

- The church is under attack today. It's commonly criticized for failing to keep abreast of the times. But the fatal error of the institutional church in America is not that it has failed to adapt itself to the 20th century. It's sickness is that it has accepted with so few poems, the standards of the day. It may retain some of the antiquated language that echoes an earlier day. By that is itself a worldly wise strategy, since thereby the church is enabled to keep up appearances and pretend to be what it once was. Of course, most people have little inkling of what it once was, and probably care less. The trouble with the church is that it accord so well with the wisdom of the world. It knows how to get along, how to adjust, to conform, to succeed. It knows how to keep peace or talk peace, or at least protect itself from that which would disturb its own peace, even if it takes a role of deacon standing at the front of the church with folded arms. It's right at home in the modern world. No stranger, nor pilgrim, it is in touch with a contemporary situation. It cannot be said that it does not meet the needs of modern men since one of the great needs in this insecure and chaotic world is to be reassured on Sunday that our weekday values, morals, and way of life are basically sound and eminently worthy of being emulated by others, especially those who live in Southeast Asia. About the only real difference between what we hear throughout the week and what one is likely to hear on Sunday in church is the religious language and the pious inflection. Now is this heading, excuse me, that's not what I meant to say. I begin over. I'm sure it's not that. What I meant to say was is this petty or petulant carping criticism? No, I think not. It is the judgment on the church that is inescapable in the light of the source of the church, Jesus, the crucified. Jesus is unacceptable to the world today as revealer of God. Should this be so strange, or that the church should find him unacceptable as well? If he is a stumbling block and foolishness today as in the first century, it will not be now as it was not then because of purely intellectual difficulties. We're too adapted rationalizing not to be able to argue intelligently for any faith we may hold. It's rather because we cannot fit him into our way of life that we instinctively recoil from the word of the cross. Paul was not using his words carelessly when he spoke of Christ as the power of God and the wisdom of God. He saw the word of the cross as a challenge to the power and wisdom of his age. Our concepts of ideology and power structures correspond roughly, I think, to what Paul seems to mean by the wisdom of this age and the powers of this age. Paul's message was falling to modern Corinthian men because it matched the ideology by which they lived not with a new ideology, but with a man on a cross. Paul's message was a stumbling block to modern men because it set this man over the power structures of religion and state. How could the spirit of the suffering servant done to death triumph over the powerful institutions or his message successfully compete with the prevailing worldviews? The ideologies were ways of looking at reality that did not allow for a cross as a key to understanding the meaning of life. The power structures were ways of preserving and defending interests which might be endangered, where concerned for persons given priority. The challenge of Jesus mode of life was radical because he refused to meet the world on its own terms, with its own weapons. He inaugurated a permanent revolution when you set the person over institution and ideology. And pressed the challenge home in the most radical way conceivable by means neither of power, nor of wisdom, but only by the power of love itself. This Paul says is a foolishness and the weakness of God. It contrasts sharply with the wisdom and the power of the world. Its symbol is the cross. In giving himself for persons, God reveal what it means to be human. And saw the acceptance of the cross enables a man to

relinquish every claim on life. Every possession, every security to give himself as a human being caring for other human beings. The ultimate freedom is disclosed as the love that is steady and persistent to the end. The self-giving love that culminated in the cross can hardly be an optional quality which can be added to or subtracted from the human if one sees this love as the love of very God himself, woven into the texture of human existence. But though this be the truly human quality of life, it's reality to be sure eludes us much of the time. The vision of the life of love is sustained in faith and faith is sustained by God. And so Paul declares to the Corinthians that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. But we're bound to say that may sound good, but it's not a realistic solution to the world's problems. We argue that it may have been relevant to men in pre-industrial society, but in a day of rapid technological and social change, talk about loving persons, loving concern for persons. This kind of talk is beside the point, we may say. The scope of one to one relations is too limited to be a significance in this revolutionary world, we say. An outstanding Christian thinker in America has for a generation warned us against trying to apply the personal morality of love based on the teachings of Jesus to society as a whole. But however salutary this warning may have been in the past as a corrective of religious sentimentalism, it may not be the word for the crisis in which we find ourselves. The folly of faith may be the price of survival for individuals trying to make sense of life, for families attempting to find a bond beyond blood, for cities facing slums, rives and apathy, for a nation seeking an identity, and for a world trying to keep from exploding. Could it be that the folly of love is the only realistic answer to the folly of the world's wisdom? But how can the one-to-one relation be effective against the power structures and ideologies of our day? Consider our justification of our role in the conflict in Vietnam. One of our ex-presidents has reasonably said that when a nation is committed to force, there is no higher court of appeal. "You've got to win," he declared. And subsequently said that he would not rule out the use of nuclear weapons. Americans can hear this without moral outrage because they assume first that we're morally right, and second, that we are justified in using all of the mighty at our disposal to enforce our idea of the right. The ancient word quoted by Paul may resound ominously in our ears; I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. The secretary of defense has just returned from Vietnam reporting impressive success in our efforts there with one exception, the rural aid program of pacification is a disappointing failure. We are succeeding in killing people very effectively, but it seems are not very persuasive with those who manage to stay alive. In our concern to counter aggression with superior military might, we're in danger of sacrificing persons to ideological principles. This isn't the occasion for a review of Vietnam policy, but our ancient text and that's one good thing, may I say in defense of the Bible for ancient texts. Our ancient texts has a disquieting power to call in question the wisdom of the world, including our own ideology by which we rationalize our military presence in Southeast Asia. We cannot create by coercion whether one world, one nation, one city, one family, or one life. Force can be used to restrain evildoers and even to annihilate them, but it cannot revivify, heal, build up, forge human bonds of understanding compassion and the will to find common ground on which to live together. Only love can do that. Realistic love like that of Martin Luther King, who this week endorsed a statement by seven national Negro leaders, repudiating what we know now is under the cry of black power and affirming integration as a goal. Non-violence as the method. But King went on to say, "It is not the Negro who is on trial, "but white society because it alone has power." In fact, he said, "Power is a reaction to the abusive. "Black power is a reaction "to the abusers of white power." It is true that power is a reality. It will not be wished away. By the hopeless society lies in the equitable use of power as the instrument of love. Martin Luther King at this moment in history, well symbolizes that wisdom and power which seem weak, but will if anything can effect

a nonviolent revolution in justice and human freedom. This love must not be confused with sentimental idealism. The revolutionary spirit of our age demands and in pins to see the power structures of entrenched privilege and social injustice torn down. Power is being challenged with power. What can love do in the social struggles of our day that erupt in bloody strife? It can insist on opening doors between the ends and the outs. It can create the will to work together between those who struggled to maintain the power structures, protecting their way of life, and those who counter the violence of the status quo with force in the attempt to secure long denied rights. Love can create and maintain the will to talk together rather than to fight it out. It can take the initiative in acknowledging one's own wrongs, and in forgiving the wrongs of the other. It can also refuse to be ignored by those who confuse love with passive acquiescence to established injustice. The word of the cross proclaims the power of love. But love is powerful only when it shows itself able to persist in spite of all that is done to it. If it is able to suffer, it is enabled to hope, but not otherwise for the power of the world is well-established and is amply justified by the ideologies of the world. Let us use every means at our disposal to bring about the social changes needed. If people are to live as human beings with dignity and self-respect, we can be grateful for the concern of so many people and groups for our social betterment. For the fact that the American people are beginning to accept responsibility for using the instruments of local and federal agencies to effect institutional change. But let us not think that this is all that needs to be done, for even in the midst of affluence, there are people who are isolated and estranged to say nothing of the many in our society who are bewildered to find themselves being catapulted from degrading, but familiar surroundings into improved, but strange conditions where they may begin to see themselves in a new light. Caring persons are needed to help them understand themselves in a new way. Those of you who are involved in the tutoring programs could speak of the significance of this one to one relationship for the real value that is created is not primarily the knowledge that is imparted from tutor to pupil, but by the fact that someone cares and believes in the youngster. Though sometimes it has to be a one to two relationship because there are not enough tutors to go around. Some of you who've worked this past summer in Durham, came to know children from large families who live in cramped quarters and which the parents have little energy or thought for the child as an individual. Because of this, the child does not develop feelings for himself as a person. The program had started has equipped some classrooms with full length mirrors because it was learned that some of the children had no idea what they looked like having never seen themselves in a mirror. Young men and women are acting as mirrors themselves. Reflecting an image of the child back to him that is reassuring and strengthening. Because he is accepted as a person in his own right with needs and possibilities and worth, the child can begin to assimilate a positive image of himself. The value of this kind of relationship is born out in other programs. Recently it was reported that because of the shortage of trained personnel in state mental hospitals, it was decided to bring in lay people to help with some of the patients on the wards. It was discovered that remarkable things were taking place in the patients that could be attributed largely to the relationship established by the caring persons who visited them, took them for walks and communicated warm and acceptance. Housewives who were untrained, serving part-time on a volunteer basis, we're able to affect dramatic changes in deeply disturbed persons. And here's a clipping from the Nigerian outlook, June 8th, 1966, telling of the shooting of Mr. James Meredith. It comes from a duke graduate serving there in the peace corps. Young men and women around the world are finding that in this turbulent moment of history, the one-to-one relation of a caring person to another becomes a creative and redemptive force in spite of cultural barriers. A black man is attacked by whites in Mississippi. The story is reported in Nigeria

and relayed back by a white man in the peace corps. So are we interrelated in a world that may increasingly recognize the influence of persons on the events and movements of the day. I began by taking note of the criticisms of the institutional church. But the church is most radically judged in light of the event which produced it. Whatever the weaknesses, errors, inadequacy, or a sickness of the church, it stands judged, not on the basis of modern ideas, but of the figure on the cross. But it may also be renewed from its source and it can scarcely be written off all together when within its ranks are counted those who persist in taking with life and death seriousness. The imperative of love and reconciliation. For there are those within and outside who choose in the insecurity of faith and the risk of love to live out their lives in the spirit of the suffering servant. They discover that the weakness and foolishness of love become the power and the wisdom of God. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore, amen. (lively hymn)