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BE AGLOW WITH THE SPIRIT

WORDS OF FAREWELL TO THE NEW GRADUATES

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SEMINARY

THERE is an injunction in St. Paul's Letter to the Romans which has been sounding within me recently. I want it to sound within you also as you leave the Seminary for your life's vocation. In the King James Version the words run, "Be fervent in spirit" (Rom. 12:11). Moffat renders them, "Maintain the spiritual glow." And in the Revised Standard Version they are translated, "Be aglow with the Spirit."

Seventeen years ago I made this injunction the basis of my words of farewell to the graduating Class of 1937, which was the first class to graduate after I became president of the Seminary. The same words have gripped me again, and, while I remember nothing of what I said on that occasion, I wish to re-echo Paul's plea and to make it relevant to the situation in which you will find yourselves as you go out into life today.

An aspect of our religion which has been too much and too long forgotten, the real indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life, has been all too frequently confined to groups which we disdainfully call "fringe" sects. One of your tasks will be to recover the reality of that experience which, in New Testament terms, we call Pentecost.

The recovery by the Church of the Pentecostal experience is indispensable. This is so not only because of the intrinsic necessity of the Spirit's presence in life, but because of the clear evidence that ours is a very passionate genera-

tion, a generation all aglow. We witness the clash of rival passions. We have fanaticism and we have faith. In some cases, as our greatest living historian, Arnold J. Toynbee, reminds us, it is almost impossible to distinguish fanaticism from faith. In the attempt to quench fanaticism, he says, we run the danger of extinguishing faith. So, too, the most distinguished poet in the English-speaking world, T. S. Eliot, emphasizes in more than one of his poems that there is a rivalry in contemporary culture between two types of fire. Men, if they are to be relevant to our time, must be "consumed by either fire or fire" the fire of the flesh or the fire of the Spirit. Another who knew the human life once said, "no soul is pure that is not passionate, no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic." Spiritual ardor is of the essence of the Christian life.

I could say to you of the graduating group, be loyal churchmen. And it is important that you should be devoted to your denomination. I could say to you, be doctrinally sound. And theological orthodoxy is a worthy pursuit. I could say to you, be ethically sensitive. The reason is obvious. Without a true ethic, without moral behaviour worthy of Jesus Christ and the Gospel, there can be no real Christianity. What I am here saying to you, however, goes beyond all these, important though they be. "Be aglow with the Spirit."

Remember this: There is something beyond churchmanship in all its forms, more important than anything that is

related to ecclesiastical order. There is something that goes beyond theological orthodoxy, important though it is that your doctrinal ideas be sound. There is something also beyond ethics. That something is an inward fire, a glow, the presence of the Holy Spirit, in Pentecostal power. "Be filled with the Spirit": Keep the soul's fire burning.

The Old Testament prophets felt the living word of God to be as a fire in their bones. Our Lord was clear that he had come to kindle a fire. The symbol of the promised Spirit was tongues of fire. Fire is inescapable in the Christian religion and in the ministry of the Word. Let this fire burn within you in such wise that it shall consume everything unworthy, every false ambition, all rancor and resentment, all hate and lustful desire. Let this fire so consume you that it shall become easy for you to forgive, that it shall make you unshockable when you come to know the life's secrets of people who may need your help. Let this flame so consume you that you will not turn your back on your worst enemy, never refusing to look him in the eye, and to shake him by the hand. Speak to him, find a way to reason with him. Take the initiative so that it may become easy for him to confess things that are wrong in his life. And would to God that this principle which is Biblical and Pentecostal were being applied to every phase of the social and international order in our time. For this consuming flame is the source of insight, faith and courage.

You will never possess all the answers to intellectual problems, whether your own or those of others. But bear witness to the fact that you know the

reality of the life of God in the soul, that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. In the calm consciousness of that fact, and with the fire of the Spirit aglow, pass beyond the chilly conventions of law. Break right through the icy proprieties of protocol.

In Oxford, in the 'nineties of the last century, there was a group of very brilliant students who had been influenced by an evangelistic movement in the University. One of them was that saint and prophet, J. H. Oldham, who later organized the Edinburgh missionary conference of 1910 and the Oxford Conference of 1937 on *Church, Community and State*. One evening, the members of the group were going down Oxford's High Street together. They were approaching the house of the Neoclassicist, Walter Pater. Pater was a man for whom life and thought had to be calm and rhythmical on the Grecian model. He had just published his famous book, *Marius the Epicurean*. As the young evangelicals passed by, the fires burned within them, and they broke out into song. This is what they sang, doggerel though it may be, according to classical poetic standards:

"It's better to shout than to doubt,
It's better to rise than to fall;
It's better to let the glory out
Than to have no glory at all!"

My friends of the graduating group, let the glory in, and then let it out. "Be aglow with the Spirit." If you are going to be true to Christianity's deepest tradition and be able to match this hour, maintain the Spirit's glow. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.