

One offers serious answers to questions that are not being asked. His talk appeals beside the point, or at the least uninteresting. Invited to lead a discussion in one of the houses on the West Campus, I asked some of the students for a list of their own questions, not wishing our meeting to become either irrelevant or boring. At the top of the list they compiled, a rather overwhelming list, by the way, were the following questions: What place does the intellect, the power of reason, play in religion? Is religion only emotional? Does religion stand a chance in our scientific age? In the ensuing discussion, it became evident that these questions reflected a common misgiving, or one might almost say a deep-seated anxiety, that a critical evaluation of the truth claims of religion is hazardous, that liberal learning is profoundly disturbing to religious men, and probably leads to the destruction of their faith. One does not wish to hold up for ridicule this attitude, for it represents a normal, human reaction, which can be understood sympathetically in the wider context of intellectual experience. It is never easy to scrutinize those assumptions, which we have come to consider fundamental, to subject them to direct, open-ended investigation, in which the results cannot be prejudged or predetermined. The critical study of the truth claims of religion is therefore but one form of human pain, for many persons, an acute form of pain, which everyone with an inquiring mind experiences, or may experience, as he moves beyond pre-critical modes of thinking to honest inquiry. In the early years of our lives, traditional beliefs and opinions are accepted upon the authority of others. Our basic assumptions are provided us, prefabricated, we may say, since they are constructed out of others' experiences and not our own. Yet the ideal of a healthy growth towards intellectual maturity calls for personal affirmation of reasoned, self-authenticated conviction. In other words, we wish not only to know what the answers to the big questions are or have been, but why they are true. Why we should be expected to live by them. The questions the students put to me then were good ones and deserved honest answers. The subject of religion and learning is a large one. However, it must be limited somewhat in scope. Let us consider only the Christian religion as the subject, for this is the only religion most of us know, somewhat, from the inside, from within the circle of faith, and I can assume at least an immediate interest. What place, then, does the intellect, the power of reason, play in the Christian religion? Is the Christian religion only emotional? Does the Christian religion stand a chance in our scientific age? This summer, while working on a commentary on Paul's letters to the Corinthians, I noted a pattern of ideas in Chapters 1 and 2, which shed some light upon these questions. Recalling his pioneer work at Corinth, Paul writes, "When I came to you brothers, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God in lofty rhetoric or philosophical discourse, for I decided to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ, to be precise, Jesus, the crucified one. So that your faith might not rest upon human philosophy, but upon the power of God." Again, commenting on the centrality of the cross in his proclamation, the Apostle writes, "The world did not recognize God by the divine wisdom displayed in creation through the medium of philosophy, hence God determined to save those who became believers through the foolishness of the proclamation concerning the cross of Jesus. A stumbling block to Jews and folly to non-Jews, but to those who have heard Christ's call, both from among Jews and non-Jews, He is God's power and God's wisdom." Concisely, Paul summarizes here the baseline of the entire New Testament. The mystery of divine love, revealed in Jesus Christ on his cross, is the ultimate source and ground of Christian faith. Witnesses of the history of the Nazarene offer their interpretations, but not those

which were the consequence of their rational observations and reflections upon life in general. Instead, they were convinced that interpretations had been forced upon them from the outside, one may say, by events, the cross, the resurrection. Making available to men the whole content of God's salvation, which these events inaugurated. So from the first, Christians seemed to have held that Jesus' death was not an extraordinary martyrdom, the heroic death of a man who died for his beliefs, like a Socrates, but that in and through this act, God made available the forgiveness of men and restored them to the normal relationships which they should hold to their creator. Christian faith then was man's response to a mystery, to return to Paul's language, revealing God's power and God's wisdom. What place has the intellect in this, we now ask. Here is the answer, which a 20th century English theologian gives us: "Christians do not believe," he writes, "because someone at some time thought up the idea of God as love, as providing a feasible, working philosophy, for which more or less convincing arguments can be adduced, and because we ourselves have, unbalanced, been persuaded by these arguments. As Christians, we do not believe because we think that Christianity qualitatively is the best of religions, which are competing for the mind's allegiance. We do not believe because there is at least the possibility or perhaps the hope that if only men can be brought to believe that God is love, they will be constrained to live by the ethic of love, rather than the ethic of the jungle. We do not believe because we happen to be born with a nice, generous humanitarian instinct, and for one reason or another, have come to feel that the Church, as a probe center of social concern and service, affords a good institution in which we may give expression to these instincts. I am not suggesting that these considerations have no weight at all," continues Dr. Herbert Farmer, "but both singly and taken together, they form the most insecure foundation for Christian faith. No, we are Christians because we believe that God himself has revealed the nature and purpose of his love for man in Christ and called us by that revelation. It is the cross which proclaims this mystery in the New Testament sense of the word mystery, a revealed truth concerning God's power and wisdom, which remains hidden from us as men while being revealed. It is a light upon our way, shining in and out of our darkness, but nonetheless, a profound mystery." In reading these words, I was reminded of that powerful oil painting of the crucifixion by Rembrandt. Only when one's eyes become accustomed to the dark shadows surrounding the suffering figure of the Christ on his cross, does one begin to discern the loving presence of God, the father. It must ever be something of an offense to the young intellectual that the power of reason is so little able to penetrate this Christian mystery. That even the very best minds within the Church are not able to construct a theology of the cross, which comprehends this event. Moreover, that theologians have been unable to provide indisputable proofs of Christ's resurrection or of his living presence in history. As to most of the Jews and Greeks, then at Corinth, this gospel stands as an (indistinct) to man's pride, who compulsively seeks to garner all truth in rational conception, and who, by our modern habits of mind, tend to equate reality with scientifically verifiable knowledge. Is the Christian religion then only emotional, if its central verities cannot be argued? If the essential ground and center of Christian faith has so little intrinsic credibility? If it cannot be read out of man's experience in general and substantiated as at least a fairly probable hypothesis? Does the gospel, at its heart, confront man only as an inscrutable mystery? In answer, we turn again to the passage in the Corinthian letter, in which Paul affirms this mystery and denies that man's unaided reason has the power to grasp it, either initially or finally. "Nevertheless," writes Paul, "I do teach a wisdom for those who are ripe for it. I teach God's hidden wisdom, destined to bring us to our full glory, revealed to us through the spirit, so that we may know all that God of His grace gives unto men." In the same context of the letter, the Apostle declares the fact that the Corinthian Christians were not ready or

willing to be fed solid food. As retarded children, mere babes in Christ, he must give them milk to drink. Herein appears a paradox. Paul affirms the irreducible element of mystery at the heart of the Christian gospel. He must hold that faith arises from something that God gives to men and is not the rational construction of wise men, in which case the validity of faith would stand or fall on logical argument. Yet, Paul does not say that there is nothing in this faith which can be examined by reason, nothing which can be taught or defended by argument. Indeed, Paul denies that the revelation of God's love is an inscrutable mystery. In revealing his love, God wills that man should be enlightened by this reality so much so, that it becomes a very spiritual center of his life. And much of the power of Paul's intellect was exercised towards this end, that faith become informed faith, communicable faith, persuasive faith. That it continue to grow in those who hold it until they know all that God of his grace gives unto men. In this regard, does Paul speak to our question? Isn't it a pity? Nay, isn't it deplorable that so many young Christians should be content to be fed only the pabulum of Christian doctrine, or else turning away from solid food, which could nourish their faith, easily succumb to the impressionistic, often pre-critical opinions that Christianity cannot be assimilated by modern man? That our intellectual ethos is post-Christian, so that moderns cannot remain Christian and be scientific or authentic persons? Dorothy Sayers, the Dante scholar and writer of inimitable mystery novels, says that the only letter she has ever wanted to write to students in general, is one that says, "Why don't you take the trouble to find out what is Christianity and what it isn't? Why do you seldom read either the ancient or the modern authorities on the subject, But gather your information, for the most part, from the casual comments of biologists or other scientists, many of whom have picked it up as inaccurately as you yourselves? Why do you accept mildewed, old heresies as bold and constructive contributions to modern thought, when any handbook on church history would tell you where they came from? Why do you complain that the proposition that God is three in one is obscure and absolutely incredible, and yet acquiesce meekly in the physicist formula  $2p-pq=rh/2\pi i$ , where 1 equals the square of minus 1? When you know quite well that the square root of minus 1 is paradoxical, and PI is incalculable?" Ms. Sayer's letter continues in much this vein of asperity, but her point need not belabored. Too many young intellectuals who are happily compelled by the excitement of learning to abandon their pre-critical opinions, in other areas of experience, either shrink from a critical, scholarly investigation of the truth claims of Christianity, or reject these as the merest superstition and nonsense under the slightest pressures of skepticism, doubt, or denial on the part of others who are often lamentably ill-informed. And as a result, merely close their minds on the subject. One can fully understand any Christian's reluctance to doubt the ground of his faith, for doubt opens before the believer, the abyss of despair and threatens the loss of a spiritual center for life. There was always the severe temptation here to flee from our freedom of asking and answering questions for ourselves. Yet one must recognize also, some of the peril and even the possibility of personal tragedy for this failure of nerve, for a pre-critical sacrifice of intellect. Time permits with one example. A reference to that particular kind of religious fanaticism, which is grounded in the suppressed anxiety of doubt. I speak of that fanatic who attacks within inordinate violence those who disagree with him, and who demonstrate by their disagreement, elements in his own spiritual life, which have been suppressed. Because such a fanatic hurts inside, he must hurt other people. Yet all the while, his actions are rationalized as a kind of crusade to keep the faithful from being upset. Such a retarded Christian compulsively persecutes their centers, but how tragically insecure a faith, which has to always be protected and somehow shored up against truth, lest it not have the power to sustain itself in a public forum. Surely, we must say that in religion, as in any other field of knowledge, the constructive way to deal with skepticism

is not to suppress thought, as though there by man saves his soul, as though faith must be deep-frozen in its embryonic stage, since it is not viable if it is brought into the light of full day. Perhaps the following advice to students, befits an academic Dean speaking in a university chapel. Be extremely wary of the closed mind, wherever you encounter it. You are already hyper-sensitized against religious dogmatism, but there are signs of your gullibility in other circles. Receive with a grain of salt all pontification concerning Christianity from scholars in other fields, as well as in religion. Especially when clever rhetoric and caricatures are relied on, and the speaker gives very little evidence of having seriously grappled with the truth claims of the position he attacks. Scientism masquerades as true science more easily in our culture, perhaps, than does rigid orthodoxy as true religion. "Today, when any human thought can be discredited by branding it as unscientific," writes Michael Polanyi, "the power previously exercised by theology has passed over to science. Hence, science has become, in its turn, the greatest single source of error." But you need not receive the last word from either scientists or theologian concerning Christianity, nor give unintelligent ascent to any of their arguments. Does the Christian religions stand a chance in our scientific age? My question to you is, will you give it a fair chance? Rejecting mere opinions, bereft of sound arguments and seeking no substitute for personal, hard, honest inquiry. True religion, no more than true science, has any reason to fear sound learning. With the passage in Corinthians before us, we must allow Paul a very brief postscript. "My brothers," writes the Apostle, "think what sort of people you are whom God has called. Few of you are men of wisdom, by any human standard of comparison. Few are powerful personalities or highly born, yet to humble the wise, God has chosen what the world counts folly. And to shame the strong, God has chosen what the world counts as weakness. And so, there is no place for human pride in the presence of God." What does this word add to our discourse? Here and elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, Paul closely associates humility and faith. Although Paul was convinced that God's power and God's wisdom are revealed in the cross and resurrection of Christ, although he was persuaded that men's perception of this truth may and should grow and mature in knowledge and in true discernment, faith for Paul was never in this life to be mistaken for sight. "Now we see through a glass darkly," he confesses, "Now we have but partial knowledge." How easily it is in our vanity to suppose that if we know something, we know it all? But Paul introduces here a perennial antidote to this intellectual presumption. You are a Christian by God's act, for God hath made Christ Jesus our wisdom. He is our righteousness. In Him, we are consecrated and set free. And so, in the words of the scripture, "If a man is proud, let him be proud of the Lord." Let us pray. Almighty God, since we also prone to pride and error, grant that thou truth may always shine upon us amidst the darkness of this world. Grant also that we may look fearlessly upon it with open eyes and have the courage to follow where it leads us. Assist us by thy word and spirit, we beseech thee, that true knowledge may abound amongst us and in us, through Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. And now may the grace of God. the love of the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and into our tomorrows. Amen.