

REMARKS FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE ASTRIK L. GABRIEL
HISTORY OF UNIVERSITIES COLLECTION

by

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DR. A. L. GABRIEL: AN HOMAGE TO A SCHOLAR

One of the greatest delights that we in the academic profession can experience is to witness the success of our former students. It is on those rare occasions that we are reassured that the task to which we have dedicated our lives is a noble enterprise and that our efforts are ultimately worthwhile. For a moment it even makes us forget that a Greyhound bus driver makes more money than an associate professor of Medieval Studies.

An even greater thrill than to see the success of our students, is to witness the success of a person whose students we were. You can, therefore, imagine what a delight it is for me to be here, to participate in this program honoring my distinguished former magister, Professor A. L. Gabriel.

Unfortunately so often recognition of outstanding achievement comes too late. Frequently we wait until we are at the casket or grave site of a person before we say those things which should have been said years before. This is why Father Hesburgh, Dr. McInerny and the Administration of this great university must be commended for their solid good sense and fine timing in celebrating Professor Gabriel while he is here among us to enjoy the well deserved praise that is bestowed upon him today. While a fine eulogy can ease the pain of grieving friends and relatives, a gathering of this nature is far more beneficial and cheerful for all of us, but most especially for Dr. Gabriel.

According to the nicely engraved invitation which you,

his colleagues and friends have received, my task today is to talk about the scholarly accomplishments of our honoree.

This becomes an almost hopelessly impossible task, for what can be said in 15 to 20 minutes about a scholar whose typed list of publications cover 15 pages! ^{2nd list of honors is 2 mile long.} What can I say about a man, who alone among the Roman Catholic clergy, has gained such world wide reknown that he has been invited to become a member of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres of the French Academy, of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Germany, and has recently been elected an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of ~~Arts and~~ Sciences. Those of you who are familiar with the politics of the European intellectual scene, know that membership to these "academies" is most selective, and to be an American scholar, and even worse a Roman Catholic priest, are major strikes against any candidate.

Having received world wide recognition as an outstanding scholar, it is fitting that this University should also honor A.L. Gabriel, for in honoring him, it honors itself. ^{Over a Years} ~~century~~ ago, the great French scholar Pasquier remarked that the famous universities of the Middle Ages were "built of men," batie en hommes. That statement is substantially true even today. It is the quality of the faculty which largely determines the reputation of an institution. While the beauty of the physical facilities greatly enhance the image of an institution and while winning football teams keep eager and zealous students and alumni happy, in the final analysis it is the reputation of the scholars on the faculty that really determines whether an institution is great or mediocre. In the eyes of many eminent men and women on both sides of the Atlantic,

individuals who have never seen the glow of the setting winter sun on the Golden Dome, or do not know the difference between a touchdown and a home run, the University of Notre Dame is associated with the person of Prof. Gabriel and is recognized through him as a center of scholarly activity and a home of the muses.

Let us briefly turn to the major phases in the long and exciting life of Prof. Gabriel, for the road from the charming city of Pécs in southwestern Hungary where he came into this world 76 years ago today, to this university of northern Indiana, is a long road. The way from Central Europe to North America was a difficult trip, with many great dangers, some interesting vistas and not a few unexpected turns. After the completion of his secondary education, Gabriel entered the Canons of Premontre, an order known in Central Europe for the excellence of its schools and the learning of its members. In 1929 he matriculated at the University of Budapest and followed a demanding curriculum. Among his professors were some of the greatest scholars of that university in the inter-war years. His training was thorough and extensive and prepared him for a life of vigorous intellectual activity. His abilities were soon recognized by his mentors and he was sent to study to the École des Hautes Études and the École des Chartes in France. Following in the footsteps of many of his medieval countrymen, who had come to study at the famous University of Paris, Gabriel arrived in the City of Lights in 1932. The young Hungarian student soon became a familiar sight at the Sorbonne and the Bibliothèque Nationale. His French professors and fellow students also recognized his brilliance and

thus began a long line of friendships which have ties Prof. Gabriel to Paris and to France, until our own days. Very much like the great Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus four and a half centuries earlier, Gabriel devoted himself with great intensity to his studies, but did not neglect to visit the restaurants, bistros, as well as academic and non academic taverns, for which Paris is so famous. On occasion when his stipend was at a low ebb, Gabriel and some fellow Hungarian students frequented some rather modest establishments in what would be called "tough" neighborhoods. He soon learned to choose his table near the door so that a strategic retreat could be undertaken, or if necessary, the table would become a protective shield against possible flying objects or bodies. This training certainly paid off in 1944-1945 when he had to suffer through the long siege of Budapest by the Russian Army, a Siege which lasted longer than the Battle of Stalingrad.

Upon his return to Hungary from Paris, Gabriel received his doctorate ^{in 1936 was} and subsequently appointed Director of the French College ^{recently established} run by the Canons of Premontré. The college had the reputation of being the best institution of its kind in the country and Dr. Gabriel was the youngest director in its history. Not only was the college known for its scholastic excellence, it ^{was also} was also a most democratic institution where the children of princes, dukes and counts rubbed shoulders with the son of the railroad crossing guard.

The dark storm clouds of war were approaching his native land when in 1941 Dr. Gabriel was appointed privat-dozent at the University of Budapest. The young scholar made quite an impression. A few years ago, while on a research grant in Hungary,

I had the opportunity to talk to some of his former colleagues at the University, who remembered Prof. Gabriel fondly. He was known for three things: 1. the brilliance of his lectures, 2. his well tailored, impeccable appearance, and 3. the elegant company he kept. These same colleagues hastened to add that while they have never seen Prof. Gabriel in the company of an unattractive woman, there was never a hint of impropriety or scandal, something which has remained true throughout his life. Canon Gabriel has demonstrated that one can take the vow of ~~cel~~ celibacy, without taking a vow of blindness.

Dr. Gabriel's appointment to the University of Budapest was the result of the sound scholarship which he displayed in the ever increasing number of his publications. Drawing upon materials he discovered at Paris, several of his articles dealt with Hungarian students and professors who had attended the Parens Scienciarum in the Middle Ages. The medieval university of Paris began to play an increasingly important role in the scholarly life of Prof. Gabriel, although he also showed interest in a variety of historical and literary problems.

During the fateful year of 1944 when Hungary was invaded first by Nazi Germany and then by the Red Army, Dr. Gabriel was hard at work and still published two books as well as several shorter studies. His first major book, Les rapports dynastiques franco-Hongrois au moyen age, appeared that year and shows the characteristics for which his work has been known ever since: 1. sound scholarship, based on meticulous archival research, 2. a text which is readable, often witty and urbane, and 3. a large number of well chosen illustrations. This book did much to enhance

Prof. Gabriel's reputation both in Hungary as well as in France. The German occupiers of Hungary were furious that such a book could appear and tried to destroy it. It is a strange coincidence that the second volume he published in 1944 was a study on the life of the then recently canonized St. Margaret of Hungary, a royal princess who was deeply influenced by the new spirituality preached by the mendicants in the 13th century, and who ended her life in a Dominican convent on an island in the Danube near the Hungarian capital. Last year, Canon Gabriel was elevated to titular provost or abbot of the Church of the Premontres on that same island, now known as St. Margaret Island. His church is but a few hundred feet from where St. Margaret had lived and died.

The end of World War II in 1945 brought fundamental changes in the life of Dr. Gabriel. The French College, which had been a safe haven for Allied airmen shot down over Hungary and protected at no small personal risk by the brave Director, was now occupied by the Soviet Army. During the siege of Budapest Prof. Gabriel endured much privation, lost his whole library and research notes. After the war, he tried to reopen the college, but soon realized that nationalization of all Catholic educational institutions was imminent and that a Communist take over was inevitable. He, therefore, left his native land in 1947 and headed for Paris. Over ten difficult years had passed since he had left the city on the Seine, but those who remembered him as an eager and talented student, welcomed him now as a recognized scholar. His friend Etienne Gilson extended an invitation to him to become a guest professor at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies at Toronto. In 1948 Gabriel came to Notre Dame and became Director of our Medieval Institute in 1953. The difficulties and uncertainties of the war years behind him, Prof. Gabriel

became a more productive scholar than ever before. The intellectual and spiritual life of the medieval University of Paris and its colleges became the focus of his attention leading to the publication of Student Life at Ave Maria College in 1955 and Skara House at the Mediaeval University of Paris in 1960. Both Ave Maria College and Skara House received excellent reviews and sold well. I always wondered how many people bought Skara House not quite knowing what type of house it really was, and were too embarrassed to ask. At this same period he also wrote studies on the educational ideas of Christine de Pisan and of Vincent of Beauvais, as well as other excellent articles.

With each passing year it became more evident that in the area of medieval education, especially the history of Universities, Professor Gabriel was the scholar with new ideas, the insights based on primary research, and a breadth of knowledge not found anywhere else.

Among the books, articles and reviews written by Professor Gabriel, the one work which has the greatest scholarly value is the Liber receptorum of the English German Nation at the University of Paris, published in 1964 as volume VI of the Auctarium Chartularii Universitatis Parisiensis. This monumental work covering 837 pages contains the records of the receivers of the nation during the 15th century. What makes this book so valuable to us, and to future generations of scholars, is that Professor Gabriel has attempted to identify every student or scholar mentioned in the volume and then proceeded to give complete biographical and bibliographical information about that particular person, such as what other universities he

attended, what books he wrote, edited or possessed, what was his subsequent ecclesiastical or secular career, etc. The Liber receptorum is a gold mine of information and is an unequaled record of the intellectual life of 15th century Paris. If the much abused term "seminal work" can be applied to a book, the Liber receptorum is it. Several generations of graduate assistants had worked on this project but Prof. Gabriel knew exactly who did what or where a possible error was committed. After more than 20 years I still have a recurring nightmare that the phone rings and Dr. Gabriel wants to know why I did not notice that a treatise of Johannes Major was missing from the bibliography. Prof. Gabriel has clearly set a new standard on how university records should be edited and what information can be extracted from them. Anybody who has ever looked at the Liber receptorum and has read at least a few entrees, can understand why Dr. Gabriel has such disdain for those "trendy," or as he calls them "phony," academics who can sit in their bathtub with a tape recorder and dictate a chapter in their newest book, a volume which will be outdated before the year is over. The type of scholarship for which A.L.G. has become famous, will stand the test of time.

In the twenty years that have elapsed since the publication of the Liber receptorum our Magister has continued to pour forth books and articles with regularity. While others decelerate with age, Prof. Gabriel excellerates. Paris and its colleges, British, Scottish, Irish, Hungarian, Colonial American institutions of higher education have received his attention. He has shown great interest in iconography and art history. His interests are truly universal.

As a result of his wide ranging scholarship he is now recog-

It received the Dourlens Prize of the Fr. Academy

nized throughout the world as the foremost authority on medieval education and has served with great distinction as the President of the Subcommittee on the History of Universities within the International Commission for Historical Sciences. As president of the very select body of international specialists in the area of University history, Dr. Gabriel has shown immense tact and diplomacy in maintaining peace between proud Poles and insecure Russians, sanguine Italians, plotting Frenchmen and chauvinistic Germans. By using his well known charm, tactics such as divide and conquer, as well as a judicious amount of their respective national drinks, he is able to bring harmony where discord had reigned. If President Reagan would be as wise as he is not, he would send Dr. Gabriel to Geneva, and the stalled disarmament talks would soon be successfully completed with the following results: First, each side would be certain that it had won a major victory at the bargaining table, and second, every maitre d' and waitress within a twenty mile radius of Geneva would know Professor Gabriel by name in less than a week.

The name of Dr. Gabriel has become, through the years, almost synonymous with the history of Universities. As Director of the Mediaeval Institute he began to assemble a research library of major proportions. The value of this collection is considerable. Its worth was recognized already over 20 years ago by a scholar well known to many of you, Professor Heiko Obermann. In the summer of 1962 Obermann, who was at Harvard at that time, was traveling to Chicago with his family by car. He knew Prof. Gabriel and had heard something about the Medieval Institute

Library and so he stopped here to investigate. Professor Gabriel was not here, he had gone to Europe, and I was working feverishly on the index of the Liber Receptorum in the unairconditioned splendor of the old Library. It became my task to show Professor Obermann our campus as well as the Institute. When he finished his tour, he turned to me and exclaimed: "This is the most magnificent collection of books on the history of universities I have ever seen. No library in America or Europe can even come close to what you have here. Most important of all, it is excessible. Magnificent." Twenty one years have passed, but the words seem as if they were spoken yesterday.

In the subsequent years Dr. Gabriel has painstakingly amassed a variety of research materials which are of inestimable value, and which today became the ALG Collection. As a former student of this institution, who is bound to this place by sincere affection, I would like to thank Father Hesburgh for his efforts to make this collection available to scholars, and at the same time ask that this great university continue to direct some of its resources to this project so that the future growth of this magnificent collection is insured.

We, who have gathered here on this festive occasion, hope that those who will use these research materials in the years to come will carry on the great scholarly tradition established by our distinguished magister, colleague and friend. May future generations, who use these tools, show the same quest for truth, the same uncompromizing dedication to excellence, and the same irrepressible joi-de-vivre, which have characterized Professor Astrik L. Gabriel.