

— Benediction —

The late Halford Luccock, borrowing from Robert Frost, claimed that he carried on a lifelong “lover’s quarrel with the church.”

This it seems to me, is what every Christian — be he minister or laymen — ought to do. The Christian church today is (and I suppose always has been) both glorious and ridiculous; dedicated and superficial; relevant and trivial. It behooves us then—those of us who love the church—to do what we can to eliminate the ridiculous, the superficial and the trivial so that the glory and the dedication and the relevance may be seen unobscured.

Some sincere Christians insist that this end is best accomplished by pretending that there is nothing ridiculous, superficial or trivial about the church. But, so to pretend is to underestimate the perceptive powers of those outside the church, especially the well-educated materialists and the keen-minded unregenerate. That they are quicker to detect the ridiculous in the church, than they are to see its glory, is due in part, to their lack of objectivity. It doesn’t help much for the church to play like it is perfect; these things will not go away for all our pretending.

It is healthier, I think, to acknowledge our shortcomings and poke fun at them than to claim sanctimoniously that they do not exist, or at least ought not to be admitted lest we expose ourselves to the jeers of the ungodly. More devils can be routed by a little laughter than by a carload of humorless piety.

I love the church, and the Methodist Church in particular. Not that it is any better (or any worse) than other sects, but because my life has been inseparable from it. Both my grandfathers were licensed Methodist preachers. My father, the late Phillips Brooks Smith — a man of rare wit and a good-natured sense of what was ridiculous in organized religion — was a prominent Methodist pastor in Indiana, as is my only brother, Phillips Brooks Smith, Jr. (who is so very much like his father) today.

And I am, also, an ordained Methodist clergyman, so the Methodist church has been my family background, and has provided me an opportunity to march in the procession of the saints,¹ as well as a profession and a living. It has been a good and exciting life so far, and I expect that it will continue to be so.

An author becomes an author from a mixture of motives — the fun of creating something, the satisfaction of getting published, the desire to supplement his income, the boost to his ego from whatever public recognition or notoriety he is able to capture, among others.

Also, most authors have, I imagine, somewhere on their list of motives the need to say something, to get something off their chest.

For me, this something is a desire to persuade the public in general and the members of the churches in particular to accept the clergy as part of the human race—a recognition they have persistently

refused to accord us. As one bright and attractive young lady (a high school senior), who is a member of my present congregation, said to me recently, "It is hard for me to think of ministers as people." So it is, my dear, but I wish it weren't.

I know now, why authors always include words of appreciation to many people who, they claim, helped them bring the book into being. Until now, I thought this was only polite hogwash, but it is really true.

If my wife, my son and daughter, my mother, and several close friends had not provided for me an enthusiastic captive audience in the first days of the writing and encouraged me to go on, I probably would have quit early.

The Rev. Carl Quinlun Baker, long time friend and coworker, thinks he rates a co-authorship for his many suggestions, his constant encouragement and his willingness to assume not a few of my regular responsibilities, so as to enable me to complete the manuscript before the deadline. And he is right.

Dr. Gerald L. Clapsaddle, a general secretary of the Methodist Board of Missions and friend of the years, had much valuable information to impart about the workings of boards and agencies of the church. The best way for me to thank him is to state with emphasis that nothing in the chapters on boards and agencies applies to him in any way, whatever.

Dr. John Sylvester Smith, also a friend of many years' standing, who is a veteran college administrator, as well as a Methodist clergyman, helped me to understand the complexities of a denominational college.

And Mrs. Sam Danenberger, valued member of my congregation, rapidly and expertly-typed the manuscript and had the grace to chuckle as she typed. There is no substitute for a competent typist, especially for one who laughs at what you hope is funny.

If any reader feels that the astringency with which some subjects have been treated is excessive I can only say that I think they deserve the treatment. If there are those who protest the needle, which has been occasionally-jabbed into the body of the church, I protest that it was aimed at those areas which need to be sensitized.

No matter what comes of it, it has been a lot of fun doing this book. And, as any good umpire will insist, I only call it as I see it.

Charles Merrill Smith

1. In the New Testament a saint was not a person of superior virtue simpering with self-conscious piety (which is what we often take it to mean), but an ordinary fallible human being subject to and often afflicted with all the ills the mortal spirit is heir to, who was a member of the Christian Church and was trying to follow Jesus Christ as best he knew how.