



The  
Princeton Seminary  
Bulletin

Your Ministry and Your Laymen's Ministry  
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Let Love Be Your Only Debt  
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The Dead Sea Scrolls—1956  
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# LET LOVE BE YOUR ONLY DEBT

WORDS OF FAREWELL TO THE NEW GRADUATES  
BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SEMINARY

Members of the Graduating Group of  
1956:

A TRADITION of long standing lays it upon me to address some parting words to you who have just received your diplomas.

As I pondered how I could best fulfil this responsibility, there came to me in an unusually meaningful way these words of St. Paul, "Owe no one anything except to love one another." By which the Apostle meant; "Owe no one anything except love, mutual love." Let me share with you some reflections which these words have awakened in my mind.

## I

There is one respect in which the Christian faith and modern psychology are agreed: They are agreed that love is the most creative, the most revolutionary, the most redemptive force known to man. At a time when people are encouraged to go into debt, it is important to remember that there is but one debt which has the full sanction of the Christian religion. There is only one form of human indebtedness which is unqualifiedly good and universally safe. It is the debt to love one's neighbor.

Love is the greatest thing in the world. Some of Christianity's chief interpreters have said so. Paul said so. For the great Tarsan, love is much more important than knowledge in any form, theoretical or practical. Love,

said he, is more important even than unconquerable faith whereby mountains may be moved. It may not be so spectacular as knowledge or faith, but love is more basic, more transforming, more far-reaching. St. Augustine had Paul's thought in mind when he said, "Love and do what you like." A great Spaniard of the Middle Ages, Raymond Lull, took up the refrain and exclaimed, "He who loves not, lives not." Not to love is to be dead, no matter how vast one's knowledge, no matter how great one's faith.

If this be true, the human heart that desires to be independent and to owe nothing to anybody is dead. That is John Milton's point in his description of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. The Archangel fell because he wanted to be utterly self-sufficient and to owe no debt of gratitude even to Deity. Death and hell are to be without love.

## II

It is important to remind ourselves, however, that love in this Christian sense is much more than some feeling of attraction towards someone or something. It is more than self-interest, in all the ranges of self-interest, from the appeal of what is beautiful to the appeal of a person to whom we are attracted because he or she may satisfy some deep desire or promote our welfare. Love as a feeling of attraction towards someone or something is as far as the great Greeks got. But in Christianity, love is directed towards all men. It is

for the unlovely as well as the lovely. It is for enemies as well as for friends. That being so, it is a betrayal of the Christian religion not to be willing to treat any enemy, when opportunity offers, in such a way as to show him at least civility, if not love.

Wherever love is real, it produces the finest kind of sensitivity. It engenders everything that we associate with humanism at its best: consideration for the sensibility, for the customs, for the situation of other people. Love instills on every occasion an exquisite sense of propriety.

### III

It is strange, yet true, that the place where it is most difficult to love in the fullest sense is in the Christian community which is called the Body of Christ. I wonder sometimes why our Lord added one more commandment to the ancient Decalogue. Talking to His disciples, He said, "A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another." It has often been easier to love one's neighbor, a mere outsider, than to love one's fellow-Christian in the community of faith. Why? We are disposed to demand of fellow-Christians too much similarity to ourselves, too much acquiescence to our point of view, too much exactitude in their formulation of doctrine, too much of our pattern in their form of worship. Resentments tend to pile up. Racial prejudice, inherited, national or regional, becomes prominent.

There is an exquisite line of poetry by Elizabeth Barrett Browning which runs, "I cannot think of thee," she meant her loved one, Robert, "thou art too near me." Have we not had to say at times in our hearts, "I cannot

love you, you are too near me"? This I say personally, in honest confession. Alas, alas, it is so often the contiguity, the nearness, of our fellow-Christians who are one with us in the faith, one with us as members of a Christian community, that makes it difficult to love them fully. When we recognize this, all self-righteousness goes. We know who we are; we know also that we must love or perish. We know that if we fail to love one another, the Christian community will not be real, whether in Princeton Seminary or in your future sphere of action. If Christians are unable to live in tune and to owe no one anything but love, Christ's Body will not be built up.

### IV

Then what shall we do? It is at this point that we should remember the words: "We love because He first loved us." Christ's love must ever be the fountain from which we derive the possibility of loving, the gift of love which becomes a debt to love. In the same way that Paul brought his physical ailment to Christ and received the reply, "My grace is sufficient for you," so let us bring to Christ our spiritual lovelessness, both now, and in the coming days. Whenever we suffer anguish because we cannot force ourselves to love, let us listen to the same words, "My grace is sufficient for you." Then we shall begin to love again; self "will fade in music out of sight"; and Christ will become regnant in our lives. Then, and only then, when we no longer live, but He lives within us, shall we be Christians in deed and in truth.

May I therefore leave this thought with you who have become today my

new colleagues in the Church's service. Christ is the answer to the tragedy of lovelessness among His followers. Only the Presence within us of the Crucified and Living One will make it possible for us to love one another and all men. Only He, too, can make it possible for

us to theologize to profit, to have faith, to work, to tread life's road, rugged or lonely or sunlit, "till the day dawns and the shadows flee away."

So let us say together, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. Amen."

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STUDENTS' LECTURESHIP ON MISSIONS  
November 5-7, 1956  
The Reverend Theodore F. Romig, D.D.  
Subject  
*Previews of Redemption*