

- In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, amen. In the scripture lesson this morning, there is a passage which obviously was not addressed to a university audience, but might have been for it focuses on the three things a good university is rightly concerned about. The business of the truth, the business of growing up, and the business of authentic community. And you may look this text up in any version that you choose, but I hope you will notice particularly the 14th, 15th, and 16th verses. I offer you a homemade paraphrase of it in which I try to accent the points that speak most directly to those of us who live and work in academic communities. It is important, says this pastor to the Christians at Ephesus, that we get past the level of acting like children, and this noun here is (speaks in foreign language), and it does not have an awful lot to do with chronological age. It has to do with adolescents who are not really grown up and with adults that are still adolescent. We have to get past this level of living like children, and the trouble with such children is that they are easily blown this way and that by each new wind of fashion, not only in costumery, but ideas as these winds of fashion are turned this way and that by the molders of public opinion and our self-chosen peer groups. If then we are not to be slaves to this shifting of fashions, now here, now there, this is new, that is old hat, we must learn to grow up by cultivating the habit of seeking the truth in love, for only so may it be found, and of speaking the truth in love, for only so may the truth be communicated. In this way, growing up by learning to speak the truth in love, we can come to be united in Him who is already the real center of all things, that is, Christ, and if Christ is acknowledged as the head or the unifying center of all creation, then the whole body of God's people will be fitted and knit together in an organic community so that every member will be supplied his own needs by all the others and will be energized by participating in the community, and so that the whole community can grow up and mature together in love. Here in brief some is the design for mature Christian living. Seeking the truth, speaking the truth, living the truth in authentic community. To love the truth and to do it in love is the shortest, valid formula I know of the Christian pattern. It is also the vital principle of the Christian ethic, for it indicates those imperatives that well up in those men for whom the truth is the guide of action and who measure the truth by the love of God revealed in and through Jesus Christ. In the very nature of the case, this kind of life is profoundly social, profoundly interpersonal, deeply and profoundly communal. The Bible knows nothing of a solitary Christian, and Christianity is interested in rescuing men from what David Riesman has taught us to call the lonely crowd, but not for self-sufficiency, not for self-directed behavior, but for life in an authentic community. Now, all of us know all too well that modern man doesn't lack for company. Actually, the planet is getting downright crowded. This may be one reason why some of us are interested in space travel, but for all the company he keeps, modern man is dying for the lack of real community. There is a deep hunger in his soul for a full membership in a significant society, for authentic existence in genuine community, but he has already discovered that most of what passes for community and interpersonal relations and group dynamics is phony and impoverishing. There is something profounder than the cynicism that strikes one's eye. In the motto I saw recently on the wall of a Dallas businessman's office, it said, "To hell with togetherness." And we live in company from the cradle to the grave. Solitude is no more a guarantee of privacy than company is a shield from loneliness, for even when we are most alone, we carry about with us a ghostly crew of opinionated intruders in our superego. There's no hiding place down here

from the lonely crowd. That's why so many of us are uneasy and restless when we are by ourselves. We fidget. We wait for intrusions and welcome them. Sometimes we study, or better yet, we turn to one or another in the vast repertory of gadgets which are endlessly produced by a technological culture expressly to distract a man from any serious self-awareness. Pushing buttons, turning levers, and you never really have to ask who you are or what you are doing down here. Yet, we are nearly as uneasy when we are in company unless it is a group that is distracted or distracting, for when we are with other people, we are usually being appraised by them or ignored by them, and neither of these is exactly reassuring. And so for compensation, we turn to various substitute patterns. What we need is true belonging. What we come to ask for is group acceptance like poor old Willie Loman who was not content just to be liked. He had to be well-liked. And so we cannot live without community. Yet, we corrupt the very spirit of community when we demand that it be focused on our own ego images and demands. Consider the typical complaints that we make about the groups to which we already belong. Our families, our clubs, our colleges, fraternities, sororities, departments, business organizations, et cetera, et cetera. Our gripes usually add up to the complaint that they don't really understand me, they don't really care about me, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. This is usually true for a very simple reason. Most of them are as busy caring for themselves as we offer ourselves, and we are to them resources for their self-caring as they are to us for our self-caring, and so our interpersonal relations are valued for their mutual utility. We prop each other up. We live off of each other, but as so many different modes of self-maintenance. Now, this is not altogether bad. In fact, it has its merits, but in the end, it shrivels the heart and stultifies the love we seek to give and to receive. Up to a point, mind you, the manners of polite society, which some of us have come by the hard way, serve as helpful substitutes for love if love cannot be had. Civilized behavior and good form manage, at least a little, to regulate the concourse of the uncaring, but the final undoing of the egotist, whether he is a sophisticated, Ivy League, flannel fellow or a Dharma bum, is that at bottom, he can neither abide his fellows nor yet live without some. The fact is that you cannot make genuine community out of a company of self-interested people, not even if they are enlightened self-interested people. For a long time now, Western man has paid devout lip service to the doctrine of laissez-faire, but he has become uncreasingly uneasy about it, increasingly unhappy with some of its consequences at least, and so has become ripe for the seductions of conformism and collectivism. Too readily, he'll sell his individuality at the exchange of freedom for the inflated price of social acceptability. This surely is swapping the devil for a witch, and this is a transaction of small profit, if any. Now, a long, long time ago in a situation not as different from our own as we might wish it were, that is to say, in the autumnal shadows of His civilization, the bishop of a small Numidian diocese wrote what has since become a great Christian classic based on this distinction I have been trying to suggest between company and community, between in a crowd and a true commonwealth. He spoke of two different cities or social aggregations or societies: the *Kiwitosdei* on the one hand, the *Kiwitosterena* on the other. The City of God is the community of those who love God above all else and love all else in God, whether it is themselves or their fellows, or all the created goods, natural and social, in the world. Everything is loved in its primary relationship to God and to His good purpose in the world. Men know themselves and each other and their right relations with each other only as they know themselves as God's creatures, as sons and daughters of the living God, and only then can they rightly know what kind of community will sustain their respective individualities. By contrast, the city of Earth is not really a community at all. It is instead an unstable, shifting aggregation of men and women and groups who love self above all else and all else in the light of this self-centered love. Loving God and loving their neighbors and

loving the created goods of life in relation to the primary center of self-love. It may be that some of you do not believe that there is any actual concrete example of the *Kiwitosdei* in the world today. Certainly, there are not many of us who could follow Augustine in his tendency to identify the *Kiwitosdei* with the Christian Church. The church, as we know it, is a mixed company. Many Christians talk a lot more about community than practice it. The average church that we know looks more like the average lodge or service club or neighborhood association than a community of people who love God above all else and all else in God. And yet, our hypercritical judgment of the institutional church, which itself is a standard fashion amongst academic people, may blind our eyes to the reality of the multitude of faithful and courageous Christians who are this very day living and working and serving the kingdom of God in unspectacular but authentic and sometimes heroic discipleship. It's sometimes a bit of a shock for conventional Christians to discover that there are members of the latent church outside the walls, but it is an equal shock to the church's detractors to discover the number of real Christians who are inside the clumsy Ark of organized Christianity. It is, for me, always a humbling and inspiring exercise to remember the number of people I know, country pastors, slum parsons, hospital chaplains, Christian doctors and professors, yet housewives and social workers, point-four technicians, missionaries who have tested themselves of their Western incubus, civil servants, businessmen, at least a few politicians, various sorts of saints and martyrs and heroes of the faith who are making their Christian witness now in sometimes quite unlikely and difficult and sometimes dangerous places like the Deep South and Texas, in East Harlem, in South Africa, in East Germany, in Southeast Asia, and Durham. And the most impressive thing about these people is that are sustained by a sense of fellowship and community which is more vital and sustaining and productive than the group relationships of even the most enlightened narcissists. Here and now in this violent and anguished age that teeters on the brink of catastrophe, there is a vast community of men and women who are not lonely even when they are alone, who are not anxious about the final meaningfulness of their lives, even in the face of frustration and tragedy and personal inadequacy. Now, if there is such a community actually existent in the world, how could we find our place in it? How can men who are literally sick of the company they keep come to share in the common life of the *Kiwitosdei* and so learn to grow up by speaking the truth in love and finding their place in a significant and valid and productive communal life? Now, the Christian answer to this sounds a bit trite and flat to the ears that have been conditioned by the slogans of the *Kiwitosterena*, for it says quite simply that the only human community that can really sustain its members in life and death, in triumph and defeat, from here to eternity, begins and ends with the basic commitment of our lives to God in response to His offer of grace and providence in and for our existences and destiny. Genuine community is covenant community. It is the life together of men who are bound to each other as a consequence of their being covenanted with God and with God for the service of His kingdom of righteousness in the world. The essence of covenant community is that God lays claim upon our lives, and we respond to that claim in loyal love, not only to God, but also as a strict implicate of this covenant with God to our neighbor, to our brother, to the whole family and people of God, the whole of his human creation. God makes covenant with men to be their God and to be for them and with them. Men respond by making covenant with God to live for God and with God as if God were really real and really God. Those who have made such a covenant with God are thereby bound to each other in covenant community, and they are quite literally members, one of another. All men, save the psychopath, are covenant-makers or one sort or another. All of us abrogate our self-sovereignty behalf of some other value, at least now and then, for this or that, but everything depends upon the substance of our covenants and our faithfulness to them. As Augustine said, "A community is a people

drawn "and held together by a common love." Many a man, as we have seen, tries to make a covenant of enlightened self-interest with other men, and this gives meaning and value to their lives. That is as much meaning and value as their lives ever know, but the end of this is despair, and this is by now a tiresome refrain in contemporary literature. Some men make covenant with a political ideology, and to the extent that they are really involved and committed, this sort of covenant gives their lives some sort of force and foundation, a force and foundation that self-interest does not match. Communism is a lousy ideology, false and barbaric, but the relatively small number of men who have really made actual covenant with it generate enough power to frighten and upset a far larger number of people who pay lip service to the far better ideology of democracy, which they live off of instead of for. Some men make covenant with truth and seek it with stubborn patience. I know a whole host of men, scientists, scholars, artists, whose unconscious love and service of truth comes close to being a really religious motivation. Their basic covenant is to seek the truth and to speak the truth, but not always in love and often not in wholeness, but in fragmented and partial truth. Still other men and women make covenant with human need and so devote their lives to the service of their fellow men. In this kind of covenant, they find a real good in life in doing jobs which bless and enrich the unnumbered company of the living and the yet unborn. They often literally wear themselves out in this business and yet are strangely satisfied and ennobled by it. Here is where you get a high sense of comradeship in the sharing of the best one has with others who count for more than we value ourselves, but all these covenants, which draw men out of themselves and weave them into a pattern of higher fellowship and un-self-conscious love, are so many preparations or derivations from the covenant which God seeks with men, the covenant He calls us to make with Him. This primary covenant community is the one inclusive relationship which we can have to the ground of our existence and to all other human beings who, like ourselves, are also creatures of God's love, our brethren for whom Christ died. This is the covenant community of those who love God above all else and all else in God, and this community is as universal as God's grace, as eternal as God's providence, as intimate and personal as God's spirit. Men who live in this community are neither lonely nor bereft, whether they are in a crowd or in a desert. They are encompassed about with witnesses and fellowship, and they are devoted to their fellows and they are willing and able to take on their share both of the world's weeping and of the world's work, but they do not depend upon the vicissitudes of the day's news to prompt them either to laughter or to tears or to a political convulsion. Their lives gain their deepest meaning and value from this covenant with God and with each other in God which is for now and always. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God is at hand. The covenant community is a real, live, present option, and so Jesus went on to say, "Repent and believe this good news." Now, just change your basic orientation toward God and your fellows. Make covenant with God and let all your other covenants be brought into right relationship to this one central and final covenant, this primitive, basic, and eternal covenant. To seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness is the beginning of the Gospel, and its end is also quite the same. To live for the truth by the power of grace and love in the community of which Jesus Christ is the unifying center. If then we are not to be slaves to shifting fashion, we must grow up by cultivating the habit of speaking the truth in love, for in this way, we will come to be united in Him who is truly the unifying center of all things, that is to say, Jesus Christ, and if Christ is the unifying center of our lives, then we with the whole community of God's people will be fitted and knit together in an organic unity wherein every member will be supplied his proper needs and will be energized by all the rest so that together, we may go on growing up and maturing in the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Let us pray. Lord, thou who does't make covenant with men and does't call us into the community of faith and

grace, draw us near to thee by thy love and nearer to each other in true community so that, whether we live or die, in our work and worship and in all the changes and chances of this mortal life, we may be bound to thee and each other by the bonds of unselfish love and find our support and sustenance in the community of thy redemption, and so come to share in thy redemptive work in the world. So shape our faith and so move our hearts that we may be truly grateful for being called to share in thy kingdom and commonwealth and be able to offer thee acceptable worship not only with our lips, but in our lives and deeds with reverence and joy through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And now, may grace.