological Conference**

*Held at the Charis Ecumenical Center, Moorhead, Minnesota, July*

### **Tape 1. The Holy Spirit and Human Reflection, July 26.**

#### **Side A.**

The reflections will be on the **ministry and the laity**. Two large events bracket our church's consideration of these themes:



1. The Second Vatican Council, which was the richest theological event of a churchwide character in the 20th century. They quit talking about "the church," and instead referred to "the people of God."

2. The merger between the ALC and LCA.

Sittler talks about the ALC's "Equipping the Saints" programs. His participation in those helped him to think about the church. When the church (the organized body, the legal entity) undertakes to discuss the kinds of issues we here confront today, we ask certain kinds of people to address those issues. They are commonly those who have responsibility for the programs of the church. It is necessary that the church have programs, but often the least exciting people to talk about what future things may be are those who are wedded vocationally to the present programs. They tend to be pragmatic operators.

### Reflections on **Equipping the Saints**:

Sittler then talks about the **(new) church** having to write a **constitution**. How can you build a constitutional wind tunnel for the Holy Ghost? There is something ironical about this. We must do it, but let's have a sense of humor about it as we do it. "(documents) can become ossified rigidities within which the always fresh vitality of the Holy Spirit can be confined and limited."

Let us remember several main models before us. Our current constitutions (ALC and LCA) are as they are because of our different histories. Neither model is quite adequate for the new thing.

Refers to the book, The Making of the Constitution. Its makers had to find a way to articulate a dream for which there was no present actuality. The beginning of the preamble is very important, "We the people..." ... a secular expression that points to the new understanding of how Christ's church is constituted.

To get at this another way: We do not baptize or ordain to the ministry in the Lutheran church but Christ's church. How is Christ's church constituted? Faith comes by and from what is heard. "How shall they hear without a preacher?" **How do ordained ones differ from the people?** The office of the ordained ones is a function of that which constitutes the church. The ordained ones have an obligation to tell the story over and over. Anyone may do these things, i.e. preaching, but what anyone can do, we must secure that someone must do. The word shall never disappear because we secure a cadre of people who are charged to do that. This way of understanding the church from behind, by reexamining its constitutive vitalities, benefits and gifts out of God, that this is a way of thinking about the church which illuminates both our common membership in Christ's church and excuses that any strange definition of the ordained ones as being a holy club with special privileges.

**The laity.** How shall the common life of the church manifest its faith in the world in such a way that the preaching of the Word is invitatory? **How shall we be in the world?** The question is how to be attractive, persuasive, winsome. How did this happen in the past? Exhibit the faith rather than proclaim it. "Behold how these people love one another!" The community (should) live out its life so that the difference is celebrated in our value system, in our way of relating to communities, in the hilarity of worship. How

does our own profession and witness of the Christian faith carry over in such a way to commend our faith and our Lord to people who sit on the margin or outside or are hostile?

Illustration: Cites Conrad Bergendorff, "one of the most admirable men I know. A model of a Christian man. He looked like what he was, who was what he said, who did what he promised, whose inwardness was permeable to any gaze without the perception of any gap."

Everyone probably knows a person for whom the reality of the Christian faith is clearly, obviously, and forcibly the center of his or her life.

In our present culture, ways of communicating are changing. **What does it mean, now, to be a member of the people of God?**

**Side B.** *With Martin Marty. Questions and answers.*

Marty's question to Joe: What would be the ideal question from this audience? What would your answer be?

Joe's response: "How shall I be a Christian now?" His reflections about the question and then about the reply follow.

Another question from Marty: Life comes to us with necessary forms, some creative, some limiting. **What one thing would you do to bust open the forms to turn loose more Christian lay potential?**

Sittler: I am hooked on **language**, the possibilities for using it to open up tiny cracks in human consciousness to let some light come through. Sittler reflects on the use of language in worship, liturgy and preaching, and talks about the beautiful, tender, invitational language of the church in years past. We have now no patience with the old language. He is trying to rescue the easily lost, to cause people to remember the resonance of possibility that lies back of the actual.

Marty: The laity has its own gift of language. What's distinctive in the gifts they bring? What would be the ideal lay person?

Sittler: It's not possible to describe the ideal lay person. Gives several illustrations of lay persons whom he appreciated. (From his congregation in Ohio- Mrs. Sorensen and the Cleveland Press employee.)

Question from audience: How can you find language to satisfy everybody? Who are the people who will make these decisions? Both Sittler and Marty respond.

Another question: How to inspire lay people to do more than listen on Sunday morning? How to encourage risk-taking and speaking out?

Question: Is there a better word than laity?

Sittler says, it's a silly word. We are the people (community) of God. Maybe we ought to get rid of it. Marty: "Let's have a better definition of what the clergy are."

## **Tape 2. The Presence of Grace in Redemption, July 27**

### **Side A.**

Sittler begins with some reflections about Marty's and Curran's presentations from the morning session. He wishes to focus on the last third of Marty's talk, which focused on the doctrine of creation, how this is reflected in the sacred texts and the **preacher's duty in relation to these texts**. Sittler comments on Paul Ricoeur's statement about the meaning of a text, the trajectory of a text. We are to ask not only what the text says, but what it is about. Illustration: Sittler says that his preaching on Colossians has been criticized. "That is not what Paul meant," his critics have said. Sittler maintains that we cannot ever completely recover the intentionality of any text.

Sittler goes on to talk about how, for him, the theme of **nature and grace** has reappeared in the 20th century. Why have Lutherans turned the world of nature over to the scientists and technicians? In 19th century Germany, romantic folk religion spiced with a recovery of naturism legends was all over the place. (Operas of Wagner, for ex.) Theologians were so frightened by all this that they decided to run from it and focus on the doctrine of the word, etc.

Sittler tells the story of the student who described Sittler as a person who pops the corks of champagne bottles, and Sittler observes, "They also serve who only stand and pop." He refers to his book, Nature and Grace, as an apostrophe to a theme, not a full elaboration of the subject.

**"To the renovation of what big theological theme did my studies on nature and grace work an almost convulsive change in my life? They served to recover the doctrine of the Holy Trinity."** It is not a Biblical doctrine. The doctrine is an effort to make a formulation whose capaciousness seeks to point to the fullness of the life of God, the pleroma of God. It is a way to talk about God in the ways God chooses to be for us. The doctrine is a necessary intellectual effort to capture a primal energy in a verbal formulation. How freshly do we see that when we look at it from our present engagement with the natural world? Our engagements with the natural world are astounding!

Sittler tells the story of Ann's geography book and talks about the enlarged scope of our reflection. In what way is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity re-envisioned in such an encounter? If God is not God of all, he is not God at all. The compass of the all is now magnified. The reality of redemption has to occupy the same space as is occupied by the doctrine of God the Creator. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit must find orbits of magnitude which are equally capacious and alluring to the mind.

The doctrine of Christ in cosmic terms is an urgent survival necessity. We must be changed in the spirit of our minds in order to deal effectively with the environmental crisis.

We must preach through the Christian community to the world so that the proclamation of the reality of God has an appropriateness to the magnificence of the change which has already occurred. (the change in our relationship with nature, our perceptions and our scope of reflection.)

*The tape ends before a question from the audience can be completed or answered.*

*Side B is blank.*

### **Tape 3. The Presence of Grace in Sanctification, July 28**

**Side A.** Continuation of reflections on **nature and grace**. "The Lutheran church ought to lift its voice and bear witness to the goodness of God in his gifts of nature and talk critically, systematically, analytically and loudly about the assault upon the earth which is taking place in mid-America right now."

It's easy to see how the grace of God comes in the good, delightful aspects of life but how is grace related to the negativities of life? Illustration: Paul and his thorn in the flesh. "My grace is sufficient for you." We can extend that statement to its ultimate image to Christ himself.

**Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.** Perfection in Scripture refers to permitting a thing to be what it is. "Become what you are."

How is the grace of God related to "**eternal life**"? The term eternal life comes mostly from John's gospel. The term has no logical meaning. Life is temporal, mortal. Think of this text: "This is eternal life, that you should know him and Jesus Christ who he has sent."

Jesus' parabolic speech has to do with "the kingdom of God" in the synoptic gospels. There's not much about this in John. Are they both angles of vision on the same reality? If so, then how do we deal with the phrase "life after death"? Strange question. What can that mean? There's not much clarification from Scripture. Paul said, "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." The nature of life after death is not elaborated in the Scriptures. It's a useless question and I refuse to worry about it.

Next, Martin Marty reads "Kingfishers Catch Fire," by Gerard Manly Hopkins.

**Side B.** *Tape is blank for a long time, then finally Marty can be heard finishing reading the Hopkins poem.* Sittler explains it. Marty reads another Hopkins poem, "Spring," which Sittler examines briefly.

## **1983 Search Faculty Training** *January*

**Tape 1.** Lecture 1.

**Side A.**

Paul Hanson introduces Sittler by saying, "He'll speak on whatever he likes for as long as he likes."

What are the difficulties before us as we prepare to engage others in Biblical studies?

**The problem of authority.** The Bible no longer has the authority it did. The word will be invested with authority by virtue of its liberating, enlightening and promising congruity with the pathos of the human condition, the ambiguity of the human life, and not by virtue of what we hear from the evangelist on Sunday mornings, "The Bible says....". The authority must be uncovered as intrinsic. "Lay it to the heart of Jerusalem."

Sittler talks about the **shape of the cross**, the prime symbol of the human condition. It's a formal reenactment of the shape of one's own life: the vertical yes, the negativity of the horizontal. Sittler relates a story about his experience at a meeting held in a convent in New Orleans, during which he happened to pass by the chapel where the nuns were in contemplation. The chapel was plain except for the large crucifix in the front, and Sittler thought, "Has any particular form, any geometrical shape, for so long, so profoundly invoked the emotions and reflections of so many people? In the history of the world, has there ever been a shape like that which, without words or even without a figure upon it, has been a primal symbol of the human condition?" Even love is fractured by ambiguity. (Example: G.K. Chesterton on the actualization of self-love.) Continuing with his reflection about ambiguity as the burden of the human situation and the cross, Sittler says that God has to come to me that way (through the cross) if he is going to take the measure of my heart.

We live in a time of **diminished, flattened-out language**. There are two kinds of speech: designative, informational. We need this for describing the structure and process of the natural world; and evocative, which causes us to remember, to join ourselves to the object the speech is addressing, to evoke our imagination. Our generation has almost lost its ear for this kind of language. That makes it harder to deal with the language of the Bible. We have gained exactitude at the price of opulence. During your study, be sure to look at several different translations.

### **Side B.**

Continuing with his observations about language, Sittler suggests the group compare the Christmas story in various translations. We cannot roll time back nor language back, but we can retain some things. Use of "thou" instead of "you;" God is not one of us. The use of "thou" indicates that.

Returning to the theme of **the problem with authority**. What is the difference between power and authority? He suggests several contrasting illustrations: Lincoln and Nixon; Pope John and Pope Pius. Authority has integrity. One who speaks with authority is one in whom what he says is continuous with the whole nature and performance of the one who said it. The Bible has power with authority. Would the power of God be an honored power were it not for the power with authority whereby he became the problem he had to confront? If he had not become our "crossed life" by taking on himself a cross, he would not have the authority of the Holy One.

The **language of a generation** reveals the interior character of their culture, their state of mind, their value system, the way they live, their life-style. Young people are now "into" things. There is a pathetic probing for something to get into them. Nothing has centrally grabbed them which is totally admirable. The purpose of education is to excite admiration. Sittler says, "How poor my life would be had I not learned to admire beauty,

greatness, goodness, perfection, accomplishment.” Today's generation has an overlay of irony and cynicism. They lead "spattered lives" in which nothing is elevated or wholly good.

**Faith** is an organizing center for living life. Something has gotten into you that you are interiorly called to the admiration of the absolute. A life which orders itself to something wholly right, wholly good. Reflect upon that kingly man, Christ, that absolute one. This is kingliness in its absolute sense.

Next, Sittler invites the group to reflect on some **general religious and Lutheran biases**. There is a general religious bias toward a galloping subjectivity (in reading the Bible). There is a need for objectivity. We must begin our discussions by letting a thing be what it is. We will confront a terrifying sentence: "But I have always felt that..." We don't give a hoot what you feel about this story at the beginning. The **first obligation to the text** is to let it hang there in celestial objectivity.

Next, a particular **Lutheran bias**: We have made so rigid a distinction between law and gospel that we have made the distinction an absolute separation. We are a church of the consolations of God, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the comfort of prayer, the consolations of love and mercy, and the consolation of a gracious God, but we should also remember that law is the given structures of creation. That is also a part of the grace of God. If we tear that structure, we not only destroy our life but other lives. The law is not a holy policeman's code, not just "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," but an insight into the structured order of God's human and natural creation. We must teach both law and gospel. We Lutherans don't much believe in law, but we believe in law in one way: we give extraordinary power to our church officials. In the Biblical sense of the law, we have a faulted dogmatic understanding. The world must be honored for its intrinsic nature. Another bias to guard against: Lutheran **piety** which believes that all truth is measured by the palpitations of the heart and we do a cerebral by-pass around the reflections of the mind.

## **Tape 2. Lecture 2.**

### **Side A.**

**What is theology?** The word comes from theos, which means god, and logos, which is discourse about anything. It is not just a church discipline. Before there were Christians, there were theologians. Biblical theology is what the scriptures say about God and systematizes that into understandable concepts. Historical theology records, systematizes and analyzes how the question about God has developed through the centuries.

Confessional theology operates primarily in the theological statements of a particular community, i.e. Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, etc.

Theology is a public action. A theologian must carry on his work in the full light of public knowledge, ignorance, criticism, hostility. He is not just a child of the church, not just a student of scripture.

Sittler's chair was in **constructive theology**. His work was to take the accumulated tradition of Christian thought and push it forward as a public event in the face of those who don't believe it, who don't know whether they believe it, and carry on a constructive conversation whereby you will seek to lead them to understand what you are saying. A

theologian can't make people believe, he can only explicate what it might mean to believe in such a way to lead them to entertain the possibility of believing.

A sermon should hang the holy possible in front of the mind of the believer.

A constructive theologian also must ask: what meaning would such a statement make in view of the contemporary situation? Theology is a work. How might the church's truth be made clear given a body of new learning into possession of which our generation is passing? Illustration: new insights into cosmology. A constructive theologian must ask after the cogency and relevancy of the past and ask after the negotiability of its transmission.

**The problem of God.** The Bible does not define God. It says, "I am the one who..." God is not the one who is but the one who does. (A functional definition in the Bible.) "Who is this does?" we have to ask. Of the great Jewish/Christian words:- God, love, guilt, sin, forgiveness, reconciliation,- none are definitions; they are all relational statements.

"Thou hast formed us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." [*Augustine's Confessions*]. Restlessness has two parts. The self cannot be itself by itself. We are made in the image of God and our life is an effort to approach, to appreciate, to participate in the absoluteness of God himself. We can never do it, and that is why our life is restless. That restlessness will either cause us to throw in the towel or pull up our socks.

## **Side B.**

**Who is Jesus?** No one can prove that God exists. The Bible never makes any effort to prove God. We do not know who Jesus was from his own internal statements. We only know who he is by what he did. The theologian has to confront the problem of Jesus. The reported word about him is inconsistent. What did the church mean when it said, "Jesus is Lord"? "Jesus is God" is not a proper statement. The Bible never says Jesus is God. Jesus said he was of God. Jesus=Son of God is a metaphor. What is the **nature of the relationship among God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?**

The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not Biblical doctrine. God chooses to be God for us in 3 ways: the ground and source of all that is, creator. He comes to us as one of us, redeemer.

What do we mean by **the word of God**? Primarily, we do not mean the Bible. There was a word of God before there was a Bible. The Hebrew word is Dabar, which means the creative force of God which goes out of himself to do something. The document (Bible) testifies to that force. The Lutheran church is not a church of the Bible, it is a church of the Word of God. Our new church must speak of the word in a way that does justice to the fundamental nature of the word and not get caught in fundamentalist or verbal inerrancy kinds of debates which are out of place for Lutheranism.

The Bible is an incomparable testimony to God's word, but God's word was before the Bible was. Luther said that the mother who teaches the child about the goodness of God who is the shepherd of all children is as much a doctor of the word as the Archbishop of Mainz.

How can one create a language for the incomprehensible? Luther says of "the naked God" (about God as he is in himself) we can know nothing, but we can know the "Deus Involutus," the God who chooses to become involved with us. By God alone can God be known.

**Questions:**

About the **parables**. Are they meant to teach or confuse? Sittler recommends a book by Dan Via, On the Parables; two books by John Dominic Crossan, and Amos Wilder's The Language of the Scriptures. We think we know what these things mean. Why have these stories lasted for 2,000 years? They are told to the religious. They are crazy stories, designed to shock, to make us think. The wilder a story is, the more invitational it is. They remain forever fresh. You can't reduce the absurdity of the parables. "Cherish your discomfort, sir!"

About **sola scriptura** in light of Sittler's comments on the Bible and the word of God. Sittler suggests that the questioner look at the context in which Luther was living and writing.

**Tape 3. Worship Meditations**

**Side A. "Redeeming the Time"**

Tape begins with a hymn. Sittler begins his meditation by talking about the different kinds of time: cosmic, historical, and internal or experienced. We are aware of passingness, mutability. Sittler mentions the literature which celebrates the pathos of passingness, giving examples from Walter de la Mare, Shakespeare, and Dylan Thomas. Quoting the passage from Corinthians in which Paul speaks about redeeming the time, Sittler says to know what in one's time one ought to make an effort to redeem depends on what he finds damnation to be. Redemption is a meaningful possibility only in the presence of damnation. Is there a damnation which characterizes epochs which calls forth a specific Christian obligation to redeem the time?

Does our time present a kind of damnation so urgent, so obscene, so horrifying, that it speaks to Christ's church in a way to which we have not vigorously responded? Our time is filled with moral issues. Sittler is not sure that there is an absolutely clear moral way to respond to many moral issues of our time. "But I am clear that there is a damnation which exists, which if the church does not think and act will call down judgment upon us."

There is a possibility of the annihilation of God's creation. What ought I to do about this? Sittler imagines a time when he might receive a question from a grandchild, "And grandfather, what were you doing while all of this was a-gathering?" How awful it would be if my reply were "I spent my time talking about God."

*The meditation ends rather abruptly; was Sittler finished? Tape ends with a prayer.*

**Side B. Meditation at the end of the 4-day session.**

Begins with scripture reading: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me." (Story of Jesus reading in the synagogue.) **Reflections on spirituality.** Sittler says that he cannot understand spirituality. There is a sense in which the spirit inheres in all things. "Spirit,"



in a sense, is a wide term for the creative presence of God in everything God has made. Spirit=the life-giving presence of God, in general.

But in this text, the Spirit gains specificity in relation to a focal duty. The **Spirit is given for the task**. Sittler reviews the story of the lepers who were cleansed: on their way, they were healed. They didn't get the gift and then take off. They took off in obedience and the gift was given in relation to the obedience. The reality of the gift is in proportion to the depth and velocity of our obedience.

#### **Tape 4. Questions and Answers**

##### **Side A.**

Tape begins with Sittler already talking, about inerrancy.

Question: What insights do you have as you have listened to our process? Sittler says that he can make a judgment about what are some inherent dispositions of Lutherans that might be barriers that have to be overcome as the task proceeds. 1. Lutheran piety which is wedded to predetermined interpretation that any deviation from that might be difficult to bring off. Example: the teachings of Jesus, especially in the parables. We must keep our minds open to pay attention to the details of the story. What is the person who wrote the text trying to say to me?

Question: Advice to a young seminary graduate? Sittler cautions such persons from becoming soggy. There are impossible demands on pastors; they must fight for their lives. Read the journals, be professionally decent. Too many sermons are rich in piety, oversimplified. Keep your mind alive!

Question: How do you articulate your own hope? "The human spirit is capable of remarkable rebound." God is not a God of hopelessness. Sittler is concerned about the proliferation of nuclear arms, finds it difficult to hold on to hope. Theological confidence in God is the only thing that gives him hope. Nothing in our current situation does. Nothing human is foreign to theology, therefore Sittler says that he never feels guilty about what he reads.

Question: Reflect upon the tension between lay and clergy, i.e. the role, function and power of the pastor over and against the rest of the community. Sittler: It is unbiblical to have a theology of the laity. Theology is theology. The pastor should have a certain authority, especially in matters of teaching. It's largely a way of manner. The notion that everybody has an equal weight in all matters is wrong. There are varieties of gifts. The pastor has to win the respect of his congregation. I never told my congregation to do anything for the first two years (I was with them). Sittler tells a story about a "battle-axe" in his congregation who didn't like him and was out to get him. She took copious notes about her complaints and made her attack on him in a congregational meeting. The people were amused by the length of her list of complaints, and "they hung her."

Question: Will you talk more about young people who are "into" things? Sittler says they don't ask my counsel and I don't force it on them. He talks about his family. "Be what you are, stick with your principles."

## Side B.

Question: Can you explain the parable of the talents? Sittler says it is not a true parable, not a parable of the kingdom. The story may have been borrowed by Jesus; it is what is termed an exemplary story. Sittler points out that the end of Matthew is a warning to the infant church to be prepared for persecution. Why did Matthew choose this story at this point? The talents refer to weights/money. "So many sermons are painful elaborations of the perfectly obvious."

Question: Can you explain what Jesus meant in Luke when he told why he spoke in parables? Sittler doesn't understand it, either. He points out that the disciples understood no more than the others hearing the stories. Jesus said this after the story of the sower and the seed. Let it hang as a puzzle. Ask what the context is.

Question: Why is it that some people are open and led to faith and some aren't? Sittler doesn't know. He reminds them of Luther's two mysteries- divine mercy and the mystery of faith. Our job is to present the promise of the invitation, to tell the story as best we can! This includes the use of common sense! Sittler says that he resents the invasion of popular psychology into Christian theology. It is an invitation to "gimmick-ize" the Holy Ghost. Let the mystery be a mystery.

Question: Can you comment on Jesus' preaching to the spirits in hell? Sittler says he can't do that, and neither could Raymond Brown. We sometimes can't reconstruct the context in which some of these things were written. Some things are just gone- we'll never know the references.

Question: Would you share some of your favorite books? Sittler tells about a recent course he taught with a colleague at LSTC about moral problems explored in literature, and some of the books used in that course were Emma, Lord Jim, and many short stories. He recommends Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Shakespeare and the romantic poets. Theologians he favors: R. Bultmann, Karl Barth, Tillich, David Tracy, Johannes Metz' Emerging Church, Karl Rahner. *The tape ends with Sittler in mid-sentence.*

## **1983 A Conversation with Joseph Sittler and Studs Terkel** *LSTC, April 12*

Moderated by Morris Niedenthal. Sittler and Terkel talk about work.

The changing nature of work; grace and work; man must feel needed; alienation of man from his labor. The intrinsically dull work of today; making stuff not really needed. What would happen to the self if no work existed? Questions from audience.

## **1983 Meditation on Psalm 66** *Rockefeller Chapel, July 10*

Several preliminary steps will be useful before we begin to look at the nature of the language in which the psalms are written. Between things we experience and the words we use to describe them, there is a vast acreage, and it's never adequately done. For example, no poet has ever said with what he believes to be complete success the image the poet sets out to articulate and celebrate; no singer has ever released in tone and rhythm and line the imagined song. Paul Ricoeur says that there is a distanciation between the realm of the beheld, experienced, felt, subjected to, and the language which has the capaciousness adequate to the original experience.

We have to understand this problem of language. For all the admirable ductility, flexibility and richness of language, there is a kind of limit. Wittgenstein said that the positivists say that what cannot be verified we must remain silent about. He agrees with that, but says his only argument is that there is something to be silent about. It is into that area of something to be silent about that we have to wander for a moment to prepare to understand the words of the psalm.

Sittler introduces the idea of ordering things using an illustration from a Marx Brothers movie. There are many ways to order things. When we begin to examine the language of the psalms, we find they are short on conceptualization and long on eloquent gesture. Take two words from the opening of Psalm 66 – the word *praise* and the word *glory*. *Praise* is the simpler of the two; it means an act of acclamation, recognition, an act of powerful admiration, the ascription of majesty. But the word *glory* is the key word, in this psalm and throughout all of scripture. It is without determinant content. The glory is the light the holy gives off. The word is essential if we are to understand the intention of the language of the psalms.

As we look at the psalm, there are three principal themes or elements:

- The first is plain power. The acts of God... God, by the Hebrews, is never defined. In the Old Testament, God is what God does. Power, not in the sense of overwhelming force, but a power in the service of restoration of a people to the secret of their being, to the root of their life, to the origin of their being. Power operating with love and mercy toward that power's own creation.
- The second element in the psalm is the response to this power. This response is what we call worship. Worship is saying 'yes' to the acts of God. It is a thanksgiving for the original giving.
- The third component in the psalm is one that needs to be more carefully unwrapped. It comes in a language which is strange to us. It is sacrifice. The proper translation of sacrifice is a responding 'yes' to God's affirmative action. It is an act of adoring acknowledgement. In the Old Testament, there were material things that went along with it- a goat, a ram, etc. Mary's Magnificat is a sacrifice. To give one's self over to that which gives itself over to the creation of one's person.

The final point in the psalm is that when we understand the steps that the expostulation language of the psalm uses, expostulation rather than conceptualization, when we enter into the internal vigor of that language, then we are able to define personhood in a fresh way.

The “search for identity” still bugs us. The self cannot find an adequate identity from within itself. The self is given its selfhood by an action to which our whole lives are a response. A “*selah*” – a “that’s the way it is.” It involves an interior reorganization of personhood from the standpoint whereby we know that our various loves are legitimized and overwhelmed by the love with which we are beloved. To live in that self-defining context between God and man and the world and the ineffable wonder- this is what the Bible always means by faith.

## **1984 His God Story** *Phoenix, AZ, January*

### **Side A.**

Lengthy introduction by Ken Larkin.

Sittler will do **an anatomy of his faith**, as he explains that he has never tried this before.

"As I try to recover my earliest recollection of the allure of the life of the church and the celebration and devotion of the Christian faith, certain insignificant things gathered signification as I now recall them." He was an acolyte in his father's church, St. Peter's in Lancaster, Ohio, and remembers fragments of things, sounds of the sentences his father said, from the Scripture and liturgy,... "things stuck in my head below the level of comprehension." If a thing has fundamental magnificence, the **language** with which it is stated doesn't have to be understood completely. As we mature, we grow up to the understanding which, for a time, comes to us only as a kind of audible, unforgettable language. **Truth and beauty belong together, big things deserve big statements. Fundamental evangelism involves the vivacity of the real.** We must catch the mind in the vivacity of the real. In the teaching, preaching, and worship of the church, we must set up the contrapuntal action in which the great language of faith crosses the realities of ordinary life.

As he grew older, Sittler brought **English literature** into his attention. This was an evangelistic event. The Gospel is not only a word of God, a word from God, but if it's simply a thing nakedly thrown into the world we may believe it "because it's in the Bible," but now people grow up in a generation for whom this is not a necessary ground for belief.

When the language of the Scriptures intersected the infinite depth and pathos of human life as that life is celebrated in the masterpieces of our language, the truth of the Christian faith became attested from the inside.

"I did not set out to be an ordained minister or a theologian." Sittler couldn't decide what he wanted to do after college (He dismissed the idea of being a physician because he didn't want to give up everything but medicine.). So, he took a year at seminary, on a teaching assistantship. **"I went to seminary under false pretenses. I came into theology through the back gate.** While I was at seminary, it dawned on me a minister needs it all (i.e., the humanities), and I was fascinated by the structure of Christian theology."

Literature is a multiplication of each person's life. Mentions Moby Dick, and says that his students used to bet with each other on how long it would take him to mention the novel in a lecture.

When it came time for him to leave seminary, he was concerned that he had never felt "a call." "I never heard a voice in the night, was not struck over the head, or didn't have a deeply moving emotional experience." So, he talked with his father about this, and his father said: if by disposition and some endowment you can do what terribly needs doing, how loudly do you want the call to yell at you?

Sittler **was called** to a small church in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, to a congregation with 60% of its members out of work; it was during the Depression. He struggled to preach a gospel of hope and redemption. No jazzed-up veneer, clap-hands-for-Jesus gospel would do. It had to be at the level of tragedy, of deprivation, of the ultimate loneliness, of being unable to look your own children in the face... at the level of that kind of pathos, one had to say something on Sunday morning or shut up.

During those years in the parish, he did a lot of studying and discovered the importance of Karl Barth's insight and scholarship. Unless an intersection takes place, the throwing out of the naked word, unless that word has a trajectory, a target, the kind of precision which intersects the reality of our common human existence, the word may do its work, but we ought to do much more than just putting all the load of effective power on the gospel itself and learn something about the people to whom this word is addressed.

**Struggling with the Scriptures** was a great benefit for Joe. He began to see that what we mean by **the Word of God** is prior to and more than just the Scriptures. When he was **called to the seminary at Maywood** he gave some lectures on the **doctrine of the Word**. "I didn't know the gun was loaded." He was accused of being un-Lutheran.

#### **The importance of Sittler's involvement in the ecumenical movement.**

In 1935, he was a delegate to the Edinburgh Conference on Faith and Order. He discovered the Lutheran church is a catholic (comprehensive) church. One can be a great Christian without being a Lutheran. To be a Christian is a priority item. The Lutheran church is my house, not my home. The years from 1935 until 1970, when he participated in the Faith and Order conferences were his graduate school in theology.

**Some comments on preaching:** We must not only be clear about the ammunition we are shooting but sensitive about the target. To whom are you saying this? What are the conditions of their lives? Sittler talks about the changes in the culture, in society. "I am as troubled a theologian now as I ever was." What kind of God has wanted to be God for us by becoming the crucified one? By the intersection of human wretchedness and evil, over which God makes the sign of the cross, he plunges into life REALLY, like a sword. And like every good sword, the hilt has the form of a cross. This kind of understanding is a life process in Christian reflection, and Sittler says, "I'm talking now not as a theologian but as an ordinary Christian."

#### **Side B.**

## Thoughts on **preaching and environmental concerns:**

Regarding the Scriptures for the day: My duty is not to say something about it but to say more fully what it says. As an illustration, let's look at the most difficult of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Sittler preached about this for the first time only two years ago. Look at three key words: blessed, meek, inherit. "Blessed" does not mean happy. The Hebrew word is "*baruch*," which means the one whose security and serenity is in his relationship to God. "Meek" refers to a strong, steady, gentle spirit. Sittler tells the story of his grandmother who spoke both German and French; one time, she wrote the Beatitudes in French for him, and he remembers that "meek" is translated as "debonair." As far as the meaning of "inherit" is concerned, the passage doesn't say that the meek will own the earth or control the earth. The difference between owning and inheriting is that an inheritance is something you don't own, you don't deserve. It's a surprise. "...to live in the world with a gentle spirit because the whole of creation is a kind of outrageous surprise, a gift." One's feeling for the world ought to be one of tender wonder, gratitude, amazement." Sittler remembers a retreat he was on with students on Oregon and their reaction to being in the forest. If you love a thing you're prepared to use it wisely. **Fundamental evangelism is to create the intersection between amazing grace and the human condition.**

Another fundamental interest of Sittler's has been the physical sciences, especially biology. In the 50's, our **vicious assault on the earth became apparent to him.** He asked, "Where is the word that will illuminate man's relationship to the creation?" Sittler found it in **the doctrine of grace.** The world of nature is also a gift of God's grace. The Christian church should be in the forefront of the environmental movement out of that fundamental doctrine. Out of that concern, he wrote The Ecology of Faith.

Since retirement, Sittler has been thinking a lot about a hermeneutical problem, **what is the role of language?** How are we to read a verse? (For example, "he is from the beginning," in Colossians.) Mentions Paul Ricoeur's idea that the meaning of a statement lies in front of the statement. We must follow the trajectory of the statement, not just tell what it said then to those people back there. There is ever new meaning and promise in scripture. "I haven't preached a sermon when I just retell the story. I've got to ask, 'What's going on here?'"

## **1984 The Liberal Arts and the Formation of Judgment** *Bethany*

*College Commencement, May 20*

*Sittler receives an honorary degree on this occasion. The tape contains the entire commencement service. Sittler's address is on Side A.*

**What liberal education is not:** There is a widespread assumption that liberal education does not really have any central contribution to make to the success or failure of our human endeavor. It is believed that it may be an embellishment for social aspirations or

add refinement to one's witty conversation. But this is a cosmetic understanding of liberal arts education.

What do we mean by **judgment**? Sittler gives several illustrations, telling about his grandmother's barley soup, the wheat farmer, his great-grandfather the "vinyardist." These days, we talk about the **information explosion**. Information only becomes significant and crucial when it is "in formation," that is, when information enters in and is formed into a judgment- which judgment then tilts the way toward a better or worse policy. Use of the judgment is, as it were, the final act of the mind in which the formative material data and all the statistics or observations or traditions come together to congeal around a tilting this way or that, and this little tilt may have great or evil consequences.

**How is judgment shaped?** Judgment does not drop as a solid globule from heaven. Judgment emerges, can be evoked, can undergo maturation. It is not something of which you are the inheritor in a kind of genetic endowment. It is a highly ductile thing that takes in, works over, reflects, learns from experience. Therefore: liberal arts have to do with the maturation or the formation of judgment.

In what way do the **liberal arts** contribute to the formation that is the information, the interior formation, of judgment? The liberal arts are called that because they liberate. They liberate the mind from solitude, from provincialism, from localism, from the development of those prejudices for which closedness is an infertile ground. The liberal arts are meant to explode the person open to the richness, the variety, the bewildering contradictions of human life. **The liberal arts invite one to membership in the human race.**

Illustration of how Sittler came to a lifelong attention to the liberal arts. Talks about his elementary school teacher and poetry ("Giuseppe, da barber,").

What does it do to the mind of a young person to come to a place like this, a college out of a great religious tradition and to know that tradition is broader, richer, more beautiful than Salina, or Kansas City or Fort Dodge?

Judgment is capable of formation. Formation is not totally a mystery. **Formation to my judgment** is given when I am invited into the vastness of the human life, the human race- in all of its variety, its madness, its delights, its craziness, its crookedness, its capability for devotion as well as betrayal. That judgment is essential to a corporate society.

## **1984 Theological Reflections** *CSCM (Center for the Study of Campus Ministry, Valparaiso, IN) Summer Seminar, June 18-22*

### **Tape 1. (June 18) Side A.**

The title of the conference was **A Fear-filled Time**. Sittler begins by commenting on the history of this institute. He remembers that one year he, and one year Martin Marty, did the whole conference: 3 sessions a day for 5 blessed days. "We were crazy."

What's happening to **language and speech** these days? Sittler talks about his early memories of church symbols, especially those referring to the Trinity. Our memory is joined with the language of events and remembrances. Referring to the theme, a fear-filled time, Sittler asks: where are the fountains of apprehension? What's going on which gives us a clue to our theological, homiletical, pedagogical answers whereby the gospel may be shaped to the shape of this apprehension? Unless we understand the contours of the culture, we cannot shape a language of transmission with any clarity or precision. Theology is never done; it is a doing, a "fresh raid on the inarticulate," to quote Eliot.

How shall I talk of the Trinity in 1984? Test the usefulness of your theological statements by their transmissibility in the sermon. You must evoke the look of comprehension from those in the pews. Liturgy and hymnody do this well. They seize the power of non-technical language to point to possibilities of meaning which are fresh for every generation.

Sittler explains that he is currently working with 2 gerontological institutes, one in Michigan, one in southern California, on the **meaning of aging**. He talks about the assumption (gained from statistics) that when you're aging, you are no longer productive; therefore, loss of productivity means loss of worth. "At 80, I am worth \$2,370." The science of gerontology dismisses interior life. Maturation into ripeness comes close to the mystery of total comprehension. Sittler is currently collecting pieces of literature about what it means to grow old (and will be using that material at the University of Michigan later in the summer.)

The **basic ground of fear is human confrontation with structural changes**.

Ripples of change are not significant; waves of change are more profound, like the information age, digitalization; currents of change indicate that the ultimate bastions of our sense of meaning and worth are crumbling. The mind of modernity must be taken into account. (Brief explanation of the meaning of "information" is offered by Sittler as an aside.) The ground of our fear is that nothing that has been able to enclose the ineffability of God, Christ, the Spirit, and the church is safe from erosion.

Illustration: The problem of, who is Jesus? I still wrestle with this. I have never been so disorganized at a higher level, not into unfaith, but the faith with worn-out tools has to tackle this question over and over again.

**Hermeneutics** is the big issue now: how to understand and integrate the text. Texts take on a life of their own. In the 20th century, if a thing purporting to have meaning can't be affirmed in such a way to meet empirical verification, it is said to be meaningless. For example, you can't prove or disprove "God is love". Sittler's principle: If a thing is neither soluble or dismissable, it must be important.

### **Side B.**

Gracia Grindal begins reading a poem, "**The Idea of Order at Key West**," by Wallace Stevens. Sittler interjects comments from time to time, interpreting as he goes.

"It was she and not the sea we heard. We are the makers of the songs we sing."

Sittler says that **all interpretation is an imposition**. Christian theology is never identical with the truth it talks about. There is something humorous about claims for theological adequacy. A problem of our time: abyss created by the evaporation of religious faith is being filled for many by the phenomenology of nature. (Quote from poem, "Whose spirit



is this?..." My children experience the mystery of life, too, but they cannot say with me, "I believe in..." That is not a language that communicates. They have no confessional answer to the inanswerable, the unsilenceable question. (A church that reduces "et cum spiritu sancto" to "and also with you" is capable of anything.) Most of us are able to take the old words of the creed, and we have evacuated them of the old way of affirming the reality and presence of God and refilled them with the richer, deeper knowledge of nature, the doctrine of God, the meaning of Christ, so I don't have trouble saying them on Sunday morning, though I'm always doing an action of draining and refilling. I am the maker of the song I sing, not that I don't honor the, by me, unsingable absolute song of God, but I have to make it my song.

Another quote from the poem: "The sea, whatever self it had, became the self that was her song. She was the artifice of the world she made... There never was a world for her except the one she sang and singing, made." Sittler applies this to the gospel writers and Paul. There is no world of Christian knowledge except the songs that are sung by those who were the children of those formative events: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul- they were the makers of the song they sang, but that doesn't mean irresponsible. Paul, his own sense of guilt, trapped by the law, caused him to develop a Christology of liberation from the law. Sittler refers to an article by Krister Stendahl, in the Harvard Theological Review: "St. Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West." Luther had that same kind of introspective way of putting the problem. Neither is wrong, but neither is fully right, either. A sense of sin may not be the only movement in the self which creates longing, an allure, an evocation for something not myself. Don't lay aside the Pauline, Lutheran solution. These must be honored and treasured. But the modern mind has never occurred before. We must be aware of the ductility of language, the way of expressing the truth of the gospel as it fits the contours of contemporary anxiety. We must find the language that honors both of them. It's a risky thing.

We don't regard the **frontier aspects of ministry**- to be true to the then in the language of the now- as being quite as respectable. It is viewed with suspicion by the church, but it's the ministry to which we are ordained.

Another quote from the poem: "**O blessed rage for order...**" This is David Tracy's title for a book on hermeneutics. Sittler reflects on this phrase. Lutheran order is centered around justification by grace through faith. Eastern Orthodoxy says that the spirit that operates through mystical love is the fundamental organizing principle. The Anglican/Episcopalian tradition has a marvelous ability to escape all propositional, theological entrapments by an enchanting rhetorical tent. There is a woman at the University of Chicago studying the Anglican translations of the old Latin collects. The Book of Common Prayer marvelously slips between theological Scyllas and Charybdis and goes quietly sailing with beautiful language. They don't settle the question between personal responsibility and absolute determinism of the will of God. They seduce our mind with the beauty of holiness so that we dismiss the question. That's not altogether true... but it's very wise.

**Tape 2.** (June 19)  
**Side A.**

Sittler begins with a story: When he was a parish pastor in Cleveland, he spent time at the Holtkamp shop where they were building the first baroque organ in the U. S. He attended the concert at the Cleveland Museum of Art at which Albert Schweitzer inaugurated the organ, and turned pages for Schweitzer when he played the Franck Chorale in A Minor. Now, the baroque organ sound is no longer in demand. Sittler sympathizes with Robert Frost who said, "I'm an old man. It's a strange world. I don't understand a damn thing."

Sittler wants to talk about the **three major focal points in his theological reflections**. Each was characterized by a book or two.

1. **The doctrine of the word.** It is inevitable that a Lutheran should, if he has any sense at all, open up the Lutheran understanding of the authority of scripture. The period of 1930-1943 was vital in his development of Biblical study. Barth, Dibelius, Bultmann, Kuntzlemann (sp?), form criticism, etc. were important to his studies. Sittler's principal interest was "What do we mean by the word of God?". At that time, Lutherans in North America equated scripture with the word of God, and that has led to endless theological confusion. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word "dabar" means "word," and refers to the reality of God coming into expression in an action. It is the creative will, force, intentionality, energy of God the creator himself. The reality of God going out of himself to create something beyond himself. That the word of God is fundamentally the Bible is nonsense.

What do we mean by scripture? "The collection of human response to what they believed to be God's address to them." In a secondary sense, we can speak of the scripture as the word of God. Luther's statement: When a mother teaches her children about the heavenly father she is as much the word of God as any prophet. Scripture is not an end station on the theological railroad. It points to, witnesses to God. It is a human document. This understanding led to the publication of The Doctrine of the Word. Gullickson forbade his students to read the book, so, of course, they all did, and found it liberating.

2. **Reflections on nature and grace.** (This led to Essays on Nature and Grace.)

Sittler always had an interest in the natural world, and he could not divorce this from the doctrine of God. What was God doing before we were? The second big theological allure was to find a doctrine of God that would swing in orbits as massive as cosmological theory and cosmological, geologic fact. Sittler says, "my life has been a constant enlarging of the ways of knowing." They need not be only empirical. Sittler says that he has also seen the importance of enlarging our Christian vocabulary. When The Ecology of Faith was published in 1958, the publisher wanted Sittler to change the word "ecology," because no one would know what it meant.

Sittler: "My whole career has been an effort, not wholly successful, to drag my students out of the church into what's happening in the world, what is the reality of the world, in order that their theological speech might intersect the kind of world their listeners would take for granted."

Sittler was influenced by Karl Rahner's Nature and Grace Reconsidered. Is there such a thing as natural grace? he wondered. Sittler's discovery: general grace is given in and with the creation, according to the early Christian fathers. The Christian tradition is the community that specifies grace, but all created things enjoy a general grace of God simply by being. Sittler articulated this first in his New Delhi speech. There, the Lutheran

delegation "trampled him underfoot." The Eastern Orthodox were overjoyed. Comments on cosmic Christology, organic oneness of the whole creation, Teilhard de Chardin..... What has shaped me and what I hope has shaped my students is the relation of the energies of the Christian reality to the modern knowledge of the scientific world.

## **Side B.**

3. My last great interest has been **the interior dimensions of aging as these undergo a change especially for the Christian believer. What does it mean to be old?** It is a time of diminishment, a time of grave melancholy, but not unmarked by insight. This is the human condition. Let's stop this conspiracy of silence about death.

Talk to healthy people about living and dying. Looking back at my experience as a young pastor, I now realize I should have been more sensitive to the confrontation with tragedy. Sittler talks about visiting the elderly, sharing literature about aging. To talk about aging among the elderly is not depressing; they both weep and are consoled by the things I share. Thus, they know they are not alone. The tragic character of life is a kind of constructive catharsis. It leads not simply to bitter acquiescence but to maturity in resignation and release.

The Bible has nothing (specific things) to say about **life after death**. It affirms there is, that life with God is life with that which doth not die. The word of the scripture in Romans is immensely satisfying to old people. In death, as in life, we are the Lord's. The Bible does use the word "eternal life." This is a promise; in Him nothing is lost. "We shall all be changed." No temporal analogies can contain eternal realities.

*Question and answer period.*

Q: Would you reflect on the language in our worship which speaks to these issues of dying and death?

Sittler observes that we need a sense of humor about some of these things.

Another participant talks about the "Te Deum" in the new hymnal which includes the phrase, "You are God." Sittler responds, "That's big news to God! This tin-earedness annoys me." There follows a wonderful, humorous discussion about new hymns, the new liturgy, etc. Sittler says that, during worship, he sings through the list of states because he can't read the hymns any more.

Another question concerns the inclusive language lectionary. Sittler won't comment because he hasn't read it. We Lutherans have some excuse for being a little bit tone deaf to the older nuances of classical English. The Episcopalians have no excuse at all. We came late to English; our worship books at first borrowed heavily from the Book of Common Prayer.

Question: What was your experience during the Vietnam era? Sittler says he didn't handle it very well. He sympathized with the civil rights struggle but did nothing dramatic about it. Through it, though, he came to a new way of understanding ethics. A new kind of ethical discourse was needed to deal with problems, particularly the problem of peace. He has been mightily instructed by the nature of the black protest and revolution. He has been forced to look again at the parables. "Love one another." You cannot be commanded

to love, but our Lord commanded us to love our enemy. Love in this case does not mean mutual affection. Did Jesus actually mean "acknowledge the presence of the other in God's creation"? You must care for them; you must attend to them. Sittler talks about his experience during that period with the black students at the University of Chicago. "When we decided to love them, it was a bitter experience." [Cf. *Sittler's video, Love is not Enough*].

**Tape 3.** June 22  
**Side A.**

Sittler remembers that he spoke to this group 5 years ago and has reflected on the differences between then and now, that group and this. "You are a much more grown-up group. You are obedient to your ministry on a very deep level."

**Summing up: All is interpretation.** Luther said that faith is to trust in God's unknown, unfelt, and untried goodness. We may be the first generation in which the raw truth of trust has never come to maturity, and we're all Mary, hearing the call and having to live as if we would stake everything on it. Sittler talks about Robert Penn Warren's comments about Joseph Conrad. Conrad's skepticism was ultimate. All religious notions are illusions. But Conrad teaches us that they are infinitely precious because these illusions disclose the only truth our humanity is ever liable to gain. Conrad pushes Stevens' poem to the end. **It is not possible to prove the realities of the Christian faith.** We are the people who face that and must teach, preach and serve, and every day reconstitute ourselves in faith in view of that. What, if these things are illusions, though I have faith that behind what the world and the skeptical mind must call illusions, is the reality of God himself?

How can I make an **order**? **Why I retain and have to fight the struggle for faith** is because of the allure of the unsilenceable congruities that the faith celebrates. There is a haunting congruity between the madness of the Christian faith and the absolute structure of human life in history. The peg of faith fits into the hole of fact. Refers to G. K. Chesterton.

**Sin** is an unfashionable word, but I look at my own life and accept it. I can't prove the truth of the Christian faith but I can't escape the haunting congruity between the doctrine of God, and grace and love and sin and judgment. The more absurd the human drama becomes, the more appropriate the divine drama discloses itself to be.

Jesus' scream of desolation is still addressed to God. In Mark, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

The **task of theology today**: the declension in the life of the church, the crumbling of institutional forms, the permeation of ancient statements by a groping for new ways to state relational reality rather than a substantial nature of reality. This is a transitional generation.

Karl Barth's Dogmatics was the last hurrah for Christian dogmatics operating with old notions. Tillich was the last to base a Christian understanding on an ontological supposition. Whitehead's may be the last effort to hang truth on a process clearly discernable. But new voices are not voices of despair or defeat. Illustration: Sally **McFague** talks about Jesus as the parable of God; it is a whole new way of unfolding

the mystery of the Holy Spirit.

A word of appreciation for the inwardness of personal endeavors. You have seen that the old theological emperors have no clothes. To pull things together, read **Romans VIII**. We are all university people. We have existential, ontological fears. Not all people do. (Someone then reads Romans VIII.) Sittler says that in Hebrew, **to "hope" and to "wait"** is the same thing. We wait upon God, we don't wait for God, and that waiting is forever. Sittler comments from time to time on what is being read from Romans. We wait upon God, and if we see not that for which we hope, then we patiently wait for it and this is constitutive of the Christian life as a hymn of praise in a context of confusion.

*Side B is blank.*

**1984 Interior Dimensions of Aging** *Kansas City, Oct. 29*  
*Medicine and Religion Conference U. of Kansas Medical Center*

*(The quality of this tape is not good.)*

**Side A.**

If we're going to get into the interior dimensions of aging, we've got to do more than just carry on objective, empirical, statistical research. The methodology of empiricism will not lead us into the kind of knowledge we've got to gain if we're going to start with the problems of aging where the data leave off.

Sittler emphasizes the importance of language, the value of poetry in understanding these problems. Gerontological research is needed, **an intellectually responsible method to intuit one's way into the interior drama of aging sensibility, the haunting sense of the passing of time.** The past is never recoverable. Examples in literature: Dylan Thomas, Shakespeare. The best teachers are the aging themselves.

The **extension of the life span has led to ethical questions we never had before.** These are problems for the family, pastor, friends and physician. The Bible doesn't give me clear direction in what judgments I should make in these cases (keeping people alive, how much treatment, etc.). Ethics used to be knowing what the will of God is and doing it. We are now presented a situation in which we are required to make a judgment of several clear alternatives. We need a **new mode of ethical discourse.** Our judgment is a kind of offertory. "Not as I ought, but as I am able." "If the judgment or decision is wrong, forgive it; if it is right, bless it."

**Eternal life-** the words don't belong together. Life is, by definition, not eternal. It has to be understood in a trans-logical way. We have to be honest with our people. Eternal life can not be a reenactment of certain choice parts of our life. If we live, we are the Lord's; if we die, we are the Lord's. Don't preach a phony kind of heaven. I [Sittler] refuse to make any blue prints of the details of eternal life.

## **1984 Dying, Ethics and Theology** *13th NICA Annual Mtg., Chicago* *November 14*

### **Side A.**

There are three aspects to consider in our reflection about this topic: ethical, methodological, and theological-pastoral.

A new form of **ethical discourse**, with new delicacy and refinement, is needed because the number of aging people is increasing. **Aging** is a time of letting go: Is there anything in the Christian tradition which speaks to this? It is different from suicide. Sittler has been forced to reopen the question about "suicide" in his own thinking. He mentions Heidegger's phrase about aging- "a time of letting be," i.e., when an elderly person decides to die. Aging is also a time of maturation of faith: "I give it (my life) back to you, God, with thanks."

The **research** on aging is statistical, empirical. That's good, but gerontological research can not be totally quantifiable. Aging also has **internal dimensions**. Research into the interior process of aging is necessary. Sittler decided to keep a list of various references to aging and its pathos found in literature. Some examples: "Epitaph," by Walter de la Mare; "Sonnet 73," by Shakespeare; "Do Not Go Gentle," by Dylan Thomas.

Be sensitized to the **vocabulary of the aging**. Listen to them! "Truth confronted is profoundly more comforting than falsehood perpetuated," says Sittler. Anything can be borne if people make a story out of it, to quote Abraham Heschel. Invite the aging into the blessed company of those who know the truth. Death is a part of life. God does not abandon them.

**Talk about death** before it occurs. What makes the aging cry also makes them joyful. Talk about the process of aging and dying. They want to know that they are not alone. Lots of talk goes on about life after death. We don't know what life with God will be like. Make the rhetoric of eternal life real to people. Quietly displace those egocentric notions of being myself for ever and ever. We must rise to the level of the language of the kingdom.

*Side B has no Sittler.*

## **1985 Theology of the Land** *March*

How did I come to **relate theology to the care of the earth**? Sittler tells a story about his father and Jake the farmer, and reflects on his early interest in language and poetry. The proper area of theological thought is nothing less than the whole world. Unless theology

can penetrate the ordinary problems of human existence, including the care of the earth, it is not an adequate theology for practical life.

The Bible says a lot more about the earth, the land, growing things and man's moral duty than we Lutherans are disposed to admit. We're so urged into internal piety that we forget that the **right realm for the exercise of "pietas"**- that is, the love of God, that the only adequate theater for the expression of the love of God has got to be the big show, the whole theater: the earth, political life, social life, more than family and interior devotion. Therefore, the radicality of our private spirituality has got to be opened up so that the love and proper worship of God should operate in a sufficiently large theater.

Sittler says that he began to read the Scriptures differently, as a result. Genesis is not natural history, paleontology, or biology. It is a magnificent holy story of who you are, whence we are and whose we are. Man is constituted by three things: relationship to God, relationship to other fellow beings, and relationship to the garden (which means the fecundity of nature in Hebrew). An understanding of this gives you a primary theological stance from which to view the various statements of the Old and New Testaments. Psalm 104 doesn't give any possible use to whales; it simply says God likes 'em, he enjoys them. Sittler says that he is suggesting things to think about, not what to think.

Reflections on **grace**. The whole world is the realm of grace in the Scriptures. He gives an illustration about a farmer in Iowa who kept his hedgerows, as God's frame around his picture. Look at the land as the giftedness of the grace of God.

Sittler talks about the ripples, waves and currents in history. The meaning of **righteousness**. As an illustration, tells the story of his malfunctioning car in Israel, and the mechanic who fixed it, pronounced it "righteous". The church should say that dealing with the land with care is a righteous way to deal with creation, and, in the long run, practical wisdom.

When we talk about the **value of the family farm**, we must create a new rhetoric of rural value, and we need to examine that word "value". We must use our brains to find a rhetoric of modernity, of recognition. Verbalize what you mean by value. To be nostalgic about procedures that can never be recovered is rationally lamentable. A new language is needed for a rhetoric of grace that the younger generations can understand. Sittler recommends authors who were instrumental in helping him to shape his theology of ecology: Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, Loren Eiseley, Richard Wilbur.

## **1985 Chapel Talks at St. Olaf College** *April 25 and 26.*

### **Side A. April 25 "The Mystery of Christ and the Anonymity of the Good"**

Text: Matthew 5. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

There is ambiguity and mutuality in the reality of love. Jesus **commands us to**

**love** (our enemies). Love cannot be commanded, so **how can this be?** Jesus didn't say, "Like your enemies." What is the **nature of this love?** Illustration: Black students at the University of Chicago in the '60's... "All we want is justice." [*Cf. Sittler's "Love is not Enough" interview*]. Love in the largest sense in Jesus' teaching is the acknowledgement of the presence of the other one. I cannot love a mass of people. I can recognize the dignity of the other. Justice is love operating at a distance. We are redeemed into a tolerable life `together.

### **Side B. April 26.**

Title is "A Meditation on the Cherubim," but it's not clear why.

Text from the Gospel of John: various verses about **truth**.

To show yourself confused and bewildered amidst the complicated is a sign of maturity, not of naiveté. As an "old person," Sittler is aware of the tentativeness of settled opinions, but not of loyalty. He is evermore alluringly related to the mystery and reality of Christ.

The Christian tradition is full of meaning and truth. If to be a Christian is to be a member of a company which has inexhaustible wells of comforting kitsch and hand-holding in difficult situations, a kind of analgesic reading of life for the more difficult moments, that might be an option of a medicinal kind, but it has nothing to do with the truth.

What do we mean, Christianly, by truth? What does it mean in John? "If you were of the truth, you would hear my word." There must be a "preliminary tilt" in order for the truth to get at you. What is this preliminary tilt?

The moral meaning of Joseph Conrad's novel Lord Jim suggests an answer: One may be so frightened of the truth that he will flee from it all of his life, so egocentric he can't allow the truth to get at him.

The best way for us to understand "I am the way, the truth and the life" is to love the truth. What does it mean to be human? Think about this, about sin, the disclosure of ultimate reality, profound ambiguity. Sittler recommends G. M. Hopkins- "Sonnet." We live in solidarity with all of God's creatures; each one has a particularity.

## **1985 "Meditation at the Installation of John Buchanan"**

*Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Sept. 22*

Text is Mark 8:27-35

A number of years ago, a decision was made by representatives from most of Christendom to urge churches to return to the ecumenical lectionary. There is a good reason for this: it rescues congregations from the idiosyncrasies of the preacher.



This is the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, and the Gospel for the day, from Mark, was just read. Sittler wants to reflect on two focal points in this passage. Sittler talks about Paul Ricouer's observation about a text taking on a life of its own. The meditation will ask, first, what is the importance of this text for the understanding of Jesus' ministry, and then, what might the word of God be saying to us in this time?

Was what Peter was saying so wrong? Note the ferocious reply of Jesus; why did he reject what Peter said? Peter interpreted Jesus backward instead of forward. His reply enclosed the "new thing" in the categories of the old. When the word of God (Jesus) comes into history, into the personal life, it must have its own way. It must not be quieted down and fit into the expectations of those who hear it. The offense of the Gospel is that the son of man must suffer many things, be rejected and killed. God, in order to be God, has got to become what must be dealt with. The energy of redemption must follow the contours of damnation. The place in which the light must appear has got to be the place of darkness. Any interpretation of Jesus which would reduce him into a kind of jolly cultural moralism would be a diversion of the mission, purpose, and message of Jesus. "In the deserts of the heart, let the healing fountains start," to quote Auden. Divine action always takes place inseparable from human suffering, despair, anxiety. There is joy, to be sure, but joy cometh in the morning. It is not always there.

Now to the second point. Expectations are good things. They enhance our willingness to wait, enrich the waiting, and magnify fulfillment. That is their positive value. But they must be ductile. If we expect things to be so programmatical, to fit into a fixed, rigid shape of what we think, then we stifle that marvel of the mystery of Christ. The new cannot be stuffed into the beautiful garments or the baskets of the past. The capaciousness of your expectation is never identical with the magnificence of the event.

To summarize: The reality of the word and the will and of the presence of God may come to unfold and come to be in despair or darkness of heart. To quote John Donne, "He can bring thy summer out of winter though thou have no spring." Our expectations must be open, ductile, marvelous, almost childlike, so the redolence and magnificence of the mystery will never be reduced or entrapped in our own expectations.

## **1985 J. Ronald Engel's Class on Environmental Ethics**

*Meadville/Lombard Theological School, Fall*

*The quality of this tape is not good.*

### **Tape 1.**

#### **Side A.**

Sittler talks about when his **interest in the relationship between theology and the care of the earth** began, in 1927. He read the proceedings from the Faith and Order Conference in Lusanne, when the topic studied was "Christ and the Scriptures." He was

sent to the second Faith and Order conference at Oxford. The one thing the participants had in common was the Bible. They discussed the role of Christ in all of their (denominational) communities. The third conference was in Edinburgh in 1938, and the fourth, in Amsterdam, in 1948. Study moved from Christ and the Scriptures through Christ and the Confessions; in Amsterdam, Barth admonished the participants to move away from Christ and the Scriptures to talk about Christ and the Church. It was in Amsterdam that the Faith and Order Commission was merged with the Life and Work Commission to form the World Council of Churches. Then, in New Delhi, in 1961, the theme was Christ and the World. Sittler explains his contribution to that conference through his speech, "Called to Unity."

In his **New Delhi speech**, Sittler said that the extra-dogmatic, trans-liturgical, the trans-ecclesiological importance of the figure of Christ was acknowledged and pulled into the discussion: the presence of a manifestation of the holy that occurs in a way not encapsulated in a cult or liturgical tradition or even an intellectual dogmatic structure. People "outside the club" felt themselves addressed. The relationship between grace and nature which has been a part of the orthodox tradition was acknowledged.

At the next meeting of Faith and Order, at St. Andrew's in Scotland in 1963, the theme was "**Christ and the Cosmos.**" The intersection between that and the world-wide attention that was finally being given to man's assault upon the natural world interested Sittler. He asked himself if **grace** is a theological notion of sufficient capaciousness that it can claim catholic universality? He discusses the importance of Irenaeus. The second Adam affirms the holiness of the garden, while the second Eve (Mary), by her obedience, corrected the mistake of the first. He also discusses the importance of Augustine. Grace is Christian manners in the creation. Sittler mentions a recent article by Susan Sontag on feminism. Grace had to be broken out of privacy and solitude and made a cosmic notion.

In reply to a question from the class about the "rump session" between **Sittler and Gustav Wingren** in 1962, Sittler says that Wingren introduced him to Irenaeus. "Wingren has a massive body of scholarly knowledge in that skull of his (I'm not in that league), but he can't say it to anybody except to other theologians. I can probably (do a better job) translating theological notions into communicable speech to ordinary people."

Sittler quotes Richard Niebuhr: most Protestants are Unitarians of the Second Article.

Another question is about the dismay of some in **reaction to his New Delhi speech**. Sittler says his speech was a correction of the Lutheran bias sort [sic] of very powerful accent upon the second person of the Trinity. The dismay was OK, because it made people think. The dismay was mostly from the Germans. He responded with an article in Die Welt, writing about common grace and special grace. Another objection was from the side of those who said this is theology trying to address the meanings of natural creation, often called natural theology. So it was necessary to say that you must go from grace to nature. You can't go from nature to grace.

**Side B.**

Lynn White's essay on the environmental crisis and the church is discussed. Sittler asks the students: Do you still feel a puritan resolve that this assault on the environment has to stop? Or is this taken for granted now? A student replies: In the 60's and 70's, the important thing was to get people to recognize the problem. Now we are concentrating on alternative, constructive solutions. Once we see there are some solutions, people tend to feel less urgent about what is still an urgent question.

Question about Sittler's participation on the National Council of Churches Commission on the arts. In his reply, Sittler commends Amos Wilder to the group. He offers reflections on this question, on modern poetry and literature with themes relating to ecology.

Other questions: Planet management. The periodicity of nature and the pathos of lostness is known by Sittler's generation, not his children's. The digital watch tells lies about the nature of time, which flows imperceptibly.

Religious communities may be one of the last strongholds of humane, humanistic studies. Engel recalls the night he heard Sittler read Wilbur's poem, "Advice to a Prophet," at Orchestra Hall during a meeting on a sane nuclear policy. That was the first time he had encountered Sittler; it was 1961.

Comment from a student: The sermons of Paul Tillich and "The Care of the Earth" indicate that the release of atomic energy was the beginning of the concern for the environment. Sittler reflects a bit on Tillich: his strength was visual art; his eye was better than his ear. For Sittler, the literary arts are more important.

**Sittler is then invited to speak autobiographically.** There never was a time when my sense of identity was important. I had a beautiful older sister and a brilliant older brother. They were so damn dramatic that I didn't amount to anything. I had neither brilliance nor beauty. I was just the third kid, which was a very good idea, because while they were attracting all the attention, no one paid any attention to me, and I read what I wanted and did what I wanted. I wasn't expected to have any particular identity or be smart or anything. I was benignly neglected in such a way that the question, "Who am I?", "what am I going to do?,"- this kind of navel-gazing adolescence- I never went through it. Sittler was fascinated by the bigness of the world, and was never bugged by the gnawing adolescence of the identity crisis. "I was a sponge of wonder."

At the Divinity School in the 60's, students would come up and ask, "Who are you, really?" I am one with what I am talking about. They didn't understand that. I couldn't think of a self which was not constituted by residence among all the living cells that are. Selfhood is a relational thing. I am constituted by my amongness.

This tape ends with another student comment: Just because you've been brought up close to nature doesn't mean you have the right attitude toward it.

## **Tape 2. Side A.**

Sittler's response to the question asked at the end of Tape 1 begins this tape. A secondary appreciation of nature is possible. You may not need a pastoral background. Sittler continues with some reflections about the United Nations.

*End of session; no more on this tape.*

## **1985 The Life and Mission of the Congregation** *UFM, November 2*

(The quality of this tape is poor; there is a lot of background noise.)

### **Side A.**

Sittler begins by talking about the root of the word **congregation**. We must question some assumptions we have traditionally held about "the congregation."

Let's look at some history. The Norwegian immigrants were, for the most part, not churchmen. Church for them in the U.S. was a center for nostalgic reflection. (The same holds for the Swedes and Germans.) To think about the future of the congregation, we must recall that the constitution of a congregation was not a purely religious, spiritual, devout thing. Forces which were constitutive of these congregations have been totally annihilated for our children. We don't need them in the same way as our grandfathers did.

**Assumptions for a new time:** "Nature" has replaced the word "creation." Is my self-hood a phrase for a chemical particularity? We must not let our children believe it is. Look at these words: "redemption" and "damnation." Your sins will do you in! We can no longer assume the continuity of language and images. We must relate old phrases to new fears.

**We must critique our assumptions. Look afresh at the facts. What must we change in order to intersect current reality? How does this affect the seminary?**

What does the church have to say to an **aging** population?

Sittler offers some good stories about the church's relationship with the aging.

### *Questions and answers.*

On the matter of our identity... Recollection, traditions are being annihilated. Identity formation will have to be taken afresh. The task of the sermon will have to be rethought. Seminaries will have to confront this problem, even to their admissions standards. "The kind of analysis that has to take place is not for the boobs." Ordinary nice gals and guys can't cut the teaching office because they're not bright enough. Sittler says, "I writhe in church when I hear a sermon begin with 'Dear Christian friends,' because this is too restricting."

Physicists are now talking like poets, not scientists. We're not, in the church, talking like poets anymore but trying to provide answers. Is it possible that **cognition by amazement** may operate in the future? Cognition by recognition or the familiar may fail to operate. There is so much work going on now in the interpretation of the parables. They don't relate the way things are but the way God is. This is cognition by astonishment... This may be the way we have to preach. Sittler recommends several pieces of literature relevant to what he has been talking about: John Berryman's Eleven Addresses to the Lord, and "Love in Pain; Richard Wilbur's "Advice to a Prophet"; G. M. Hopkins' "Spring."

*The tape ends in mid-sentence while Sittler is talking about a sermon on a parable he preached at Yale. He was going to tell about the reaction to the sermon he heard after the service, but his story is cut off.*

*Side B is blank.*

## **1986 Inauguration of J. W. Vannorsdall** *LTS Philadelphia, April 20*

**Side A** contains the musical prelude, worship, remarks by Bishop Crumley.

**Side B.** Installation, followed by remarks from J. W. V.

### **Sittler's remarks:**

Sittler cites The Lively Experiment by Sidney Mead in which the author discusses Davenport's 1684 election-day sermon. "We have been dispatched by God and by history on an errand into the wilderness to create in this place a city on a hill, a light in the wilderness." Why is this an appropriate text for us today?

Currently, we are in the midst of deepest cultural change. J. S. tells the story of Ann's geography book in comparison to his, with the frontispiece of the Milky Way in hers. He cites the differences between our ways of knowing in his youth and Ann's, and talks about the amplification of our vocabulary.

We (Christians/Lutherans) need to lead the march into the wilderness. Our speech, our way of talking about the presence of the Holy must intersect the size of the world and the nature of our experience of that world.

However, the church can experience "transmission trouble." The act of transmitting the tradition is one which we are loathe to undertake because it is difficult. You have an opportunity to transmit the tradition by renewing the language and looking with a fresh and critical gaze at the adequacy of older formulations, not to declare them untrue but to ask, are they big enough, flexible enough, to give with the ways of knowing which characterize our culture.

## **1986 "Preaching: The Narrative of Experience" –**

### **A Conversation With Joseph Sittler** *Professional Leadership Conference,*

*LSTC, April 22*

*(Moderated by Morris Niedenthal, Charles Rice)*

### **Side A.**

Sittler begins by defining terms. The meaning of "experience" must be carefully discriminated. There are 3 aspects to it. 1) What I myself have undergone in my own body. This is a fatal way to use the word if we're going to use it to mean the kind of experience with which the gospel must interact.

If I use the word only in that way, the story of the Christian gospel will be awfully compressed, if I judge it within the little brackets of my personal experience. 2) Vicarious experiences. I know Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius, even though I never met them. Those things which become my experience through reading. 3) Not only the actual eventfulness of human life but the possibilities we experience.

Narrative as a device in preaching is not only ancient but necessary.

Charles Rice says, The liturgy is the most important vehicle we have for appropriating to ourselves the tradition of the past. It is in liturgy that we understand best what we believe. He then asks Sittler a question about narrative and story.

Sittler: I early realized the theological importance of the narrative character of the stories of redemption. Something that occurred in time. There was a time when there was no incarnation, etc. The theological importance of the fundamental being declared in temporal sequence. The historicalness of the redemptive event is a kind of divine congruity with the mortality of my human event. It moves through time. If it's going to intersect me it must take upon itself my timeliness.

**All preaching is triply organic:** to a time, to a place, and to particular personalities. Preaching is an event; it is non-repeatable.

There have been certain **continuing obediences in my preaching** right from the beginning.

1) Listen to what the text says. Study it in the context of the total utterance. Listen to what the man said by trying to get it into the language in which he said it.

2) Take the text beyond the text. What's going on here?

3) Get the plane of the sermon beyond the field where it took off. Try to have a schedule for this flight.

Questions and answers, from Niedenthal, Rice and the audience, on many topics including: Ricouer's idea about the written text taking on a life of its own; the use of stories in sermons; Sittler's father's preaching ("It was theologically conventional. What I learned from my father he never intended to teach me. He read the scriptures with love, clarity and warmth to give the impression he was reading the text for the first time and wasn't it wonderful. It was his communicative quality, with a sense of awe, adoration and affection that ought to characterize the preacher preaching to his flock. Preach a sermon that matches what you've just read (i.e., the text))."

## Side B.

More questions. What else would you like to share with those who are

preaching today? Sittler: Talking to preachers about preaching and study in preparation for preaching is one of the least satisfactory experiences of my life. They like it, applaud it, they want you to keep on doing it, but they don't do it. I suggest the latest books on NT interpretation or on the parables, for example, but then discover they have bought books on "how to" rather than "what of."

Other questions: How much of the preacher's life, faith and personality should be in the sermon? Isn't there a place for idiosyncratic language? What about the paradox between language and God (preaching about the ineffable)? What happens when the well runs dry? ("Take charge of your own time. You can't put it out if you don't put it in. Keep alive; read!")

Another question: Can you speak about the expectations of the laity as to what preaching should be in light of one minute commercials and short news stories? "We can't beat them at their own business so let's give up trying. We are not in the entertainment business. What the laity wants doesn't have anything to do with what our obligation is. You are ordained to the ministry of the Word and sacraments and that means more than good pastoral words. What they want is an amiable guy who will make the church grow and raise the budget. Don't be the product of a seminary stamping plant, that turns out the hubcaps that the church says she wants. Take charge of yourself, decide what your calling requires.

Another question about preaching on controversial matters (and Robert Schuller's reluctance to do so). Last question is about the relationship between prayer and preaching. "I'm sure there is some, but I can't speak to it. I'm not a person for whom organized, structured prayer has been a part of my life. I love Paul's statement, to pray without ceasing. Prayer, to me, is a constant conversation between myself and my fellows and the awesome reality of God. I am so recalcitrant a theologian that God is always in the mix.

**1986 Congregational Health Partnerships** *Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, Il., December 1.*

#### **Side A.**

What is the mission of the church? What of the church of the future? Is our coming merger just an administrative shake-up?

How do we stay faithful to the gospel?

What does the crisis in Christendom mean for **theological education**? How do we prepare a ministry for Christ's church?

Several years ago, in a directive to the seminaries, the LCA wanted pastors who were energetic, good administrators, amiable good fellows and acceptable public speakers. Joseph Sittler.: "I have no interest in turning out genial nincompoops." (See original purpose of Harvard College.)

Rather, the church needs those who are critical and intellectually equipped. The church may not know what it needs, but we have always had a few prophets who have.

To this particular group:

Make sure you have a proper theological base; know how you will fit and make sure this is not just a marketing gimmick.

What are you going to do when you are too old to be a yuppie?

Many seminarians are not preparing for a vocation or calling, but a career.

### **Side B.**

The secular culture does not prepare us for aging.

What does Sittler mean by "stupid preaching?" The pastor reads the text but doesn't think about what it says. Instead, his/her sermons contain moralistic statements, i.e. be a nice guy, contribute to the United Way, etc. Students don't torment themselves with the texts. Instead, they want to know how to get kids on an overnight, how to make the church a part of the social community.

You have to be uncomfortable to be creative. Find new ways to preach the message. Lutherans have overdone it in making too great a distinction between law and gospel.

This program should not be a substitute for the preaching, teaching mission of the church. There must be attention to spiritual health, the whole person.

Sittler tells about a visit he made a week ago to a Methodist (nursing) Home on Fullerton. He talked to residents about how to maintain their sense of personhood. Celebrate **aging** by remembrance; it's O. K. to talk about the pathos of aging. Don't baby the aged, play with them or divert them.

## **Sittler Recordings without Dates**

### **Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogues (Joseph Sittler and Father Jerome Theisen) *Place unknown***

#### **Side A.**

Begins with Father Theisen summarizing the results of the **Lutheran- Roman Catholic dialogues**. Topics thus far discussed:



- 1) Difference in the way dogma is established.
- 2) The nature of baptism.
- 3) The Eucharist and the Mass.
- 4) Ministry in the church.
- 5) Petrine ministry- papal primacy. The dialogue is now involved with the issue of papal infallibility.

**Ecumenism today.** The importance of hospitality. Paul insists on special care for those who belong to the household of the Christian faith. Mutual concern on the part of believers is a sign of their unity. It is a sign of the way God accepts us. Hospitality imitates the generosity of God. Mutual concern expressed in acceptance and hospitality is a witness to those who do not believe in Christ.

We are concerned with the church on the local level. The local church is united with the universal church by bonds of faith and prayer and by life in the Lord Jesus. It is the **local church that provides new experiences, new visions, new avenues of action.** Ecumenism is a matter of local involvement, inspiration. **The hospitable local church is the primary locus of ecumenism today.**

Hospitality does not mean that we erase all the differences. It is the acceptance of others even in their differences. Those belonging to the household of faith need not have the same expressions of faith, need not have one form of church leadership, one manner of congregational life, pursue one mode of mission and work. Theologians have always responded to the problems of the day, influenced by political, philosophical, social patterns of the day. However, some expressions of Christian reality are inadequate, if not actually false. All the differences need not be accepted as equal. Hospitality does not mean the remaking of the other group. Each group brings richness to the dialogue.

**Common work and witness.** We give witness to the sacred and transcendent. We can speak out against various forms of idolatry. Hospitality on the local level = a sign of unity of mankind. Local groups can read and study the Bible together; schedule common prayer sessions; form covenant relationships; share facilities, lectures, common retreats; examine peace issues; assist the poor. Leaders can meet together to share concerns, problems, make use of communications media, institute common actions in the promotion of better housing, etc. Our common witness will be a sign which commands credibility for Christianity. We can set up our effort to promote a just society. Christians can be prophets to each other. Hospitality does not exclude a mutual recommendation of improvement. We can point up areas that need improvement, i.e., a specific mode of action may be divisive (restrictive promises in marriages between Christians of different traditions, for example). This is the end of the Theisen presentation.

#### **Sittler presentation:**

Sittler first comments on Theisen's summary of the **Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues.** In the section about the Eucharist, there was discussion about the reservation of the host. Theisen understated the degree of agreement reached on the doctrine of the Eucharist. The report states, "We find no doctrinal reason why there should not be

inter-communion between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.” Sittler says this point has been “put in the bottom drawer.”

Sittler next will “put a lot on the table” about his **perspective and experiences surrounding the ecumenical movement**. In 1927, when he was about to enter the seminary, he heard his mother say, “Dammit, God is not a Lutheran!” He quotes Henry Adams in Mont St. Michel and Chartres: “From an empty heaven, a forgotten virgin looks down into a deserted church.”

### **Side B.**

The language, symbols, images and discourse of the church continuing to penetrate life so as to give meaning- these have been in diminution as well as the statistical tabulation of those who attend it. **Faith and Order Conferences**: At first (1930), the group was trying to reformulate the generally accepted out of our various traditions. In 1970, the task is to re-propose the generally forgotten. The task of Christian theology must propose what has become utterly strange to millions. (Growth of secularism) **The use of Scripture in the church**- that is what we all had in common in the beginning of our ecumenical discussions. An intense study of the Bible took place in order to find our common roots. At the same time occurred a profound, exciting restudy of the nature of the Biblical material. At the end of the 1940’s, the whole Bible blew up in our face. Paul Ricoeur observed that when anything becomes a written text, it escapes the intentionality of the writer. It takes to itself a life of its own, leans into the future. The meaning of a text is out in front of the text. Example: Ophelia’s song in Hamlet: “Full fathoms five my father lies.” We can’t climb into Shakespeare’s intentionality, but the text has a meaning for us now which may not be identical with that of the writer. The Bible in our time has exploded into a new and freshly discovered form of discourse about God and man in the world. It has an authority not imposed by doctrine but an authority intrinsic in the allure and force and truth of the text itself.

### **Another element in the ecumenical movement- we studied one another’s traditions.**

We did not end up with a unified understanding.

(The era of comparative ecclesiology) We ended up with two things:

- 1) A much clearer understanding of one another and a more cheerful willingness to endow one another’s positions with some measure of truth and
- 2) there is no one systematic in which the comprehensive of the catholic vivacity and power of the Christian gospel can be articulated, formulated, transmitted, made into catechesis, etc. The profundity of our embarrassment is the ground of our hope. We have learned, I think, that the task of the achievement of the unity of Christ’s church cannot be achieved by making a fresh amalgam of comparative theology or ecclesiology.

**The task ahead of us:** It is with a freshly recovered Scripture, a more sophisticated understanding of tradition, with a deepened understanding of the “pathos of the historical,” that we confront the problem of modernity. There must be fresh theological constructions out of freshly recovered Biblical insights and a freshly fashioned vocabulary for specification and transmission.

Illustrations: Karl Rahner, in Nature and Grace, says the ordinary Catholic faithful

cannot explain the meaning of grace though he says he believes in it. The immediacy of grace, the presence of grace in the individual life, of this he may remain spiritually ignorant. We must speak with a new intersection with the actualities of our common life. Ask the Protestant about grace: what effect has the certainty of God's gracious interpenetration of this world got upon your life, your behavior? He will find it difficult to say anything. For an instance: Sittler has tried to restore the meaning of grace to the doctrine of creation. If I live in grace, I will deal graciously with all that God has made.

Epigrams: Tradition is remembering the continuity and the long enrichment of human existence. It is making a bow in the direction of the intelligence of our forebears. In our American ears, tradition has a pejorative sound.

Jaroslav Pelikan says that we must make a distinction between traditionalism and Tradition [*cf. Pelikan, The Vindication of Tradition*]. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition is the living faith of the dead.

### **Question and answer period.**

1) About the intentionality of the writer. Exegesis is still necessary.

2) About the Eucharist. Of particular concern are local practices without the official sanction of the church. Sittler says the course of the church is not determined by its leaders.

3) How do you reconcile different interpretations of the common Word? Sittler says it is almost an unanswerable question. Read the Scripture in such a way as to break it loose from what you want it to mean, to protect what you have always understood before. The Bible is inexhaustible in its fresh, flexible address to my own problems, to the issues of the time, to the nature of things.

Theisen says a common consensus may grow within the whole church. Perhaps we do not need the exact same statement for expressing various aspects of the reality of Christ or the church.

## **Modern Day Demands Upon the Christian Tradition**

*Place unknown*

**Side A.** Sittler begins by talking about **ethics** and natural law. Lutherans are obtuse about the notion of "Torah." Tells story of the auto mechanic at Ramalah and the meaning of the word "righteousness." What is the good as over against evil? What is the nature of justice? Guidance for the "common good." **Decisions about life and death.** "I don't know what the will of God is." To be ethical in our day will be not only to be in command of past ideas and motivations toward ethicality but the center of ethical life has moved from obedience to the clear to the active judgment within legal determinants. Refers to examples in contemporary literature and an AMA Journal article by Father John McCormick, "To Live or Let Die." At the end of Side A, James Wallis begins "The Open Hand of Relinquishment" which is continued on Side B.

## **Certainty (Certitude) and Mystery: The Dynamics of Church**

**Renewal.** *Presentation to an ALC/LCA Cluster Gathering in Colorado, possibly 1976 or 1977. (THE TAPE IS UNFORTUNATELY MISSING FROM THE ARCHIVE)*

**Side A.** Has a long introduction. Sittler begins by defining “**certainty.**” The word shouldn’t be used in connection with faith. Rather, use “**certitude.**” He goes on to analyze the title of his presentation: what did you mean? what do you want me to talk about? Reflections on Sittler’s use of the **Colossians text at New Delhi.** He talks about the **living word (dabar, logos). How do we talk about eternal life?**

There is a need for fresh perspectives about that term. There is too much egocentricity surrounding our thoughts about what happens after death. Sittler recommends two books: Willy Martin’s The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and Reginald Fuller’s Formation of Resurrection Narrative.

## **Spirituality; the meaning of the religious right.**

*Pacific Lutheran Seminary*

### **Side A.**

J. S. is introduced by Robert Herhold, who reads his poem "The Old Brooder." This is Sittler's "4th annual farewell visit to the west coast."

J. S. begins by saying that he is always somewhat embarrassed when he is described as a systematic theologian. "My way of reflection is too non-sequential to be described as systematic."

**Spirituality.** The word has its origin in Roman Catholic practice. Candidates for the priesthood have a "spiritual director" in theological education, and a discipline of reading the breviary, reading about the heroes of the church, and praying meditatively. Sittler can't find an equivalent in Protestant theological education, but students are now asking for this. Desire for this is because of the "spatteredness" of modern life. There is no time for reflection. The Oxford Dictionary definition of spirituality: a way of meditative life in which inwardness is matured.

Reflections on the **quality of current preaching.** "The most powerful evidence I have of the Divine Providence whereby the church continues in history is the fact that it is still here despite the appalling leanness of the sermon." Sittler's advice to the preacher: Fight the text. We must not preach doctrine; the particularity of each text is, thus, honored. Don't take a text and ask what doctrine of the church it points to.

**Spirituality** is not a mystical mystery. It can come in several ways and is a gift of grace. It doesn't depend on sophistication or education. Spirituality is not

unrelated to gathering the data and listening to the actuality of human existence and then letting that come up against the absurdity of the Word.

What do we do about preaching? Let's not put the juicy, earthy reality of the text within a doctrinal category, into a dogmatic proposition.  
How else do we grow in spirituality?

1. We are tempted to make ideas out of events. The text must not escape the encounter with the reflective life. "There's more here than meets the eye."
2. Preachers ought to develop a contrapuntal competence in another area of knowledge. They should deepen their knowledge of the profoundest aspects of our human reality in such a way that calls deep unto deep. This competence should not be in theology or religion.

Sittler speaks of the importance of language and linguistics. He tells the preacher: go back and find out what the words meant in the language in which they were written.

"Any spirituality I've been able to develop has come by passing data through my cerebrum and reflecting upon what might this thing mean under the surface of the obvious and the perfectly clear?"

What might be the meaning of the rapid rise and development of the **religious right**?

The human mind and spirit have become uncomfortable in the midst of ambiguity. Our 20th century life is full of ambiguity and complexity. The mind wants clarity, simplicity, and easy answers instead of depth.

The religious right has an unambiguous way of speaking about the God relationship which does an end run around every difficulty in the gospel. Faith and doubt exist together. Simplified piety and superheated patriotism seem to go together in the sermons from the religious right.

#### **Side B.**

**Religious right**, (continued). We must not love our country for a reason [*Sittler cites Chesterton on this point*]. We should love our country because she is our country, our place.

How can an evangelical catholic church, where we have our roots, respond to this situation? We are asking, wrongly, of the religious right, "What are they doing in such a way that we might, by imitating it, do better?" We think we have to find a way of slipping with lubricated ease into the cultural requirements of the place. That is sudden death, not faithfulness to the gospel.

How do we be the church? St. Paul says that it is required of stewards that they be found faithful- not successful. Sittler says the Lutheran church will never be very successful in terms of the meaning of "successful." We are called to be witnesses. The church exists to be, to bear witness to, to point to, to be a cadre

of the discontented.

Even in failure we must not despair.

We must develop in our witness and life insight, an internal reflection, perception, a listening ear to the internal music of the church's praise, and then to know it is that which is the church's treasure.

There will be temptations to do the right thing in an inappropriate way, so the kernel of the appropriate message is completely silenced by the inappropriateness of the means. We must bear witness by the means, language, habits and style which are appropriate to that which we are proposing.

## **Preaching From Structure** *United Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA*

Sittler is addressing a group at a Presbyterian seminary; he makes references to "President McCord." These were speeches given while Sittler was at the University of Chicago, and not long after the New Delhi gathering in 1961. One of the presentations was made on or near Ash Wednesday. The tape has spots which are difficult/impossible to hear. There are three lectures on two tapes.

### **Tape 1.**

#### **Side A.**

Sittler outlines the concerns which he will address:

- 1. The concept of ecology as a proper Christian category. How Christian faith comes about. The difficulty in contemporary preaching is this:** Preaching is largely torn loose from the ancient ecology in the worshiping life of the church. It floats with a kind of moralistic nakedness above the actual ecological matrix in which faith has been historically formed and which it ought to be addressed in preaching.
- 2. How is the language used in preaching and teaching related to Biblical language?**
- 3. A procedure for the preacher in sermons.**

There is a renaissance in Biblical theology and a waning of 19th century alliances with philosophical, moral systems along with an interest in the particular nature of Biblical discourse.

Sittler tells about lectures he heard at Oberlin (while he was serving a congregation in Ohio) given by a church historian who maintained that the history of Christian thought needs to pay more attention to the "barbarians," not just to Hellas, Rome and the West. This historian wrote a book called The Legend of the Great King which chronicled the Oriental stories and legends about the great kings of light who were succeeded by those with whom the glory (light) dwelt, and not by primogeniture. The king ruled by these devices: His deputies were called the **friends of the king**. The friend speaks in the king's name and is a personal extension of the king. The friend is known because the king divests himself of his garment and puts it on the friend. Also, the king celebrated with a great dinner with his friends. In the legend, there are two kinds of righteousness, i.e., what men ought to do. In the first, men are forced by law to rightness, but in the second,

friends are under royal righteousness and operate with the law-making power of the king himself.

With this background, read the Biblical narratives. The **cross is the garment of the king**. The **friends participate in his nature**. His presence is your presence and you are his presence in the world. Sittler points out how, operating with these organic concepts, rather than with Western ontological and propositional concepts, how with these concepts, certain teachings, particularly in the Pauline epistles, leap with life. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."

What does this mean for **ethics**? Ethics is the extension of the fellowship of the king. Royal righteousness which knows and honors the law always presses at the confines of all law in order to bring together the will of the great king and the needs and orders of men.

The understanding of the **rule of Christ** among his own has come back into contemporary theology. Sittler refers to Gustav Aulen's emphasis on *Christus Victor*. A ninth or tenth century poem of great meaning for Sittler was "The Dream of the Rood," by a Northumbrian named Kinnewolf. It speaks of the hero of God, God's knight. In the ninth century, this dream was still alive; an understanding of Christ out of contact with official Catholic theology.

**How does all this help the preacher?** The church understood this interior ecology of Biblical speech by the way it used the Bible, i.e., establishing the **Christian liturgical year** by which the organic character of the action of grace should be made clear to the common life through preaching. The advantages to **preaching from structure**, rather than of topical preaching, gives integrity to the pastoral task. When this structure disappeared (in some denominations) it was a great loss. The advantages to preaching from structure are that it gives focus, offers an episodic richness in tracing the progress in the life of our Lord, and removes the congregation from the tyranny of pastoral idiosyncracies.

#### **Illustrations: For Epiphany, Lent and St. Michael and All Angels.**

In these illustrations, Sittler suggests how the texts and pericopes can be used together to proclaim the message.

**Epiphany I.** Light has come into the world. The Christian community is formed by this light in historical motion. Sittler reads from Ephesians 3, and points out how this epistle, the collect, the introit and the gospel cohere.

Sittler talks about the importance of the church year and its rhythm. Through Christian history, even up to the turn of the century in England, the people's year was governed by the liturgical year. Everyone understood the progress of the year.

Sittler continues to examine, in detail, the propers and texts for the Epiphany season. In Epiphany, the role of light is a major image. Use this accent to elevate this message. Recall the role of light in Augustine's theology.

## Side B.

In continuing with the theme of light, Sittler goes on to examine the pericopes and scripture for the **Lenten season**. A Roman Catholic theologian and literary critic, William Lynch of Fordham, wrote a book called Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination. It is an examination of the structure of contemporary drama. Lynch talks about the path of images; we must go through the finite, the limited, the definite, the thick facticity of the world. He makes a typology of 4 ways in which he believes the literary imagination deals with the definiteness of man's contemporary predicament. Imagination operates among us in 4 ways:

1. The great barrier to evangelical vision is spirituality. A too-quick spiritualization of things prevents the mind from encompassing the finitude of things. (See Proust.) Exploitation of the real.
2. Some desire to touch the finite as lightly as possible to rebound into the self. (Proust again.)
3. Imagination of the double vacuum: the 2 vacuums of heaven and earth. An escape into a tenuous world of infinite bliss. The facts are used, not as a challenging wilderness through which one must penetrate but as an annealing place of an angelic judgment. We go from the facts into some angelic rhetoric. There is no gracious content except as cosmetic one. (See Archibald MacLeish's JB.)
4. Facers of fact. Earth is hell revisited. Accept the absurdity and limitation of reality with nerve, sincerity, courage and authenticity. Quarrel between Graham Greene and Camus. Recall the existentialist literature of this generation.

The problem of the imagination confronted by the concrete is to avoid this dichotomy. The attitude I [*Sittler*] am proposing as a model for it is exemplified in Christology where the conflict has been resolved once and for all. "He that descended also ascended that he might fill all things." We need go no further than the earthly, concrete, limited Christ and descend with him for the grasping of everything. As Lynch wrote, "Our Lord went through all the aspect of man's immemorial predicament in actuality." This understanding of the Christian life as being a reenactment of God's word in the activity of the son of God is the oldest understanding of the Christian faith we have: **The Christian life is the responding parabola to grace**. Sittler continues with this parabolic image: Note the luminousness of the Nativity stories, their celebration of light. The Gospels are the story of the downward course of that line as it penetrates our human career, down to the nadir at the bottom of the sweeping circle where stands the moment of the absolute dereliction and the sign of the cross. The line does not stop there, but goes on and through, ending where it began.

Paul's talk about the Christian life takes the same shape as the circle of the Incarnation. By knowing Christ, I must reenact in the drama of my own existence this existence of God in His Son, and thus become a son of God. I must die with Him, dying to self.

In the Lenten season, we celebrate the travel and victory of the **light**. We are led into Advent through the dark prison of John the Baptist. We are led into Lent through the dark place of the temptation of our Lord. He that is to be the Messiah must learn how he must be the Messiah, - not by a pure effulgence of the holy but by a bitter beating-out of the tasks of the holy, within our human finitude and within our history.



The second Sunday in Lent: The church uses the Lenten Sundays to lead the worshipping people of God through the episodic coursing of her Lord so the faithful may be attended in their earthly course and pray that they may be lifted up into the Head by reenactment in their own lives. The **Gospel** for the day is John 6:1-15, the **miracle of the loaves and fishes**. The care for the definite is itself a bearer of grace. Bread is not kind of a wall off of which a spiritual lesson is to be gained, that is, that this bread is the bread of heaven. No, the bread in the New Testament is always real bread, the real presence, which is itself as bread a carrier, the finite can contain the infinite and therefore you are not just to use this bread and having made a nice spiritual lesson, toss out the bread. Care for this carrier of grace- "gather up the crumbs."

The third Sunday in Lent: The **Gospel** is Matthew 15: 21-28, **the Canaanite woman whose daughter was sick**. (An aside, to begin: "We do too much preaching about things on which the New Testament is silent.") Sermons devoted to the topic of "testing the faith" are nonsensical. We must be shoved off our security before the gift shall be given. Jesus has to get the woman to the point where she isn't dealing with him or treating him as a disposable source of good for her own purposes, but she comes to the point where she falls down to worship and simply cries, "Help, Lord."

The fourth Sunday in Lent's **Gospel** is the **story of Beelzebub**, in Luke 11: 14-28, a story of the battering of grace through the hard doors of our idolatry.

**The entry into Jerusalem:** The epistle is from Philippians 2: 5-11. Public worship was meant to be the dramatic reenactment of this parabola of grace in order that our own parabola, our own responding faithfulness may be formed in Christ.

Sittler refers to an article in the Journal of Religion, "Grace and Freedom Reconsidered," by Joseph Haroutunian, in which he writes that we have understood the grace of God in Augustinian terms and continue to operate with an Augustinian schema long after the facts of our life have made it impossible to do so. Sittler reviews Augustine on grace: he treated grace as holy substance. But now, in a post-Newtonian universe, we view things in a different way. The analogy of all things in relationship permits us to re-understand the grace of God meeting us in the neighbor. Our present view is more like the Biblical view, i.e., as Biblical speech is organic and relational, so is the forming of the contemporary vocabulary of modern man thoroughly organic and relational. Refers to G. M. Hopkins' "The Soldier."

**Tape 2.** (*The quality of this tape is not good.*)  
**Side A.**

(Sittler begins by commenting that he was on a panel "last month" in New York City with Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie, exploring the possible usefulness of the jazz idiom in the worship of the church.)

The topic this morning is worship. What will be the effect of the Orthodox churches becoming a part of the World Council of Churches?

The **meaning of catholicity**. Sittler wants to talk about two festivals which will illumine the meaning of this word. "The fullness and wholeness of Christ's church" is the meaning of catholicity, as over against provincial, partial, restricted, fragmented. For example, the liturgical year is a catholic tradition. Sittler examines the meaning of the participation of the Orthodox in the ecumenical conversation. We must **expand our Western understanding of**

- 1) **theological method**: the Orthodox method is theocentric and metaphysical, while ours, characterized by attention to the problems of *anthropos*, is moral;
- 2) **Biblical interpretation**: the Orthodox is dramatic rather than notional;
- 3) **comprehension of life in the church as life in the mystical body**.

Sittler invites the group to look at two **devotional practices of Orthodoxy**:

1. Devotion to the **blessed virgin**. The eternal feminine belongs to the fullness of the Godhead. Protestants have not given enough attention to her. Instead, we sublimate it in the mawkish extravaganza of Mothers' Day. We have raised Mothers' Day to the status of a liturgical feast.

2. **St. Michael and All Angels**. Sittler first refers to All Saints Day, defining the saints as "all them that believe." The saints in the New Testament were the gathered company around the Eucharist. Look at the language of the collect for the day: "God, who hast knit together thine elect...". Moving on to St. Michael and All Angels, Sittler talks about angels. What is the intention of the symbol of angels in the Biblical stories? Angels are a symbol of humanity in its uncorrupted God relationship (see Reinhold Seeberg).

Sittler reads the introit, collect and epistle from Revelation for St. Michael. What does this narrative say? Michael is God's man. God is involved in man's struggles. We do not walk alone, but we walk within the company of all them who, out of demonic possession, have been called to be knit together into one mystical fellowship in the name of the One who on earth destroyed the demons. Everything in our humanistic culture today tempts us to ignore this and to accent the isolation of the lonely human creature.

St. Michael is God's warrior, the symbol of the heroic God, crucified and risen, only after sharing our private crucifixions and risen only after sharing our societal crucifixions, this man of God, this action of God as the hero, symbolized in St. Michael, God's and Christ's angel, is a massive symbol that moves with dramatic substance into our often too-theoretical life of worship. The feast of St. Michael and All Angels reminds us that the Satanic cannot be silenced by the soporific. That Christian worship remembers that the Son of God in the wilderness of this concrete world was himself attended by angels, that Christ himself did not do it all alone. This is God's doing. When angels attended him in the garden, we are told that it is not Christ in the power even of his being the second person of the Trinity, but always the work of the whole Trinity. Just as we are locked together in a bundle of evil so also we are in the church locked together in a bundle of grace.

In Lund, 1951, at the Faith and Order Conference, Prof. Ionides from the Orthodox church was asked what the church means by its prayers to the dead. He and his colleagues explained that no man is really dead in God, but the church is the eternal company of them that are alive in God. Are these believers not alive with the present company and is not prayer the bloodstream in the body of Christ? In our prayers we do

not remember the dead as sources of salvation, but as the accompanying fellowship of the saved.

**What may these festivals do for the liberation of our particularity and our fragmented church life into truly catholic fullness of worship?**

J. Barzun defined a liberal education as the invitation to every generation to join the human race. It is an expansion of selfhood. Another quote, from Quiller-Couch, about what (the reading of) literature accomplishes. Against that analogy, the drama of catholic Christian worship sinks this combat and delight of each man's life into the drama of the heart of God. **Worship is the church's liberal education.**

Sittler reads the Gospel for St. Michael and All Angels, Matthew 18:1: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones..." Referring to the phrase "little ones," Sittler points out that the Greek word used is not the word for "baby" or "child," but "*mikroi*," meaning the lost, the people who do the world's work and have no great position, the unacknowledged people of the world. Take heed that you despise not the little ones.

**Side B.**

Some repetition from Side A. Continuing to talk about the "little ones," Sittler goes on with the passage, "their angels in heaven always regard the face of my father which is in heaven." Sittler says: "It is a troubling verse, but I will suggest this much in the way of interpretation: the involvement and enfolding of grace of every man in the regard of God....may I suggest something of what this means- that we are thus enfolded and regarded is the intention of the theological doctrine of the Imago Dei." In the context of Christian worship, the church is pessimistic about man, but she is optimistic about God. There follows a summary of what Christian worship should do.

*Lecture ends with Sittler's prayer.*

**Components for Ecological Reflection** *Boston Theological Institute*  
(Thesis Theological Cassettes, Vol. II #7)

There are 4 speakers on this tape with no indication that their presentations were made at the same time or for the same occasion.

1. Dr. Robert McAfee Brown: "Uses of the Past."
2. The Reverend Kenneth Bailey: "The Unjust Steward."
3. Dr. Rene Dubos: "Creative Stewardship of the Earth ."
- 4. Dr. Joseph Sittler: "Components for Ecological Reflection."**

Sittler was introduced as a theologian from the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, so that helps to identify the time of the presentation.

Sittler wants to suggest a minimum catalogue of components which must be built in to a

proper **theological reflection about ecology.**

1. **The theater of grace** in Biblical literature must be re-understood, reassessed, and permitted to surprise us again. The Old Testament speaks of the benevolent disposition of God toward all that he has made. Man has an existence which is a subsistence within the existence of God, he has an existence whose primary human component is the other, and he has a third component which is the garden. There is no Hebrew word for the notion of nature. Instead, it is referred to as “what God has made.”

Sittler discusses the New Testament doctrine of Christ in Colossians and Ephesians. There is no low Christology in the NT. Sittler then makes some remarks about the cosmic meaning of Christ.

2. A new look at the **Augustinian tradition.** Augustine says that the concern of theology is God and the soul. The inadequacy of that axis to enclose and administer the tasks of Christian theology has been exposed for me. The Augustinian schematization of how grace is related to nature moves within categories that are bounded by man as psyche and man as history. They do not permit you to move into larger placement of man as nature. We must not try to make the Augustinian understanding of grace adequate to the kind of problems we now confront.

During the Faith and Order conferences 6 years ago and then 3 years ago, Sittler realized that the Christos Immolator of the West is the *Christos Pantocrator* of the East: the living, reigning Lord, his arms outstretched in sovereignty and grace over the whole of the creation.

We do not read the eighth chapter of Romans’ implications amply enough if we do not read that enigmatic passage that the whole creation writhes in anguish waiting for the disclosure of the reality of the power of God when men act like children of God.

3. **The operational reality of contemporary man and the psychologizing of his identity quest.** Modern man defines himself by what he does. His “isness” is his “doesness.” Man is constituted by his residency and his transactions with the world as nature, and the diminishment which we are witnessing in the sensibility and the clarity and the contours of felt depth in the modern man as realized in theater, short story, film,.. this crisis of the self is in large measure due to our forgetfulness of that.

“It is of the heart of sin that men use what they ought to enjoy and enjoy what they ought to use.”

## **Dogma and Doxa: The text and the accompaniment**

*Place unknown, date is after 1972.*

### **Side A.**

This was apparently an address made to a gathering that was focused on the future of worship in the church. The conference was under Lutheran auspices. Sittler begins by talking about the function of a keynote address.

He then continues by asking if it is possible to discern any process of solidification among the many tumultuous movements, issues, demolitions and reconstructions that have characterized Christian theological reflection since WW II. Is it possible to discern any centers of concern that are becoming persistent and steady that promise a kind of pattern, a density? Sittler thinks there are and shall try to name them and ask after their meaning and possible guidance for the future of Christian worship.

One theme is that of eschatology. Albert Schweitzer's Quest for the Historical Jesus was a turning in a new direction for Biblical studies. The life world, the thought world, the spiritually envisioned world of Jesus and the testimony to him in the first century was radically eschatological. By eschatological, Schweitzer meant and we still mean today, is a sense of the promise and pathos of historical life, under and within the brackets of the powers of the Divine Life.

A summary statement of the Christian way of being in the world is a new horizon for all contemplation, faith, and action, is given by what Sittler calls the "drenchedness" of the Christian understanding of life in the eschatological. That new horizon underlies the paradoxical structure and fabric of the Christian life, even its language. We have life in death, death in life...; we are to bear one another's burdens, every man must bear his own burden, and we are to cast our burden upon the Lord. This is utter nonsense except within an eschatological horizon. Christian faith within history has not been annihilated. Why? Because from the eschatological angle every active verb has its roots deeply sunk in the ineffable passive. The active verb "to know" is both qualified and released from its qualification by the passive "I have been known." "To love"... "I have been beloved." God has promised, God has determined, God has willed.

The purpose of this conference will not be served if the eschatological is affirmed to be formative merely of early Christian life, thought and experience. This way of man's being in the world has so permeated all historical life in the West, persisted even if unacknowledged, that the very story and substance of Western culture would not be the thing it is save for the strange boundless within the humanly bounded.

The literature of the West cannot tear itself loose from the twin pathos and allure of the exploration of the moral as that moral quest has been complicated by the Christian eschatological.

There is a second force at work to call the mind of this generation to the reality that tradition has known as eschatological. Finitude is a cosmic fact before it is an element of personal knowledge. We are being told that our assumptions of inexhaustible resources and energy are a dream. Ecological fact is eschatology operating as nature.

A second theme around which there seems to be solidification: The reopening of the ways of knowing and of discourse. Reflect on the demolition of assumptions and loyalties, the shattering of ideal portraits of justice and rationality and a good life, that is the fundamental fact of our culture for the past fifteen years.

Basic to all of this is a radical reduction of the meaning of the human. It is this diminishment in thought, in feeling, in all forms of human engagement which is to be

understood if the task of Christian theology in our time is to be undertaken and the possibility of Christian worship adequately proposed for our discussion.

One component of contemporary culture that Sittler talks about which contributes to the diminishment of the human is the contradiction of selfhood. The self is the aware center of grateful participation. Authentic cries of diminishment from contemporary selfhood are forcing a reexamination of the most prestigious model of knowledge in the modern world. That model requires an excision of the examining self from the way of knowing and the excluded self in its anguish is the core of man's protest. All truly meditative thinking must also be an act of thanksgiving and therefore preliminary to an act of worship.

A third theme is the experience of nothingness (an idea borrowed from Michael Novak's book), and the fecundity of the darkness. This idea is not new- we find it in Camus, Tolstoy, Kafka, Melville, Hawthorne, Bellow. It can't be defined, but a sense for it can be descriptively built up. Among its components are:

1. Contemporary consciousness is shaped by the fluidity of percepts, and the velocity and fluidity of the percepts of this current generation contribute to the feeling of nothingness. TV and film are fantasies of sheer input; the world is fluid, reality is altered. The percepts are too many and too rich to order. This raises questions about the propriety of the multi-media method for contemporary worship.

2. A consciousness shaped by percepts so fluid is a dispersed consciousness. In the contemporary American subculture, "I think, therefore I am," has been replaced with "I feel."

3. Nothingness as boredom. "Killing time..."

4. Nothingness is helplessness.

Except the understanding of our task be beheld and formed in the actuality of darkness, it will be of no worth. The fecundity of darkness:

Let us give thanks for the liberating exposures that have been accomplished within our decade: The Myth of American innocence; of the feebleness of morality detached from some grave intention that is total and some trust that is transcendently grounded; of the reality of evil and injustice behind the managed façade of growth and affluence; of the corrupting dynamics of power; of idolatries garbed in the vestments of religion and patriotism; of hollowness of pretense and the spirit enervating forms of the clean, if awesome, truth, when at last it gets said.

When darkness drives reflection deep it becomes a germinating darkness. Remember the fecundity of the darkness and the night throughout the story of the divine redemption.

Granted that I must die, how then shall I live? That question is a sickness unto death and a supplier of the momentum of three positive forces, three affirmative acts of the self: honesty, freedom, courage.

-One is forced to acknowledge that all the myths, forms, institutions by which one has lived are not necessary, solid, or permanent. The first response to this knowledge is lostness. "Everything is relative; nothing makes any difference." Honesty does not stop there. Relativity is not an absolute. The fact that values are relative to one's time, culture, person, purpose, does not oblige one to be ethically indifferent. Relativity is not an excuse, it is a new starting point. Granted that values are relative, how do I wish to live? The ethical question becomes one of invention and creativity rather than merely a problem of obedience and obligation.

-The fact that we do act, that out of theoretical darkness we choose, is the reality of freedom. In that act of freedom we make a huge leap, for we confer a value upon the drive to question and the fact of choice. Nothing compels us to turn facts into values. We do this in an act of freedom, a creative act whose starting place is the very fecundity of darkness itself.

### **Side B.**

There is a sense in which (man) comes to know that the Spirit that hovered over chaos, darkness and old ancient night in the creation operates with equivalent cruciality in the realm and reality of redemption. The third act experienced in and out of the darkness is courage. Without courage, honesty and freedom are not possible.

What we believe and how we praise (dogma and doxa) constitute a single music in contrapuntal form. The songs of praise the church sings are lyrical ways of disclosing what the faith knows and how she came to know it. The language of recollection, thanksgiving and joy which is praise is at the same time the alembic in which a new conceptuality and a language serviceable to be its voice may be freshly forged.

Worship is a cultic ritual but in a double sense. The terms it uses, the recollections it cherishes, the episodes it orders toward significance, the images and symbols it employs are drenched in the shared meanings of a very particular community. Dogma bears forth doxa and doxa both explores and enriches dogma. But there is an equally important sense in which Christian worship is not the ritual of a cult. Its action is a public action, it speaks within the culture, always wanting to be overheard. Its affirmations are not founded upon the culture but they are an address through the community to the culture. The world does not know why the church says what it says but what the church says is not so utterly esoteric or unintelligible. The life of the cult forms what is to be said, but the promises recalled, the powers and presences celebrated, the mad hopes swing out and resonate from beyond the cult and strangely intersect with the unarticulated realities of the world around. This double character of Christian worship says something, too, about the form, style, language of worship.

The church best serves the culture by not intending, primarily, to serve the culture. She discloses best what the culture needs when she speaks out of her own integrity. There is a shaping interaction between church and culture. The modes of a culture are not without influence upon the form and language of worship. That interplay of influences is most integrally absorbed and actualized by both when imitation is not intended, when trading off of gimmicks is not allowed.

In summary--- Sittler believes the following to be a main theological fact for our reflection: darkness, faithfully and eschatologically understood, has a strange, truth-bearing promise.

First respondent to Sittler's address was Father Aelred Tagels, OSB, Professor of Liturgies at St. John's, Collegeville, and editor of Worship magazine. He speaks about liturgical renewal and liturgical reform; liturgical forms and culture.

The second respondent was Dr. Vilmos Vajta, formerly of the LWF staff, currently Director of the Institute of Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg. He is known best in the US for his book, Luther on Worship.

He says that of importance to this conference is the epiphany of doxa or the appearance of the glory of God. Doxa=glory. Man cannot penetrate this. To see God's glory face to face is the promise of the final fulfillment. This is one side of the Biblical concept. The other is the glory which the faithful community presents to God in glorifying His name and in bringing praise and thanksgiving to Him. This glory, given by man to God, is the reflection of his glory which has appeared among men. Thus, the doxa of the Christian community, its worship and adoration, is the giving back of that which has been received. He continues with this theme of glory a while longer.

## **“Faith and Culture”** (Tape from the American Lutheran Church)

*Place unknown*

### **Side A.**

Sittler begins by referring to his “first two lectures” (*which the archives do not have*). They were a unit explicating the doctrine of nature and grace. In this, his third lecture, he wants to talk about the problem of time: not clock time, but felt time- the fact of irreversibility, irrecoverability of the past, the root pathos of “you can't go home again.” The most moving, pathetic, powerful elements in our literary tradition have been absorbed with the problem of time. Examples: Faust, the songs in Shakespeare's plays, Wordsworth, A.E. Housman, Dylan Thomas.

[*In modern thinking*], the realm of grace is the realm of the infinite, the spiritual. The timeless infinite is the only realm in which one can know grace. This is characteristic of the modern imagination. Grace cannot inhere in time. Grace and temporality, grace and history, grace and the concrete are somehow in hostility.

People think that spirituality is living in a removal from the concretions of existence. We must be lifted up above all this material world and think spiritually in order to be Christian. “Nonsense!” says Sittler. It is unbiblical. He quotes Father William Lynch: “on the attitude we take we take toward time as the most intense form of the limited, on our decision either to strain against it or accept it, depends all our peace. Unless a man can be brought to the point where he seeks for the most full in the most concrete, where he is



able to envision grace- the gifts of God- somehow in the limited finite, the fragments that make up his life, there will be no peace...”

The modern imagination has held two basically contrary and hostile positions regarding time:

1) Time is that which must be escaped from. It must be used in such a way as to convince ourselves that it is clearly external to us. “My real self is not this self which proceeds yesterday, today and tomorrow...” The limited finite leads neither to peace, beauty, God... It must be transcended or destroyed or overcome. “My real self is not the one that washes the kids’ ears, puts on their snowpants, etc. My real self has got to be somewhere else.” Time is our enemy.

We have identified the meaning of the Christian faith with this transcendent spirituality which floats above this muddy vesture of decay we call mutability. In this view, the intelligence can stand outside the flow of time and be more clear-sighted, gain intellectual understanding by remaining apart from the rough contours of the moment. Such an intelligence is seen as more pure because it need not enter into the confusing patterns of the concrete.

Simone Weil said, “We must get rid of the superstition of chronology in order to find eternity.” [Sittler says] this is a blasphemous statement as over against the grace of God in the incarnation. Rupert Brooke longs for a world free from the wash of days and temporal tide. [Sittler continues] We are living in the midst of a cultural assault on the limited nature of the moment. There is a longing for simultaneity. Sittler makes a reference to Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*.

In contrast, think of Jesus’ temptation to behold all things in a moment of time. He rejects infinitude for the finite, rejects the non-temporal for the temporal. In John we read, “Today and tomorrow I must walk this way.” This coursing of the divine life in the incarnate Lord through the fragmented temporalities of our existence is not just a biographical fact. This is the shape of grace, grace which does not come from the pinnacle of simultaneity and spirituality.

Another illustration, from modern painting: In talking about cubism and his cubist painting of a violin, Picasso said that the artist must obliterate time as a way of beholding. Time is a prisoner to the painter as space is a prisoner to objects. The artist longs to paint the absolute violin. He wants to paint things from some supra human or supra temporal point of view. The artist does not seek to reproduce what they (things) bodily confront us with in time and space, but the imperial fullness of the mind’s perception.

Yet another illustration, from films: *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*. The heroine tries to remember herself back into sanity. What could that mean? Man is constituted by remembering but life is lived by forgetting. I can only forget successfully if, in the divine ultimate, I am both remembered and forgotten. (There is) counterpoint of the divine remembrance combined with the divine laying aside and covering over. If this is truth, what truth is big enough to deal with this truth? If this is the case, can anything short of the gospel of the divine remembering and the divine forgetting, in the forgiveness of sins, really deal with the human act when it is exposed at that level? The chief rascal in all of this was Descartes.

2.) An alternate position regarding time, which is Biblical: An acceptance of time as the form of our creaturehood under God. Not resignation to time, but the evaluation of time as the place of grace. Recall how the Bible deals with time and nature. The Bible is time-drenched. Time is not ignored, despised, called evil. Tillich is wrong when he makes the fall into temporality the substance of the fall of man. Remember Ecclesiastes, "There is a time..." Consider: we are all driven by a need for maximum beauty, maximum intelligibility, clarity and insight. At the same moment, we wish for a more concrete appreciation and living with the facticities of our mortal life. We want the absolute generality and the absolute particular. Life is spun on a spindle between these two incessant poles.

For example- let us take erotic love. This love is what it is and it has a beckoning toward a possibility of love which in these terms can never be fulfilled. It promises more than it delivers because it beckons us into its own character into a kind of absolute love which we there envision; and without the relativities of our own human loves, we could not envision the other.

We wish to grasp meaning to the full so that there shall be no pain of questioning left, but on the other hand, we have an equal longing for pure, unalloyed objects. Think of Dante who talks of eternity and also the concrete images of Beatrice. Also, see Gerard Manly Hopkins' "The Soldier."

#### **Side B. Fourth Lecture in "Faith and Culture" Series**

Sittler recommends two books by Nathan Scott: *The Christian Faith and the Tragic Vision* and *Voices of Discomposure*. They deal with a Christian evaluation of literature and a Christian criticism of literature. Also useful, *The American Adam*, plus the Viking portable edition of Joseph Conrad's work with an excellent introduction by Robert Penn Warren. [Sittler says] the moral problem of modern man is more clearly stated in Conrad than in many more-celebrated authors.

Sittler then begins a long commentary on *Christ and Apollo: Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* by Father William Lynch.

-Tape is unintelligible here for a minute or two-

Attend to the work of J. D. Salinger, especially, *Franny and Zooey*.

The modern playwright and modern plays exemplify man's flight from time, his conviction that time is the enemy, that truth, beauty, peace, fullness, reality can only come in some infinity, that man must be detached from these transparencies of the concrete finite and that only by escape from them is any redemption or salvation possible for man. Father Lynch writes, "The modern playwright is a thorough romantic, despite the fact that he makes loud and incessant noises about being realistic, actualistic, rubbing our noses 'in the way things really are.' In Act 1, he is extremely actualistic, but by the time he gets to Act 3, he becomes a complete romantic. The playwrights proclaim, against all evidence, that the achievement of great tragedy has always been rooted in mystical conquests of the human spirit over pain, in the emergence of godlike strength and qualities in man in the midst of tragic defeat. The tragic figure in contemporary writing is an exalted conqueror, but any straight reading of the Greek tragedies and Shakespeare will find this is not so. The modern playwright does not have the nerve to

prevent man driven to helplessness and reveal his tragic strength in and through his helplessness, but he must escape, bounce off the actual situation into some kind of purely rhetorical infinitude.

Sittler reads Lynch's analysis of plays by Clifford Odets, Maxwell Anderson, Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller, especially *Death of a Salesman*. Lynch goes on, "It is not the perfectibility of man which the Elizabethans and classical plays show but the grandeur of man's ability to acknowledge his helplessness in tragic circumstances which constitutes the fullness of his humanity which both Shakespeare and the classics illustrate." Lynch calls modern playwrights, "theologians of the new dawn." A dawn which has no substance and whose terms have no relationship and hence they are dishonest to the structural members of the tragedy they build up.

Sittler then returns to "where we started yesterday morning." Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The specifically Christian meaning of grace is not identifiable apart from the verb that this grace came. It does not remain a remote disposition of a propositional first cause. This grace in its coming makes itself available precisely in the theater of man's existence and hence it is not substantial grace infused by a benevolent God, but is a grace available to man in Christ because Christ coursed through all the episodes of humanity. He took upon himself all the episodic finitude of man's concreteness. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a substance, it is a drama. To what and where, and moving through what did he come to earth, to time, to our successiveness, to tiredness and zest, to being born and dying, to sunrise and setting, through nativity, youth, and maturity.

The problem for the imagination confronted by the concrete is to avoid the cleavage between knowing the particular and the concrete and the finite in such a way that it is known precisely as the creature, the creation, the gift of God and therefore is transparent to the holy. And yet knowing the holy in such a way as not to disengage it by false absoluteness from that very finitude- time, successiveness, into which I am born. For example, I must avoid a cleavage between love as an absolute dream and love as an ethical duty in this moment. If I love a woman who is my wife, this love is a kind of analogue of the love with which I am beloved of God.

- *Some spots on tape unintelligible* -

[...]because the elements of love that persist through no merit or worthiness on my part are still there, broken, fragmented, humanly limited, but there, so that this love gleams with a far-off brightness and is a natural theological witness to the love of God.

A full development of New Testament Christology resolves this problem (of cleavage). Reflect on St. Paul's words: "ascending on high he took captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now he that ascendeth what is it, but because he also descended into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended is also the same as he that ascended above the heavens that he might fill- '*ta panta*' - all things."

This understanding of Christ as the godly evaluation of the temporal, the passing, the fragmented, and the place of the soteriological act of God for our redemption is in the Christly concrete. This descent of God to do the deed here leaves this "here" never the

same as it was before this descent took place. This world is not identical with the holy. You cannot go from nature to grace but when grace becomes incarnated in the forms of nature, nothing natural is anything but a transparency to grace.

*-Tape defective here –*

How should this inform our teaching and preaching at the level of the parish minister? Sittler says this is always his ultimate concern. As an example, he points out how the propers for the day can both elevate the holy and address the limited finite, as well.

## **A Conversation with the Bishops** (Tape supplied by Bishop Roger Gieschen)

*Place unknown, (date is pre-formation of the ELCA)*

### **Tape 1.**

#### **Side A.**

Sittler begins with his illustration of Ann's geography book with its frontispiece of the cosmos, indicating how the scope of theological reflection must change [*In the story, he finds out that his young friend Ann has a picture of the Milky Way on the front of her geography book, whereas he remembers that the geography books from his youth had pictures of McCormick reapers in wheat fields. His point is that today's youth grow up with an awareness that their lives are situated within the entire cosmos*]. He continues by saying that we (the Lutheran church) have been almost exclusively a church of the second article: God the redeemer, Jesus. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit has to fill the space of the photograph in Ann's geography book.

Sittler then turns to a discussion of the office of the bishop. The word *office* means two things: First, the definition connotes the "center of authority," and second, the meaning is functional. It is fluid, according to the circumstances which call for that office.

According to Sittler, we should talk about the Office of the Bishop in the same way we talk about the Office of the Word. When we talk about the word of God, we mean that energy from God that goes out to create all that is. The fundamental notion of word is energy, not a book.

Sittler talks about the Scriptures, then comments on Paul Ricoeur's idea that the meaning of the text is not just behind it or within it or under it; rather, the meaning is out in front of the text [*cf. Sittler's Essays on Nature and Grace for a longer explanation of this point*]. Its meaning is like a trajected bullet thrust out into the future. When we look at a text, we first look at what it meant at the time it was written, but that's only the first step in preaching. The preacher must be clear about the words used- in Greek or in Hebrew- and what the circumstances were, but now must also look at what it means (now) for Ann and her geography book.

Sittler references, as an illustration, his own New Delhi speech on Colossians. Christ is a symbol, a personal concentration of the purpose of all life, that for which all life came into being: perfect obedience to the Father. That text is launched from the launching pad of the first century, but the target of the text is every century.

Sittler then returns to look at the meaning of the bishop. It was created to preserve the apostolic gospel; it carried the tradition. The bishops were the teachers. That is what the bishops were then, but that doesn't do us much good now. The bishop filled the vacuum left by the death of the Empire. Bishops became the center of authority because there was nobody else to do it. The doctrine of the episcopacy is a secular and religious mix in the course of history. We must not look at the office of the bishop purely from behind and say that if we can fill in from behind what it has been and make an agenda of what its obligations and duties were, we then have a sufficient guide for what the office of the bishop now is or is likely to become. Can we learn, however, something from that past? What did they do? What were they in their person and teaching that made them mighty? Illustrations: 1) Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. His thought ruled Western Christendom for 1,000 years. What was the power that came forth from him? It was almost purely cerebral. The Church displaced the Empire in the first 500 years of the Christian era because it outlived (morally), outdied, and outthought the pagan world. Read Augustine's treatise on the Holy Trinity. He interpreted his office according to the needs of his time. 2) Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. Through his influence, Augustine came to an understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. This is an example of the moral force of a bishop. 3) Bishop Berggraff of Norway. He stood up to the Nazis. This was an example of moral courage. His influence stiffened the back of a whole culture during very perilous days.

Sittler says that what he is trying to do is fill this notion of "bishop" with a much more complex content than what we in our modern day attribute to it. We think of it according to, well, "the man is, the office is, what I see the man doing." We all know what he does. He drives all over the place; he's got to light small fires and put out big ones; he presides over committee concerns. What is a bishop? One could say that "he's what he does," but Sittler wants to enrich that notion.

Although some order-keeping and administration will continue to be necessary, we will have to define the office better, deeper, more thoughtfully. The following is likely to be an agenda to which we will have to attend as we seek a redefinition of the contemporary and future bishop:

1. The territorial definition of a diocese will have to be reduced in many places to a more manageable and humane size. We impose inhumane obligations on a bishop.
2. Administrative duties might be shared with someone else.
3. The church of the future must have a reflective center. A quality of reflectiveness, of thought, broad education, a knowledge of the contemporary world which is always asking, "What does this mean for the Christian faith?"

Sittler offers one example: Oliver Tompkins, Bishop of Bristol, in the Anglican church. He carried into his understanding of his role that teaching obligation which had formed him in his early days. He brought a deep reflective ability to his task. He was a scholar/teacher.

We must not cherish a caricature of the office or a prefabricated picture of it according to our own experience. We must keep the office of the bishop as a function rather than a substance.

#### Questions, answers, discussion

There followed a discussion among the bishops and Sittler about the need for bishops with solid theological education and background who know what's happening in theological and Biblical studies and can transmit the fundamental postulates of theology to the common life.

**Q.:** What you are talking about defining is not only a new criterion for the office of the bishop but a new criterion for the evaluation of church life itself.

**Sittler:** There is a clamor now from students for courses in spirituality, for nurturing the interior spiritual life. Sittler then talks about the Catholic tradition of developing spirituality. Our (Lutheran) spirituality has to be a spirituality of the word (as scripture). The Lutherans are a church of the word, above all things, in the whole complex of Western Christianity. The word as scripture must be where we Lutherans deliver our faithfulness.

Sittler goes on to remark, "I'm not a spiritual man in the mystical or disciplined sense of the Dominican fathers, but I am a spiritual man in the sense that my own has been a spirituality of the word...in that the text, the document- I always felt it a clear obligation: do not talk nonsense about God's word. Do not get up and babble around with ordinary Rotarian luncheon speeches about a great text. That's spirituality operating cerebrally."

**Q.:** Definition of *grace*- something more than a declaration of forgiveness.

**Sittler:** [*There is*] grace in the Old Testament. Jesus didn't invent it. It is the unmerited goodness of God toward all that he has made, according to Luther. Grace inheres in creation as well as redemption. He then tells a story of an Iowa farmer and his "God's strip" [*a patch of land left uncultivated; cf. Sittler's Care of the Earth*].

#### **Side B.**

At the beginning of the tape, Sittler chats about what he's going to talk about. What is the fundamental change in the world which has the greatest importance for theology?

Then there is a long gap of silence on the tape. (The comments about Ann's geography book which begin Side A would seem to follow from this introduction.)

When the recording resumes, we hear the end of a question from someone in the group to which Sittler responds that Lutherans are always tempted, when we lose our excitement about the fundamental spirituality of the word, to move toward ecclesiastical cosmetics. "The Episcopal Bishop almost becomes the person of the church. He is the person in whom the church is concentrated."

**Q.:** Question about the bishop being the pastor of a parish pastor. Someone reminds the group that the constitution says the bishop "shepherds congregations and ministers."

**Sittler:** The bishop's pastorship is the whole people.

Sittler then brings up another point. We are confronting the necessity of not only reassessing and restating the role of the bishop but the nature of the church. There are two notions of how the church is constituted and they are not on the surface compatible. There is an historical reason for the congregational understanding in the ALC and the trans-congregational understanding in the LCA. Both notions have to be transcended in whatever preamble we write for a new constitution. "I wish we could develop a sense of humor about a constitution. There is something madly funny about a spiritual community writing a constitution." Most of the ALC groups came to the U.S. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They came with few pastors but with their Bibles and hymn books. They got along as isolated congregations. That notion of the congregation as the unit which constitutes the church grows out of the American frontier experience. The LCA and its predecessor bodies was a colonial church- late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The pastors (like Muhlenberg) called these people together. The LCA constitution says this church is constituted by congregations and pastors, with no intention of putting the pastors morally above the congregation. Both experiences are irrelevant- neither should control our future. Past experience must not determine how we state the new thing. Sittler talks about reading a book entitled The Making of the Constitution ( about the U.S. constitution) "We the people..."- that phrase is of deep importance. There follows more discussion in the group about the preamble of the new constitution for the ELCA, about the organization of the new church, the role of the ordained. "The pedagogy of the word must be secured," says Joe.

## **Tape 2.**

### **Side A.**

Sittler offers some comments on preaching by African-American ministers- he finds it genuine, straight, spirit-filled, evocative, and about the African- American churches.

**Q.:** If you were to preach in Washington DC to address the current political, social, economic climate of this administration from the viewpoint of prophetic justice of the Christian faith what would be the key to your message?

**Sittler:** The verse from Micah- to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with your God. That is Torah, guidance for life under God. (I would talk about) the actualization of redemption in care for the human situation. Sittler continues by talking about the arms race. He mentions a book by Robert Benne, Ethics and Democratic Capitalism. Benne tries to show that Christian ethics and democratic capitalism get as close a fit to justice as you can get. Sittler says the church must be a critical principle in the political order and not just a seconder of the motion of the status quo.

There is then more discussion among the participants about the arms race, the current scene.

Sittler asks if the Lutheran Church should have a College of Bishops, to be a responsible voice on great issues. There is then more talk about the role of the bishops.

### **Side B.**

There is continuing discussion about the role of bishops as well as spirituality and the liturgy.

One idea talked about: perhaps the bishop, in his teaching role, should give a sermon once a month, as a regular preaching assignment, in a diocesan parish church (like a cathedral church) to show where his mind has been taking him, and where his new understanding of the Gospel is taking him in relationship to practical affairs, as Luther did in the castle church in Wittenberg during the last years of his life.

Another point Sittler wants to make is about the church's program (or lack of it) for continuing education for pastors. One of the most exciting scholarly developments for Sittler in the past few years is the work being done on the parables. He speaks favorably of the quest for the historical Jesus. Where shall we meet the heart of the teaching of Jesus? There are four different Gospels. Can we get beyond the differences we find there?... the reportorial bias?...

The heart of the preaching of Jesus is in the parables. Nothing in the Old Testament is quite like it; Jesus invented that medium. They are the concentrated teaching of what in all the Gospels is the heart of his message- the kingdom of God. What God wants, what God wills, what by creation God intended, is all condensed in that Greek phrase, "the kingly rule of God."

Do we have an access to Jesus which is more direct and delivers us from the irrecoverability of the historical events? We cannot recover the Jesus of history- we have only secondhand reports in the Gospels. Yes, I think we do, in the parables. Sittler recommends several books on the parables: Dan Via's *In Parables*, and one by David Rhoads [*Mark as Story*]. Responding to a question about a book on ecclesiology, Sittler recommends Phil Hefner's contribution to Carl Braaten's two volume work on Lutheran theology. Returning to the parables, Sittler also mentions John Dominic Crossan's work. The parables use exaggeration and hyperbole to upset, to subvert the ordinary religious expectation of the people. Today, they are as powerful an assault upon the mind of the religious and pious people who sit in our churches as they were when Jesus spoke them.

The recording stops while Sittler is still speaking about the parables.

## **Sermons on the Parables** *St. Olaf College*

### **Tape 1. Side A.**

**The Unjust Steward.** Whoever would speak about the parables must speak about **language**. There is a magic in both the simplicity and the extravagant uses of language. Unless we are aware of this, we cannot ever approach the parables with a mind sufficiently humble to appreciate the magnificent concentration and evocative power of the parables. It's as if the speech of Jesus and the actions of Jesus were intended to gain cognition by amazement. Our Lord seemed to delight in using words and actions to explode the expected. Sittler mentions stories about the Cyro-Phoenician woman and the Centurion. Sittler also mentions the



authors he read about the parables to prepare for these meditations.

**The parables are neither allegories nor narratives.** They are a fierce attack on the expected religious. They are full of exaggerated language because they say the absurd thing to prepare the mind by bewilderment for the unexpected, possible thing. The parable says an exaggerated thing in order to disorient our minds for a new orientation toward the undreamed of. The parable says something crazy in order that we should be totally annihilated and disorganized in order to hear something new. **What is the new thing to which the parables are addressed? The kingdom of God.** The parables have to turn us upside down and inside out. Everything in our contemporary life dulls and blinds us to the magic of language. Illustration: John Donne's Christmas Day sermon on the mercies of God.

**The parable of the unjust steward.** (Parables are always about God and about us.) The Lord commended this shrewd crook. There are parts in this text added on- read the story and leave the moral lessons out. The parable ends with a question: What kind of a kingdom is this in which a crook is commended? Sittler doesn't know exactly what it might mean, but here is one possibility: See Luther's sermon on the holy swindler. Jesus commended the crook for his canniness, his shrewdness, not his morality. Why did he tell this story? When the servant knew the nature of his master, he didn't try to con him, to slip anything by him. Luther says we are dealing with a master who knows what the facts are, who sees straight through us. As before God, don't do anything about grace except accept it. Don't try to earn it. Don't build yourself up as if God's grace were a payment for your morality.

God's grace is always an astonishing thing. This crook stood with complete clarity before the truth of his situation and he acted appropriately. If the God of our devotion and astonishment is a God who is really a God of amazing grace, then in the amazement of our clear response, we must deal appropriately with that kind of a God. The way to deal with that God is to hear, to obey, to live out of his grace, not only vertically but horizontally in our life in the world.

*Side B contains "The Conference Summation" from the ALCF Presentations at St. Olaf College (below).*

## **Tape 2. The Lost Sheep**

**Side A: Preparing for the task of preaching the gospel.** What makes a thing beautiful or strong? Humanism is not compatible with faith. There is such a thing as an **evangelical Christian humanism**, a holy demand that we should live with delight and wonder and awe and joy within the creation. To live with wonder and joy in God's creation is not only a quirk of personality having something to do with a happy metabolic system, but it is a command, a doxological requirement of the God relationship. **How does one cultivate this kind of humanism as he tries to prepare for a vocation in teaching and proclaiming the word of God, or, if not thus ordained, in the common**

**ordination of baptism and lay ministry?** Reading, writing, conversation. Pay **attention to the language of scripture**. Jesus not only talked about the kingdom, he was the living parable of it, and out of that, he spoke.

**Dangers in the lectionary system.** There are advantages, but the danger is in a prefabricated proclamation: this is the theme for the day. Sometimes it works, more often it does not, so the preacher is forced to make an elaboration of the perfectly obvious. Tonight's text is about the **lost sheep**- Matthew 18:10-14. The rich Biblical material about sheep, shepherds, pastures, the lost, the found, home, has been dominated by a single text in John 10: I am the good shepherd. Tonight's passage, however, is not about God or Jesus the good shepherd. If we take this passage and slip it into a prefabricated set of sermonic notions about the good shepherd, then we will have missed what this particular passage is all about.

This parable fits very well **in the context of the material in Matthew**, the children, openness to the kingdom, the "*mikroi*," – the little ones. If we try to subsume the picture of the shepherd returning with the lost sheep into the John 10 text or the shepherd stories in the Old Testament, we shall have missed the point of the parable. We must notice what has come before. The story is absurd. What person would leave 99 to look for one? He's a fool. It's much like the story of the woman and the lost coin. The action is out of relationship to the value of the thing. Is it possible that the parable is saying that we are a fold, a combination of goods, evils, dependencies, temptations, possibilities, of affections, of many things. Therefore, our lives are spattered; they lose focus. There is no one thing that of so commanding of worth and a value (sic) that you leave every other thing and, like a fool, go find that one thing. It is a foolish way to live. You have to pull your life together, not by making a necessarily harmonious balance because not everything is an absolute good, not everything is required for the conformation of a life to the God relationship. You must will one thing. The God relationship has an apex character. This one thing. Is it possible that the absurdity of the story is the point of the story? The shepherd who left everything, who went to find this one thing which was precious to him, it's worth taking a chance on the loss of everything else, and he played it that way.

*Side B is blank.*

### **Tape 3. "The Seed Growing of Itself."**

**Side A:** Sittler wants to continue reflections on last night's meditation on the **parable of the lost sheep**. That parable of the lost sheep has a clearly discernible context and continuity of images within which it occurs. Images do not determine the parable, but establish an ambiance in which one can reflect upon it. **Who shall be the greatest in the kingdom of God?**

Jesus put a child in front of the disciples and **used the child** as an image of the kind of mind and openness of spirit which is a precondition of the hearing and responding to the force of the kingdom. That figure of a child continues into the next section in which Jesus

says, “Whosoever causes one of these little people (“*mikroi*”) to offend, it would be better...”

What is the occasion that evoked these remarks? That becomes both clear and elusive in the phrase, “For I say to you that in heaven, their angels...” i.e., in the presence of God, a kind of symbol of each individual soul in this mortal world always exists in the mind and presence of God.

In the old order for public confession, we read, “**We shall find in ourselves nothing but sin and death.**” “**Sin and death,**” yes; “**nothing but**”?- no. There was a point when our church fathers in Reformation times made a necessary correction of the mechanization of the doctrine of grace, but they may have corrected a little too much. In such a way that they tended to annihilate in their church dogmatics the reality of grace given in, with and under our very existence as human beings in God’s world. There is another strain that ought to be emphasized. In the garden, Adam and Eve did not completely fall out of any relationship to God. They were estranged, not strangers (Tillich). “Thou hast formed us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless ‘til they rest in Thee” [*Augustine*]. There is a residual relationship which is always there. (Illustrations: Vaughn, Wordsworth, G. K. Chesterton’s characterization of childhood- openness, wonder, surprise, awe.) This tinctures the continuity with which we come to the parable we will consider this evening. **In the parable of the lost sheep, we read of a man who doesn’t find something absolutely new; he recovers something he had lost.**

This parable (**the seed growing of itself**) is sandwiched in between two others. This parable has to do with the farmer, not the seed. In the Greek, the word used is not the usual word for “sowing.” The word used is “baleg” (sp?), meaning “thrown away,” not with any intention. The thing grows on its own and the farmer doesn’t understand it. He questioned the result because he didn’t understand the process. All growth need not be legitimized by programmatic preconditions. We must not set limits to the fact that the seed grows by itself. The process is only in part comprehensible. **We are always tempted to create wind tunnels for the winds of God.** Let us not systematize our minds or our programs into hindrances to the suddenness of the power of the kingdom. But do all things as a child.

The last point in the parable: What the farmer does. He knows when there’s corn out there. He knows what to do about it. He reaps the harvest.

In any programmatic effort to reenact the process of the coming kingdom, we must not be so tightly nailed down, so dogmatically closed off, so given to a kind of *ordo salutis*, that we hamper the thrown-away seed of the gospel. Our rightness in our procedures must never create such a constipation of the mind that we forget the thrown-away seed, that we forget the unpredictability of God’s possible.

*Side B is blank*

### **Side A.**

*Labeled “Opening worship” and has only Sittler’s sermon.*

The tape begins with Sittler in mid-sentence talking about **Paul and Philippians**. “All these things I regard as refuse in order that I may know him, that I may be with him in his death, etc.” Paul moves the meaning of the Christian faith and his experiences of it down to a very narrow point, “laying aside everything else, I run this race with one point in view...” Then a strange thing happens to this almost goblet shape, down to a narrow point, he goes through the narrow point – “this one thing”- with radical compression, then, amazingly, the last part of the epistle goes out like this, “Finally, brethren,”... a shift of gears. There has been lots of exegesis on this because it is quite discontinuous for many. But if one understands **Paul’s morphology of faith**, then it’s not strange. When you know the one thing, everything is lightened up by the joy of God. When you know where the center is, everything becomes an occasion of grace.

The humanities become a field of joy; they become occasions for the specifications of grace. One does not go from nature to grace, but when one has experienced the word ‘grace’, then everything in nature is illumined from within, as from above. As we, in our vocation, **make our decisions about the role of the humanities, let us remember the strange morphology in Paul’s letter to the Philippians**. Narrowness, concentration, determination, perception of the center does not destroy the circumference, it brings it refreshingly alive.

*Side B is blank.*

*The ALCF Conference Summation below is contained on Side B of Tape 1 (“The Unjust Steward”) from “Sermon on the Parables”, St. Olaf College (see above).*

### **Conference Summation:**

**Pedagogy in the humanities.** Kant says concepts without percepts are empty and percepts without concepts are blind. When we’re dealing with the young, the mind of the young is best dealt with when we put the accent not on the too-early achievement of concepts but on loading the mind with percepts. The unfolding of a multitude of percepts into adequate concepts is the work of a lifetime. Our job at the undergraduate level and early graduate level is not too quickly to try to find generalizations out of the explicit, but to be sure that the concrete, the perceptual, the implicit that that (next word is inaudible) is made clear and multiform. To quote William Carlos Williams: “Everything depends on the red wheelbarrow and the white chicken.”

Our eyes must be open to the immaculate particularity and to train the mind to see the particularity in that which we tend to lump together too quickly into categories and generalizations. This is a pedagogical method which has much to say to those of us who struggle in the field of humanistic studies. Illustration: difference between those in our culture who respond to this beautiful October morning with the observation, “big deal, frost this morning,” and John Keats’ “Season of mists...”. We must teach the young to look, to see, to behold.

There is an enormous chasm between **the realms of discourse represented here this morning. Scientists' language is becoming so metallic, so precise. There is a stiffening between the two kingdoms of language.**

They must mature to something of a catastrophe, something to a clearly exposed diminishment in the nature of human life until we're ready for a rapprochement or a synthesis which overcomes it or a penetration of each realm of language by the intentionality of the other and the forgotten dimensions of the human spirit that each forgets in the presence of the other. It would be wisdom not to try prematurely to bring perceptual distance into a conceptual synthesis, to let these two ways mature. It's as if we expected the world of Louis Rukyser to hold hands with the world of Flannery O'Connor. That's not going to happen in our lifetime and it should not happen.

**Second point.** What we may expect to be our future as we are concerned about **the role of humanistic studies in our American colleges.** The future is bleak, and therefore hopeful. Bleak because the colleges which affirm a Christian humanism have to act in such a way to deny that affirmation to stay in business. They have to add programs which are not humanistic in their discourse and discipline or in their cultivation of the human spirit. The reigning theological sophistication of Lutheranism in America will not support the giving of the kind of money to the project of Christian humanism in our colleges because they have so shallow an understanding of the nature of theology, the nature of theological language, the long-term project in which the Christian faith is involved with its intersection with culture. (The church) will do much to celebrate their fond remembrance of old alma mater and give money for a new field house, student union or other things, but it will be a long day ahead to get the kind of money necessary to continue an unprofitable venture and we will probably have to look at a shrinking future.

**Third point.** That being the case, we must pull up our socks and continue doing what we think is good to do. To quote T.S. Eliot: It is the destiny of some times in our history not to succeed at all but to insure that some things not be forgotten. A remnant must carry this intention of language, this capaciousness of the human responsibility; it's got to carry that witness regardless of the diminishment of the support systems around it. This has been the nature of the various realms of language throughout Western history. Certain things have to mature to a point where their pretensions of adequate capaciousness self-disclose their inadequacy to the practitioners thereof. That takes a long time to accomplish. Illustration: Think of Norman Rockwell's paintings as opposed to Vermeer's.

**The humanities want truth as much as the scientific community wants truth. But the word truth is used in different ways.** The humanistic understanding of truth by no means permits the denial of facticity of fact. The situation with humanistic truth is not "deuces wild," that one thing is just as good as another. There are methods of rational discrimination. If there seems to be a too easy and quick understanding between these two realms of truth, we shall reach

that understanding only by a reduction of the ineffable difference. There will always be an embarrassed giggle between us.

To illuminate the chasm of incomprehension (between scientists and humanists), the failure to grasp the nuance that characterizes all language, Sittler illustrates by dealing with a text. Let's examine the way the language operates in evocative realms:

**“Blessed are the meek...”** Every word in this beatitude has a history.

The Hebrew baruch is translated as blessed, but in some modern translations, it is, unfortunately, translated as happy. Happy is not the same as blessed.

Baruch means the one upon whom in all things God continues to smile. A God relationship that is not extinguishable by the circumstances of good or bad fortune. Meek tends, to us, to mean a gelatinous disposition of mind and spirit. In Old English, in the King James version, meek refers to those of a gentle and receptive spirit. Sittler's grandmother explained that in the French NT, the meek are the debonair. They have an innocent openness to the wonder of the world; they sit lightly and blithely... Inherit the earth: It doesn't say the meek shall own the world or run it. They do not earn it. It comes to them through grace. It is a surprise.

*Sittler is cut off in the middle of his illustration, about two-thirds of the way through the tape.*

## **Sittler-related Recordings in the Archive, but not BY Sittler**

### **1941 Columbia Church of the Air, with Joseph Sittler, Sr. , Preaching**

Joseph A. Sittler, D.D., was the president of the Ohio Synod, ULCA, at the time this program aired on WBNS, Columbus. A quartet from the First English Lutheran Church, Columbus, provided the music. Included in this 30 minute program was a portion of the liturgy from the Common Service Book. The scripture for the day was Hebrews 10:35 ff., and the text for Dr. Sittler's sermon entitled "The Unshakeable Things of God," was Hebrews 12:27.

### **1973 Conference on Nature and Grace, in Honor of Joseph Sittler May 3-4, University of Chicago Divinity School**

Lecture by Dr. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., Professor of Theology and Literature, University of Chicago Divinity School:

"The Poetry and Theology of Earth: Reflections on the Testimony of Joseph Sittler and Gerard Manly Hopkins." (Tape 1: Sides A and B; Tape 2: Side A)

### **1977 Wittenberg Founders Day March 11 Springfield, Ohio**

On Side B of this tape, the Founders Day program was recorded. Distinguished Alumni/ae, friends of the university, staff, and faculty were recognized. Margaret Sittler Ermarth, a sister of Joseph Sittler, Jr., was honored as the first

recipient of the Wittenberg Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching. Poor health prevented her from being present to accept the award, but her son, Fritz Ermarth, accepted it for his mother and then delivered a speech on "Ethics: Style and Public Debate." Fritz said that he had asked his uncle (Joe) for some guidance on this topic, and Joe suggested that he examine and reflect on Robert Oppenheimer's piece on style. In his presentation, Fritz gives examples from his work as a member of the CIA on arms control and the nuclear arms race. The tape ends before his speech is over.

Side A of this tape contains a talk by President William Kinnison as well as presentations of many alumni and retiring faculty awards.

**2005 Festival of Homiletics: Great Preaching May 16-20  
Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago**

The sermon is by Fred Craddock. At the beginning, he mentions hearing Joseph Sittler, late in his life, refer to a highlight in his (Sittler's) life, when he turned the pages for Albert Schweitzer who was giving an organ recital (probably in Cleveland?).