

DR JOCZ
LOOKS
BACK

I have been asked to put down a few of my reminiscences before saying good-bye to the lofty portals of Wycliffe College.

My association with the College covers almost 17 years. I was first asked to teach part time in the autumn of 1959. Since Jan. 1960 I occupied to chair of a full time professor in the department of Systematic Theology. In the course of the years I have seen many students enter my classroom and many graduates leave. A few did not make it.

My first experience of Wycliffe was of a very formal institution. We all wore academic gowns, all the time, except for sleeping. The black gown covered a strange variety of attire and no matter how tattered, it provided respectability to our scholastic existence.

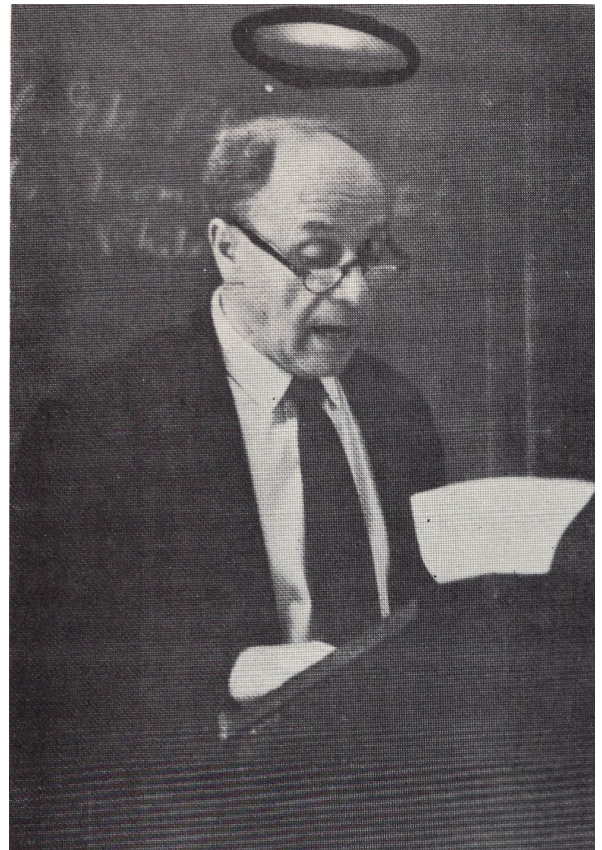
Chapel worship was conducted by professors only and in full ecclesiastical outfit including hood. I well remember the gentle reprimand when I appeared in Chapel with uncovered back.

The clerical collar was much in evidence in those far off days. Strict seniority reigned at the high table. To sit at a meal in the company of professors was no mean privilege. The pecking order began at the door of the refectory: Principal - Dean - Senior professors - the plebs bringing up the rear.

A similar order prevailed at Chapel. Professors sat at the back in assigned stalls and nowhere else. Students knew their place and kept their distance. We moved and had our being in a graded and ordered community.

There were no women in the College except for the domestic staff. Female visitors were under strict control as to time and place. Their presence was tolerated only on week-ends and on the ground floor.

Initiation of freshman was still a firmly established medieval institution. Initiation night was wild, wet and noisy. There was also a tug of war carried on in perpetuity, though undeclared and indecisive, with the enemy from across the road. The time for equalizing



accounts was Convocation night when the alien Philistines surprised the solemn assembly with bangs and fireworks.

Occasionally frustrated energy reversed itself, when for instance the Chapel organ exploded with a bang at the first touch of the organist's pedal; or the alarm clock went off half way through morning worship. All this and more were daily routine in a highly organized and orderly institution.

But suddenly, in the mid sixties, there came a break. The spirit of revolution from across the Campus began to seep through the seemingly impregnable fortifications of Wycliffe College. Murmurs against authoritarianism, paternalism, discipline and etiquette could be heard in the corridors. The slogan of the French revolution began to impinge upon the innocent minds of the theological fraternity.

The instigators were the non-theologues. They were the first to call for loosening of restrictions especially about female visitors. "Change" became the philosophy of University life and the theological students gave to it an evangelical twist: Why not have professors sit in the same pews as the students? Why formal lectures; why not Seminars in which everyone could talk? Why structured worship? Why dressing-up for prayer? And so the College began to change.

Restrictions on female visitors were slackened. Lectures became seminars with a few doing most of the talking. The Constitution of the student body was re-written. The black gown became optional. Except for one professor (a die-hard traditionalist) and one student (a die-hard reactionary), the gown disappeared overnight. Shirt sleeves and patched trousers became the style - except for dinner when jacket and tie was obligatory. The proletariat won the day as predicted by Karl Marx.

On occasion liberty took on unusual form. I well remember a student (non-theologue!) appearing in a swim suit at the office downstairs in confrontation with Miss Marion Taylor. The look she gave him accompanied by a regal frown froze him on the spot. He had to thaw out to be freed.

The revolution lasted five years. By the seventies it had spent itself. We are now gradually beginning the return to normal. Lectures instead of free-for-all exercise in volubility; structured liturgical worship; robing in conducting chapel worship. We may yet see a return to the academic gown and the high table. Who knows?

Looking back the revolutionary interval was a useful experience. We gained the presence of women both as visitors and students; we learned that freedom is a precious and fragile commodity; we discovered the connection between form and substance. Above all we learned flexibility without giving up essentials.

Such is life. It goes up and down. It turns in circles. Perhaps Horace's dictum is a fitting conclusion: dulce et decorum est disipere in loco - it is pleasant and proper to be foolish once in a while.