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WILLIAM H. ALEXANDER: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS.

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Speech

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

WILLIAM H. ALEXANDER: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

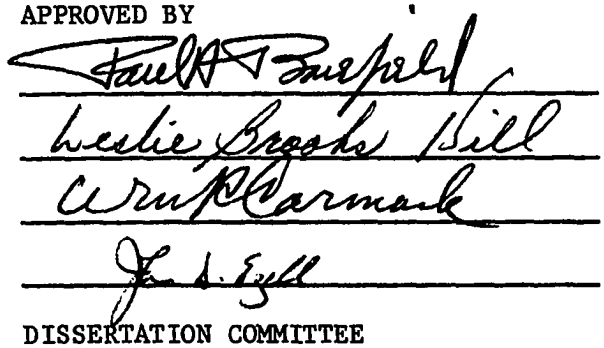
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Norman, Oklahoma

1971

WILLIAM H. ALEXANDER: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

APPROVED BY



DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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gave unselfishly of their time and advice, I must single out J. Phil Burns and J. Clyde Wheeler for their especially fruitful recollections of Alexander's persuasive traits.

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WILLIAM H. ALEXANDER: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Survey of Previous Research

In spite of the steadily expanding ranks of speech scholars, with their proliferating publications, occasionally a person of genuine significance to the field is overlooked. Such is the case with William H. Alexander, the late pastor of First Christian Church of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Although Alexander's contribution to pulpit, after-dinner, and political oratory is well established, at this date--a decade after his untimely death--there is no definitive study of his life and work. Yet, if the lives and thoughts of men of persuasive renown constitute worthwhile studies, such a speech figure as Bill Alexander should not escape our examination.

Graduate research by speech scholars relating to Alexander's speaking is non-existent. A survey of the materials in the Quarterly Journal of Speech, Speech Monographs, and the Library of Congress card catalog indicates no rhetorical study has been undertaken on William Alexander. This is not to say, however, that Alexander did not receive the notice of other writers. There are extensive articles about him in religious publications such as The Christian Century, The Christian

Evangelist, and Front Rank. Popular weekly magazines have featured expansive articles about the popular preacher. Time once declared, "What Florenz Ziegfeld brought to Broadway and Tabasco sauce to the raw oyster, the Rev. William H. Alexander brought to religion in Oklahoma City."[1] Life said of his 1950 campaign for U.S. Senate, " . . . he is providing the best histrionics that part of the country has seen since 'Pappy' O'Daniels first started passing biscuits in Texas."[2]

Look devoted five pages to "The Happy Preacher in the Heart of the Bible Belt," praising his positive approach to religion, snappy showmanship, use of humor, and penchant for getting big jobs done.[3] Journalists for such newspapers as Christian Science Monitor, Kansas City Star, and Detroit Free Press gave much space to the preacher's religious innovations, political escapades, and public declarations on a wide variety of subjects.

The general quality and the abundance of published material about the man furnishes evidence of Alexander's wide influence in our society, but it does little to provide a lasting analysis of his contribution to the field of speech.

Justification for the Study

Justification for this study has already been suggested in depicting the subject's influence as a speaker. A rhetor whose effectiveness is indicated by continuing interest of the media in his ministry, by

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[1]"The Call," Time, LV (January 16, 1950), 20.

[2]"Politicking Starts Early in the South," Life, XXVII (March 27, 1950), 30.

[3]Lewis W. Gillenson, "The Happy Preacher," Look, XII (August 3, 1948), 49-53.

persistent crowds at his speech events, and by sizeable growth of financial support for church programs he advanced may well be worthy of examination. Although it is in the interests of speech scholarship to ask what accounts for such effectiveness in public speaking, there is no rhetorical analysis of this speaker who was consistently ranked near the top of the National Chamber of Commerce poll of the ten top speakers of America, and who was said to have spoken in person to more people each week than any other minister in the country.[1] An Illinois newspaper gave evidence of the unusual clamor to engage Alexander--especially for youthful audiences--when it reported that the Oklahoman "gave over 1,200 speeches last year, and turned down 103 invitation to speak at commencement programs during 1947 . . . "[2]

Furthermore, Alexander's range of speech activities provides a unique opportunity to study three significant genres of public speaking within the career of a single spokesman. While some speakers do occasionally accept appointments in areas of persuasion other than their vocational calling, rarely does an orator devote intense energy to two or three full-time careers simultaneously.

From 1945 until his death in 1960 Alexander met a heavy schedule of after-dinner speeches across the nation--often four or five weekly--in addition to his many ministerial speaking duties at Oklahoma City's First Christian Church. The church's demands on Alexander were heavy. For example, in February, 1958, he delivered: four Sunday morning sermons;

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[1]Edward M. Miller, biographical data on album cover of recorded speech, "Are You Part of the Problem or Part of the Answer?" (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Edward M. Miller and Associates, 1960).

[2]Freeport Journal-Standard, November 10, 1948.

four Wednesday night talks; two Sunday evening talks to young people; five funeral messages; four weddings; plus twenty-two talks to women's meetings, special committees, deacons' meetings, church school classes, and other groups.[1] He further widened his speech experience when he announced his candidacy for the office of U.S. Senator in January, 1950. The ten-month period following was one of furious campaigning which, while it necessitated some curtailment of his preaching and occasional speaking, resulted in an extremely demanding agenda embracing many speeches in each of his three areas of speaking.

Plan of the Study

This analysis will pursue the following main lines of inquiry: (1) the recounting of significant events in Alexander's life as they relate to his speech practices; (2) the analysis of the chief sources of his rhetorical effectiveness; (3) a discussion of elements which hindered Alexander's efforts at persuasion; and (4) the assessment of Alexander's contribution as a spokesman on The American Scene.

Since my research has established that the unique personality of William H. Alexander was one of the most potent forces in his persuasion, the study opens with a rather thorough examination of Alexander as a person. Chapter II, in surveying the formative influences of his speech personality, discusses the influence of parents, sports activities, sales work, showbusiness, and conversion experience upon the emerging preacher. Chapter III examines the mature speech personality of the man as seen by his contemporaries. Chapters II and III are in accord with

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[1] Monthly Report to Board of Elders, First Christian Church, February, 1958.

the viewpoint expressed by Robert D. Clark that "biography can be an ideal vehicle for rhetorical criticism."[1] Such a perspective seems especially applicable to the study of such a man as Alexander.

The times and conditions in which a speaker lives exert great influence upon his interests and concerns, shaping in large measure his speech materials. The stream of events in which Alexander lived must be surveyed. However, since current issues and Alexander's speech themes were so closely correlated, it is my intention to fuse them throughout the study, rather than devote separate sections to the historical context.

Chapter IV focuses upon Alexander's purpose in speaking, noting the consistency of aim evident in the three different speech genres in which he operated. Chapter V discusses the speaker's methods of preparing his sermons and speeches, noting his movement from the thoroughly developed, written manuscript form to a loose, off-hand message frequently composed while he addressed his audience.

Chapter VI concentrates upon the appeal of Alexander's personality as a persuasive force, dealing with his much-publicized image as the happy preacher, his use of ethos-building devices, and instances of negative ethos in Alexander's make-up. Chapter VII investigates the contribution of showmanship to Alexander's career as persuader, focusing upon his reputation as a showbusiness figure, his use of showman techniques in public address, and his dual role as poet and orator. Chapter VIII examines Alexander's use of emotional appeals as he sought

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[1]Barnet Baskerville, "Addendum 1967," in Essays on Rhetorical Criticism, ed. by Thomas R. Nilsen (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 189.

to move his hearers to accept his propositions; the showman-preacher's dependence upon stories centering on parent-child affection and the sacrifice of human life in war is evaluated.

Chapter IX is devoted to an analysis of the basic ideas which pervade Alexander's sermons and speeches. The dominant themes were his belief in the power of ideas, the virtuous nature of man, the dignity of the individual, the soundness of free enterprise economy, and a liberal theology. The structure of Alexander's speech messages provides the focus of Chapter X; the characteristics of loose organization of his materials, use of humor in introductions, preference for three or four main speech points, and use of hope-filled poetic conclusions are set forth. Chapter XI examines Alexander's use of simple, concrete language in his persuasive efforts, his adaptive approach to style and his achievement of vividness through the use of dream metaphor, poetry, and speech figures such as alliteration, antithesis, and historical and literary allusions. Chapter XII examines Alexander's use of voice, facial expression, gesture, body tone, and animation to achieve his spontaneous and memorable delivery. The final chapter attempts to estimate the influence of William H. Alexander as a speech personality, discussing the effects of his untimely death upon his career and evaluates the rhetorical and literary aspects of Alexander's addresses. Chapter XIII also establishes the major conclusions derived from the study.

Sources of Material for This Study

The materials used in this investigation have included Alexander's recorded after-dinner speeches and sermons as well as his poetry, eulogies, sermons, lectures, and political speeches in their original

manuscript form. Much evidence useful to historical and descriptive research has been gleaned from articles from newspapers, weekly news magazines, scholarly journals and church periodicals. The recollections, observations, and conclusions of scores of people who were in Alexander's audiences have been obtained through correspondence and are reflected in the study. Also, the results of numerous personal and telephone interviews with Alexander's sons, Ralph and Don, his secretaries, some of his close associates in the ministry, and many of his personal friends have become part of this study. Extensive notes of Ralph Alexander, elder son of the late minister, relating many incidents in the life of Bill Alexander, have been especially helpful.

PART I

CHAPTER II

THE FORMATIVE PERSONALITY

Childhood

William Hamilton Alexander was born at Shelbyville, Missouri on January 20, 1915. The husky, red-haired lad was the last child born to Reverend and Mrs. Ralph Edward Alexander. Their first-born, Ralph Edward, Jr., had died in infancy; a son, Glenn, and a daughter, Nadine, had preceded Bill's arrival. When Bill was two and a half years old Reverend and Mrs. Alexander moved to St. Louis where Bill's father was to serve twenty-seven years as Pastor of the Second Christian Church.

Although Bill was to become known for his articulate speech personality, he was slower than most in learning to talk. When he was four, his mother, concerned about her son's lack of intelligible speech, visited the family physician. The doctor told her the only reason the boy had learned no words was that he knew he needed none. He had only to point or grunt and his demand was instantly met. Mrs. Alexander scoffed at the diagnosis until shortly after her return home when Bill stood by the sink, pointed, grunted, and received his customary drink. Upon reflection, Mrs. Alexander decided to delay compliance with her son's requests until he made efforts at using words instead of his less sophisticated symbols. In very little time the speech deficiency was remedied. This incident may be of value as an indication of the

deference and near-adulation held by his parents for their youngest child.[1] Bill would always receive much attention from others, thinking little of it, but accepting it as his due. The warmth, love, and devotion Bill received in his early years probably laid the foundation for his lifelong expectation of immediate acceptance by others and his own ready trust of people in every situation.

Bill's father was a congenial, fun-loving preacher who had developed a personal philosophy which manifested itself in a perennially optimistic attitude altogether independent of circumstances. This positive, exulting spirit so impressed his son that Bill frequently referred to his father as a powerful influence in shaping his own attitude toward life. He said,

> My father had a terrific influence. He was the happiest man I ever met. I'd ask him if he had a good time when he had been away preaching. He would say, "Son, I always take a good time with me." He got a big kick out of life.[2]

Not only was Bill influenced by his father's fundamental cheerfulness, but it appears that young Alexander's fascination with show business was also the result of his father's encouragement. Reverend Alexander frequently attended vaudeville performances and generally took little Bill along. At the age of five or six, on returning home from accompanying his Dad to a vaudeville perofrmance, Bill would regale family and friends by recreating the show through mimicry. While many a preacher's boyhood training was conducted through repetition of the Sunday morning sermon

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[1]Interview with Ralph Alexander, Lawton, Oklahoma, March 25, 1968.

[2]William H. Alexander, "Faith and Freedom," delivered December 5, 1951 at convention of the New Idea Corporation, Van Orman Hotel, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

with emphasis on textual references, stylistic flourishes and preacher tone, Bill's early speech impressions were formed through reproduction of humorous material, animated dialogue, and showbusiness improvisation. The influence of such interests was evident throughout his life and ministry.

Bill's childhood was marked by his own fun-loving spirit which occasionally brought chagrin to his father. Reverend Alexander usually handled such embarrassment in his customary good-natured manner. However, when Bill, usually well-behaved in church, caught a mouse and put it on top of the organ during a morning worship service, his father gave him a severe paddling.[1] Infractions of a lesser nature, such as sailing paper airplanes during the sermon and placing $10,000.00 checks in the collection plate, were not considered very seriously.[2]

Champion Athlete

Reverend Alexander's easy tolerance and generally permissive approach to child-rearing was balanced by a toughness which nurtured an intense and competitive spirit in his younger son. The pastor often said he would rather have a boy who caused the neighbors to say "You'd better keep your kid off of mine," than to have a son who came home crying, "Daddy, so-and-so beat me up today."[3] When Bill was eleven years old, his father initiated boxing lessons at St. Louis's Northside YMCA; Bill's coach was the heavy-weight champion of Illinois University. Alexander proved an apt student. After six years of training he won city and state light heavyweight championships, completing his amateur

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[1] Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 5.

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

[3] Ibid., p. 6.

fight career as runner-up in the American Athletic Association's national event at Madison Square Garden.[1]

This training and experience did much to toughen up the light-hearted preacher's son, probably stiffening and cultivating what was to become a relentless will to win a contest. The honors which Bill won through fighting were not without their drawbacks, however. The amateur boxer came home from New York with a new image of himself: he was as tough as they came. Years later, speaking to a large sales convention audience, he recalled that he found it necessary to change this opinion shortly after his return to St. Louis.

> Some of my school buddies came by to take me to an Italian wedding on the other side of town. No one but Italians were supposed to be there, but we thought we would crash the party. When we got there a lot of people were just going in the house so we mingled with the crowd and went on in without any problems. Once inside, my buddies were doing fine--they had black hair--but my red hair stuck out like a sore thumb.
>
> We'd been there about three minutes when this guy walked up to me, looked me over good, and said, "What are you doing in here?" Since I had just won some pretty good boxing championships, I felt pretty sure of myself, so I looked him up and down and said, as smart-alecky as I could, "I don't think it's any of your business but if you think it is, we'll go out into the alley and see which one of us comes back." He very quietly said, "All right." So we went outside. It wasn't going to be a brawl. We were just going to see who was the better man. And it didn't take long to find out.
>
> To make a long story short, all I did was to get up and then get up again. I never got so tired of one guy in my life. He had a punch like a mule and he was fast on his feet. But every time he'd knock me down, I'd shake my head and say, "That was an accident. This couldn't happen to me. I just won the Missouri championship." So I'd get up and the mistake would happen all over again. About the 15th time I got up he just lifted me over his shoulder, put me in his car, and took me to the doctor.
>
> On the way there he apologized. "I'm sorry I had to do that to you. If you hadn't been pretty good I wouldn't have been so rough on you. I've been fighting professionally in Brooklyn for seven years. You were just a fresh, punk kid who needed a lesson." He took me to the doctor and got my broken nose fixed. Then he took me

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[1] Ibid., p. 6.

home and explained to my folks. Dad got a big laugh out of it. But I've never been to an Italian wedding since then.[1]

Bill's athletic activities went beyond the boxing arena: during his high school days he lettered in football, tennis, baseball, and swimming.

Emergent Showmanship

Heavy as his sports schedule was, it did not prevent the development and display of the showbusiness side of his personality. He had the romantic lead in the junior class play, was active in St. Louis community theatre productions, and was "maestro of the hottest dance band on the campus."[2] In addition to this, Alexander was class president each of his years at Beaumont High School and also served as high school mayor.[3]

During the early part of Bill's senior year, he left the ranks of the amateur and turned his showman's flair to professional activities. He took a job as master-of-ceremonies at Westborough Night Club, providing continuity for the floor shows of a large night spot in St. Louis.[4] The idea of the pastor's son working in such a place was unpopular with many of the congregation; nevertheless, Reverend Alexander would not tell his son to quit. While at Westchester, Bill added to his repertoire of anecdotes and quips, did some tap dance improvisations, and

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[1]"Four Secrets to Success," p. 16.

[2]Lewis S. Gillenson, "The Happy Preacher," Look, XII (August 3, 1948), 50.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Interview with Ralph Alexander at Lawton, Oklahoma, March 25, 1968.

delivered sentimental ballads in the nostalgic, intimate way of other crooners of the day.

Success--and Defeat--in Selling

Immediately following graduation from high school, Bill took a holiday from his harried pace. He quit his job at Westchester and spent his time at the city's tennis courts and swimming pools. With sports, dating, and running around with his school chums to occupy him, the athletic, gregarious redhead thought he had found a way of life which suited him quite well. His holiday from responsibility was short-lived, however, since Bill's mother soon tired of seeing her energetic son sleeping late into the day, resting up for afternoon and evening frivolities. A believer in hard work, thrift, and old-fashioned self-discipline, Mrs. Alexander soon had her son looking for employment. Young Alexander went on some interviews announced in the newspaper's classified ads but returned home, saying there was nothing but door-to-door sales jobs available to people his age--and that was one kind of work he simply refused to do. Travelling around with a tough crew of magazine salesmen who get door after door slammed in their faces was not in Alexander's agenda.

Many of the "help wanted" ads were "blind" ads, so worded that job-hunters could not determine the nature of the work before receiving a sales talk from the hard-sell interviewer. Alexander answered such an ad and changed his plans for that summer; moreover, the experience changed his attitude towards selling as a field of work and provided memorable experiences which cultivated his persuasive appeals. The ad read, "Enthusiastic, energetic young man who wants to go places.

National Company. See J. Phil Burns, Continental Life Building, St. Louis."[1] On answering the ad, Bill met twenty-eight-year-old Burns, district circulation manager of the Delineator magazine. Burns had set national sales records as salesman and sales manager and soon sold young Alexander on the money-making possibilities of soliciting magazine subscriptions as a member of a crew then travelling in Indiana and adjacent states. Bill went home, told his mother of his change in plans, packed his bag, and took a bus to Vincennes, Indiana to begin what proved to be two of the most disappointing weeks he ever experienced. Since most of Alexander's experiences (class president, star athlete, leading roles in class plays) had been successful, he was hardly prepared for the rejections he was to receive as a magazine salesman.

The daily sales quota for a crew member was eight points, the equivalent of eight three-year subscriptions or sixteen one-year subscriptions. At the end of his first two weeks on the crew, Bill had sold one one-year subscription or one-half point. He had earned sixteen cents for two weeks of the hardest work he had ever done. When Phil Burns drove over to check on the crew's progress he found a dejected young man ready to quit. Here is how Mr. Burns recalls his conversation with Bill, who must have been surprised at the verbal barrage he received from his new boss.

Burns: What have you been living on, Bill. It can't be on the sales you've made.
Bill: I've been borrowing from the other fellows on the crew--mainly the crew manager. I'll pay them back. I've decided I don't like the work. Are you going back to St. Louis, Phil?
Burns: Yes, I am. This afternoon.
Bill: I'd like to ride home with you then, if I could.

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[1] "Four Secrets of Success," p. 11.

Burns: I don't think that would be a pleasant trip. I don't think I'd like travelling with a quitter.

Bill: I'm not a quitter. I just don't like the work, that's all.

Burns: O.K. But first succeed in it! Make good in it! Then decide you don't like it. Don't fail in it and then quit. You've got a life ahead of you, son. You fail here and quit. Then try something else. Fail in it. Quit. You set up a pattern that way. Learn this lesson now. Make good in what ever you try. Then do something else--because you don't like the kind of work.

What's the matter? Others on the crew are bringing in their quotas. Are they smarter than you are? Are you lazier than they are? Do they have more get up and go than you do? Do you have a yellow streak up your back?

If you get back to St. Louis, it won't be with me. You'll have to find some other way home. Maybe you can hitchhike. I'm not taking any fainthearted Flossie with a streak of yellow up his back home in my car.[1]

Burns left for St. Louis--without Bill. After watching his manager's car disappear into the distance, Bill sat down on the curb and wept.

Two days passed. Still Alexander had made no more sales and had become altogether demoralized. It seemed to make no difference how hard he tried. By now he had the "pitch" down perfectly. He would knock at the door, smile and cheerfully say to the housewife, "Good afternoon, ma'm. My name's Bill Alexander and I'm going through the neighborhood showing your neighbors some of the new and exciting Buttrick patterns which are so simple and inexpensive to make. . . ." For all his smoothness, he was not making enough sales to begin to pay expenses. Thoroughly disgusted, Alexander said, "Oh, what's the use! The patterns are fine, but I'm sick of trying to trick my way into a house 'showing patterns' when I'm there to sell magazines." Yet he could not quit--the sting of Burns's harsh words was still with him.

Alexander walked up to the next house, determined to try something

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[1]Interview with J. Phil Burns, April 1, 1970 at Oklahoma City.

different--but to keep on trying. When the door opened he said,

> "Lady, I'm probably the last person in the world you want to see. I'm a magazine salesman."
>
> The lady stood there with her hands on her hips and asked, "What magazine do you sell, young man?"
>
> "Delineator Magazine, Ma'am," said Bill in a matter-of-fact voice. "It's probably not the best magazine on the market but it has some really worthwhile things in it. Well, for example, look here at our Buttrick patterns. They're pretty and they're easy to make, too . . . "[1]

Bill smiled and spoke in a relaxed way as he spread the opened pages before the woman, catching her interest in that feature of the magazine. The lady invited him into the house, liked him, his direct and friendly manner, and bought a subscription to the magazine. Bill went to the next house and the next, trying to be himself, telling his story in a straightforward way. By the end of the day, he had sold twelve subscriptions; he felt like he had struck oil. Soon he was exceeding his quota every day. By the end of the summer Bill Alexander led the nation in subscriptions for the Delineator. The last half of the summer Bill worked in St. Louis, under the direct supervision of Phil Burns, who became a lifelong friend.[2]

University of Missouri

That fall, Bill wanted to enroll in college. However, September 1933 found the Alexanders without the necessary funds to finance their son's further education. The ranks of the unemployed stood at thirteen million;[3] church collections and pastor's salaries were at a meager

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[1]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 15.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr. and Nelson Manfred Blake, Since 1900 (4th ed.; New York: MacMillan Company, 1965), p. 408.

level. Thousands of Americans Bill's age were flocking to the Civilian Conservation Corps, a New Deal agency formed to keep jobless youths from lives of crime and hoboism by putting them to work conserving natural resources. Times were tough and Bill's youthful improvidence was no help; he had spent all he had earned from his summer's sales work.

Bill's mother, Clara Alexander, provided the solution which enabled Bill to begin his college work. Mrs. Alexander rented a large house in Columbia, the site of the University of Missouri, and rented rooms to other college students. For nine months she lived away from the rest of her family cooking, washing and cleaning house for a half-dozen college boys so her son could advance his education. Bill stayed busy that year at the University, but he was not busy studying. He pledged ATO fraternity, dated a wide variety of coeds, was in constant attendance at parties on and off campus, and dropped out of school altogether two months before the end of the second semester.[1]

Vaudeville

Alexander decided some form of showbusiness would suit his personality better than anything related to academics. Together with a high school chum, Byron Whitcraft, who shared Bill's love of the entertainer's art, young Alexander cast about for a way to make a living by making people have more fun. The two showmen from St. Louis auditioned for Vaudeville with a song and dance routine that put them on the Orpheum Circuit playing, among other cities, Des Moines and Chicago. Bill was drawing $250.00 weekly for his part of the vaudeville act. The year was

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[1]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 25.

1934; back in St. Louis Reverend Ralph Alexander was preaching sermons and funerals, visiting his parishioners at their homes, encouraging the sick, and counselling the troubled--for a tenth of what his son was receiving.

Alexander and Whitcraft lived well while on the road, saving some of their earnings for a vacation trip to New Orleans they had been planning. Bill soon became tired of vaudeville life. Although he liked the laughter and applause his talents generated, he was vaguely dissatisfied with the superficial and temporal aspects of his relationships with his audiences. Moreover, a minor health problem was aggravating him so much he decided he would have to leave showbusiness, at least temporarily. A paddling during a high school fraternity initiation had caused a cyst to form on his coccyx bone; long neglected, this malady was giving him more and more discomfort. Bill and his vaudeville teammate Whitcraft decided to take a month's leave during the early summer of 1935; they would spend two weeks vacationing in New Orleans, then return to St. Louis where Bill would have the cyst removed.

"Vacation" in New Orleans

The first evening Whitcraft and Alexander spent in New Orleans was not as they had planned it. They had started down Bourbon Street, visiting the night clubs, staying at each place only long enough to buy drinks for those at the next table, watch the floor show, then move on to the next club. After a half-dozen such visits, they decided the entertainment situation on Bourbon Street was near desperation. The masters-of-ceremonies were below the level of mediocrity, the combo bands were uninspired, and the various acts were barely more than dull. At

about the eighth club, before the floor show began, Byron asked for the bill; he and Bill had agreed to leave before the show was over unless there was notable improvement in the talent.

Byron looked at the bill in disbelief, passing it to his partner. Bill exclaimed, "One hundred and thirty dollars!" Rising slowly with a menacing look at the waiter, the former boxing champion said, "Look, buddy, who do you think you're kidding?" Waving at the people at his elbow, Alexander said, "We bought a half-a-dozen drinks--maybe ten--counting all the people at this table. Now where do you get a hundred and thirty bucks?"

The waiter glared back, "Now you look, fella, you said drinks for everyone. So we gave drinks to everyone. And some of them wanted more than one drink. So pay up or . . . " Alexander shot back, "We told you nothing of the sort and you know it. What kind of suckers do you take us for? Where's the manager of this clip joint, anyway? We'll just get this thing straightened out right now." The waiter's lips shifted into a half-amused snarl as he motioned to a door on the other side of the small stage. "You'll find the manager on the other side of that door, Mister."

Bill stormed across the room, knocked on the door and stalked in when he heard a gruff "C'mon in." Alexander saw a scowling, coarse looking man sitting at a desk who said, "Yeah, what's your problem, Boy Scout?" Bill said, "Look, Mister, we're getting a bum deal here. We bought a few drinks for the people at the next table and your waiter out there is saying we owe this dump a hundred and thirty dollars. Now we're willing to pay for what we ordered--but not a cent more. I figure if

there's going to be trouble over this, we might as well start right here 'cause I'm not going to pay this crooked bill!"

The figure behind the desk half-smiled as he said nothing but rose to his feet, never taking his eyes off the angry young man with the ultimatum. Bill's intense gaze shifted as it followed the towering movement of a burly monster of a man whose full height, now revealed, must have approached six feet, nine inches. The club manager started around his desk toward Bill, saying in an edgy voice, "Now just what kind of trouble did you have in mind, kid?"

Alexander made no reply. His mind was racing as he re-examined and rejected his apparent alternatives. He could whip the waiter but not this gorilla. He was determined not to pay the excessive charges. He wanted to bolt but rejected such a course as cowardly. Diplomatic language would surely mean nothing to the menacing hulk in front of him. A moment before, as he pounded on the manager's door, Alexander had seen the musicians getting into position to begin the next show. Now, as he cast about for a way out, he saw the master-of-ceremonies approaching the microphone and then an idea struck. He swung away from the manager, ran onto the small stage and grabbed the microphone from the hand of the startled master-of-ceremonies, "It's all right," Bill whispered, pointing to the manager who was standing in the door of his office with a hostile, baffled expression. The master-of-ceremonies, seeing the manager on hand, eased off the stage.

Bill took a breath, smiled broadly at his audience and enthusiastically announced, "Friends, this is Bill Alexander straight from Vaudeville's famous Orpheum Circuit. My partner, Byron Whitcraft and I have a

special treat for you tonight, so sit back and relax while Byron and I do a little novelty number that we picked up in New York. Hope you like it!" Bill motioned for Byron, who ran up to the stage as Bill said to the piano player, "Give us an 'a,' Maestro." The two young showmen from St. Louis alternately sang and danced and clowned through a tuneful parody; before they were well into the number they realized their audience was with them. Probably their freshness, vitality, and spirit of fun were most welcome to the bored and restless people who made up the audiences in most of the bars of New Orleans' French Quarter. With the applause ending of the first number, enthusiastic clapping filled the house. As Bill and Byron acknowledged the applause and then struck up another song, the doorman, sensing a crowd-pulling act, propped open the door and began hawking the people on the sidewalk with increased intensity, "C'mon in and catch our show--the hottest pair in Vaudeville straight from the Orpheum Circuit! You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll be dancing in the aisles! Step right inside. And there's no cover charge for this special show!"

At the end of the second number, the applause and shouts of approval were tumultuous, more people were pushing into the small club so that a crowd atmosphere was building. Bill ran back to the club manager, who stood transfixed in his office doorway. "You hear that applause?" Bill shouted, "You see that crowd? Well, we've just got started. Now I'm going back up there and we're going to do another number and when we finish they'll be screaming for more. And then I'm going to tell them what kind of a place you run. Mister, you'll be lucky if you sell another drink all night! And with all those people on

there's going to be trouble over this, we might as well start right here 'cause I'm not going to pay this crooked bill!"

The figure behind the desk half-smiled as he said nothing but rose to his feet, never taking his eyes off the angry young man with the ultimatum. Bill's intense gaze shifted as it followed the towering movement of a burly monster of a man whose full height, now revealed, must have approached six feet, nine inches. The club manager started around his desk toward Bill, saying in an edgy voice, "Now just what kind of trouble did you have in mind, kid?"

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Bill took a breath, smiled broadly at his audience and enthusiastically announced, "Friends, this is Bill Alexander straight from Vaudeville's famous Orpheum Circuit. My partner, Byron Whitcraft and I have a

our side, you'll sure not get any $130 from us. So think it over--and re-figure that bill!"

Bill ran back to the microphone, grinned at the applauding crowd and held up his hand, motioning for quietness. Then Byron and he went into one of their favorite routines: a combination of story-telling, witty dialogue and impromptu dancing, blended together by segments of popular songs. The audience--now swelled to capacity--found the entertainers and the number so engaging and versatile they were standing and cheering before the last bar was played. Bill hastily acknowledged the ovation before running back to the awestruck manager and yelling "Well, what did I tell you? You ready to play fair now or do I blow the whistle on you?" The manager looked from the crowd to Bill, back to the crowd, then back to Bill, and shouted above the roar, "I'll give you $200.00 a week plus all you can eat and drink if you'll work for me . . . and you can forget that bill!" "Okay, it's a deal," Bill returned, "but only for two weeks. And no more funny business of charging people for drinks they don't get. Right?" The hulking ex-bouncer nodded his agreement as Bill leaped to the microphone and announced the next number.

Two weeks later, Bill and Byron were on their way back to St. Louis, weary from the combination of the demands of exhaustive entertaining at night and impetuous sightseeing during the day.[1]

Conversion

Bill entered the hospital to have surgery performed, stayed a few days, and went home to rest and fully recuperate. His father was

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[1] Ibid., pp. 26-29.

scheduled to direct a week long church youth conference beginning the week after Bill's release from the hospital. The pastor asked Bill if he would like to attend the conference; when the young entertainer (whose disinterest in religion had prevented his hearing his father preach for over three years) said that he would like to go along for the camp's recreation, his father replied, "No. Either you go along for the whole thing or you don't go at all." To this ultimatum Bill gave no reply. Young Alexander spent the week-end preceding the conference brooding about the strained relationship with his father and about his vague dissatisfaction with his life as a showman.

Monday morning, when Reverend Alexander drove off to the youth camp, Bill was at his side. That week, at Inspiration Point, Missouri, Bill swam, hiked, played ball, led singing and joshed with the other young people. For Bill, the framework of Christian doctrine and practice in which the activities were carried out lent extra meaning and value to the otherwise lusty and happy-go-lucky days. He came home at the end of the week pensive and more serious than he had been for some time.

Needing some time to reflect upon his future, Bill stayed home during the next several days, hardly stirring from his room. On Thursday of that week he told his mother and father that he had decided to enter the ministry. Reverend Alexander smiled broadly and then said, "There's just one thing I ask of you, Bill. Don't do it if you can keep from it." They left Bill alone to think and pray more about his commitment.

Later that day Bill told his parents that there was not a shred of a doubt in his mind as to the nature of his life's work. Furthermore, a youth conference was scheduled for the following week in the Ozark

Mountains of Arkansas; Bill told them he planned to go. Beyond that point he was not sure just how or where he would serve the Lord, but he felt certain God would reveal this to him in His good time.

The conference in Arkansas was in no way dissappointing to Alexander; again he found his love of fun and recreation satisfied within the context of Christian faith. In addition to receiving reinforcement for his career decision at the youth camp, Bill was offered an unusual opportunity for Christian service. Charles Reign Scoville, well-known hymn writer and revival evangelist of the Disciples movement, was taken with the enthusiastic, light-hearted lad and asked him to lead the singing for a revival meeting to begin only a few days from then in Jenks, Oklahoma. When Bill hesitated, the preacher looked squarely at him and said, "If you're ever going to do anything for the Lord, young man, do it now." Alexander agreed and returned to St. Louis to say goodbye to his folks. During this brief visit, Reverend Alexander's congregation ordained Bill in the ministry. The following day, Bill's father stood at the platform of the St. Louis depot feeling both proud and sad as he bid his son farewell. "I believe in you, Bill," said the elder man as he shook his son's hand. Bill climbed aboard the train and waved at his dad. The parting was not easy for either of them. The expression of faith by his father greatly encouraged Bill; he knew there were good reasons why his dad might <u>not</u> believe in him. The fact that his many previous mistakes, such as his long absences from church, the wasting of his opportunities at the University, along with his general prodigality and frivolity, made no difference in his father's genuine belief in him had a profound effect upon Bill. His own dealing with young people who

failed would be marked by the same unshakeable trust.

From Song Leader to Pastor

At Jenks, a small town some twelve miles south of Tulsa, Bill added much to the service as he enthusiastically let the hymns, made announcements in his happy fashion and in a variety of ways lent zest to the meeting. It was at this meeting that Bill met Charlsie Perdue, a talented girl of his own age who performed as violin soloist at the revival. Her good looks, quiet devotion, and musical talent combined to make a sudden and solid impact upon the rugged, good looking song leader.

During the Jenks' meeting, Bill learned that the Christian Church in Stroud, Oklahoma, a town of two thousand a hundred miles to the west, was without a pastor. The Depression had hit the rural Oklahoma town hard; the last minister had left when the congregation could not raise his weekly salary of $7.50. Intrigued by the challenge, Bill drove to Stroud to inquire further about the needs and possibilities.

At Stroud Bill found two or three restaurants and filling stations, one auto dealer, a dentist, a young medical doctor with upstairs office and two-bed clinic, and several churches--some of which were closed down for lack of interest. The economic conditions from which the nation suffered had brought serious adversity to Stroud. Furthermore, the "dry blizzards" of 1933 and 1934, when dust storms swept across thousands of farms along the Great Plains, from the Texas Panhandle to Canada, were sufficient in themselves to cripple a rural economy. Many towns and cities in southwestern and midwestern states saw their residents load up belongings and move westward, leaving the dusty, choking drought belt behind. Stroud was one such town.

After making some inquiries, Alexander located Claude Smith, one of the leaders in the Christian Church. Smith painted a doleful scene for the idealistic young preacher. The church was actually at the point of disbanding. The janitor received only $5.00 a month for his services yet the church had difficulty meeting such a wage. The City of Stroud, because of the hard times, donated the water and electricity for the building so long as the usage was kept to a minimum. The membership numbered about 100, with some 50 or 60 of these attending Sunday morning services, dwindling to some 25 or 30 souls for the Sunday evening services; collections were very small and the members' morale was extremely low. The building was a modest frame structure in need of some repair, especially to ceiling and roof. Next door to the meeting house a narrow, two-storied house served as the parsonage.

Smith and others of the community who met Bill that day liked the young man's optimism and zeal and would have been glad to have such a minister serving the congregation. However, because of the economic situation, none would offer Bill the job. Finally, Alexander himself suggested he move to Stroud, work with the church, and let the brethren pay $5.00 a week when and if it was available. The elders quickly conferred and decided that Bill should come, telling the preacher that more help in the form of food and other goods would be supplied if he should come. Bill said if there was nothing but potatoes available, he was sure the church wouldn't let him starve. He planned to return to Stroud during the next few weeks as soon as his commitments as song leader were fulfilled.[1]

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[1]Interview with Claude Smith, August 11, 1970 at Stroud, Oklahoma.

Alexander returned to Jenks to finish the meeting and proposed marriage to Charlsie Perdue, telling her of the little church in Stroud where they could work together in the Kingdom of God. On August 14, 1935, six weeks after their first meeting, the two were united in marriage. Shortly afterwards they moved into the Stroud parsonage.

CHAPTER III

THE MATURE PERSONALITY

Early Experiences at Stroud

Alexander came to Stroud handicapped both by his youthful inexperience and by his lack of ministerial training. He partially made up for his lack of experience by throwing himself into the work with all the vigor he could muster. He walked door-to-door throughout the entire Stroud community, getting acquainted with the people and inviting them to come and worship at the Christian Church the next Sunday. According to Dr. Carl Bailey, who became Bill's close friend, Alexander had a genuis for identifying with people of all types and persuasions.[1] If a lady wrote poetry, Bill would come by and listen to her poetry; if a town crony wanted to swap jokes, the young preacher would spend some time trading bits of humor to put some cheer in the man's day. If someone was sick or sorrowing, Bill was a great comfort at such times; if prayer was requested, Bill would earnestly implore the Father on the other's behalf. Bill's enthusiasm for life had a positive effect upon people; attendance at the Christian Church began to rise. Bill organized young people's outings and injected his happy spirit into picnics and watermelon feasts and community sings.

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[1]Interview August 13, 1970, at Davenport, Oklahoma.

Still, Alexander felt he would be more effective if he had a ministerial education. He stayed in close correspondence with his father, asking advice about sermon preparation, visitation, and counselling. The St. Louis pastor sent advice, some books and some suggested readings. Additionally, his father urged Bill to consider re-entering college, noting that Phillips University, a Disciples institution, was located at Enid, Oklahoma, some 130 miles away.

Phillips University

Bill persuaded the church that he should resume his education, even though it would require his staying in Enid four days a week. In February of 1936 Bill began his work at Phillips University, taking courses in Colonial Rhetoric and Sermon Development,[1] and paying close attention to the technique of the guest speakers who addressed Phillips's general assemblies. Two of these speakers in particular made deep impressions on Alexander. These were Burris Jenkins and A. B. McReynolds, two of the best acclaimed speakers in the fellowship. Jenkins was known for his showbusiness platform charm; he was given to flamboyant display, and frequently employed wide, spreading gestures.[2] McReynolds, a masterful story teller, was especially adept at inducing audience participation, dramatizing biblical incidents, and building stirring climaxes into his presentations.[3]

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[1]Transcript, Office of the Registrar, Phillips University.

[2]J. Clyde Wheeler, fellow preacher and close associate of Alexander believes Jenkins exerted a significant influence on the younger man's approach to preaching. Interview of March 31, 1970 at Oklahoma City.

[3]Paul McBride, who worked closely with Alexander shortly after

While Alexander profitted from the exposure to such personalities as Burris and McReynolds, he did not relate well to several of the professors and administrators who were at Phillips during this period. Bill's fun-loving, earthy, rather iconoclastic view of Christianity ran counter to the prevailing emphasis there. His outspoken attitudes toward some of the taboos soon aroused opposition. When Raymond Stackley, one of Bill's closest friends, was about to be dismissed from school because a faculty member had seen him dancing, Alexander took up his defense. At a student-faculty meeting, he attacked the University policy which forbade dancing, accusing the administrators who had suspended Stackley of petty hypocrisy. When Alexander was told to mind his own business, he spent three days gathering evidence which might save Stackley from expulsion.

When Phillips' Board of Directors next met, the Stackley case was on the agenda. Alexander, unannounced, strode into the board room and threw a stack of papers onto the table.

> "These papers," he said, "are affidavits I personally collected in the last three days from 75 deacons and elders of our church. Of the 75, 71 admit they enjoy dancing, three think it is unreligious and one is a cripple. If you expel anyone from this school for dancing, then you'd better start picking on 71 pillars of our church."

The offending student was not dismissed.[1] Alexander finished the semester at Phillips, then enrolled at the University of Tulsa as a philosophy major, hoping to find a less authoritarian attitude in a Presbyterian

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the ex-entertainer entered the ministry, suggested Bill may have modelled his style after McReynolds, especially his penchant for dramatic stories and builds. Telephone interview June 12, 1970, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

[1]Lewis W. Gillenson, "The Happy Preacher," Look, XII (August 3, 1948), 52.

school than he had known in his own denomination.

Although Alexander's pastoral labors at Stroud were limited to week-ends, the church was evidencing a new vitality. During 1936, the first full year of his ministry at Stroud, Bill baptized 96 people;[1] the church roster showed 153 as the total membership at the close of the year. The church people were happy with the increased interest and activities and had increased their aid to their preacher by means of free-will gifts of money and goods. Bill had his own car now--an old Buick he had bought with $35.00 he had received from a benefactor. Different members of the church and the community gave him money for gas and oil, encouraging him to stay in college until he earned his degree.

The University of Tulsa

Alexander enjoyed his years at the University of Tulsa; there he found the more relaxed atmosphere he had hoped for and he exulted in it. During his two years there he took five courses in speech and theatre subjects,[2] acted in three plays, played cards incessantly, entered the annual ping-pong tournament and was senior class vice-president. Professor Ben G. Henneke, who headed the drama department at the time Bill was a student there, remembers Alexander well, praising his "tremendous ability as an actor."[3] However, the professor was frankly disappointed in other facets of Bill's personality and style of living which did not,

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[1]Interview with Ralph Alexander at Lawton, Oklahoma, March 25, 1968.

[2]Alexander's T. U. Transcript shows: Public Speaking, Introduction to Drama, Dramatics, Laboratory in Acting, and Directing.

[3]Interview with Dr. Ben G. Henneke, University of Tulsa, March 2, 1970.

in his opinion, become a Christian minister. "I recall that the first liquor ever brought to a cast party was brought by Bill--a preacher," he said. The former speech and drama teacher said he felt the same disappointment about Bill's boasting that his winnings from gambling paid the costs of his tuition. Henneke volunteered the suggestion that he probably would not have attached as much significance to such things if the young man had not been a clergyman.

Such responses to Alexander were commonplace since Bill's habits of living were far from being abstemious or circumspect. Some people were scandalized by his conspicuous addiction to cigarettes. Claude Smith, one of Bill's church elders at Stroud, said:

> I told Bill something once about his personal habits, but it didn't seem to make any difference. I said, "Bill, I looked out my window and saw you as you walked to church this morning and I thought, 'Now doesn't that look good. Our preacher walking to church on Sunday morning with a Bible in one hand--and a cigarette in the other.'" Bill listened to me--but he went right on smoking the same as ever.[1]

Smith went on to say that to his knowledge Alexander did not drink intoxicants during his tenure at Stroud.

Even when people seriously disagreed with Alexander, because of certain of his personal traits, they frequently found so much to admire in the man that they eventually reconciled their dislikes. Many who were most disappointed with his departures from their own religious doctrine and practice praised him for his brilliance and energetic achievements.

Considering the heavy demands of his extra curricular activities, not to mention preaching, church calls and youth work at Stroud,

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[1]Interview with Claude Smith, Stroud, Oklahoma, August 11, 1970.

Alexander left a remarkable academic record at the University of Tulsa. University of Tulsa Professor H. Rodman Jones, who was a classmate of Bill's, remarked upon his easy mastery of scholastic matter.

> Bill had to be out-of-town sometimes for funerals and weddings and other things at Stroud. Consequently, he often had to miss class. Sometimes he sent Charlsie, his wife, to class so she could take notes for him. Other times he simply borrowed my notes to prepare for the exams. When the course was over, Bill got an "A" and I got a "B."[1]

Dr. Grady Snuggs, who directed Alexander in his education at the University, remembers Bill's "center-of-the-stage personality" was combined with "an excellent mind . . . Bill almost had a photographic memory."[2] Professor Snuggs said further that "he was too gregarious to be a real scholar in spite of a superior mind . . . he liked people and liked to be with them. He was as unrepressed as a child in relation to friends. His remarkable personality topped by a genuinely friendly smile drew people to him . . . I might also note: good voice, happy inspiring confidence, good stage presence."[3] Alexander's University of Tulsa transcript confirms his colleagues and professors' estimate of his intelligence showing 54 hours of "A," 15 hours of "B," and 6 hours of "C." In his pursuit of high academic achievement, Alexander's reliance upon conventional methods of study must have been minimal, considering his card playing, theatrical work, functions as class officer, and church duties. Moreover, the student-minister's family responsibilities were

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[1]Interview with Dr. H. Rodman Jones, University of Tulsa, February 4, 1970.

[2]Letter from Dr. Grady Snuggs, Westminster College, Cambridge, England, June 9, 1970.

[3]Ibid.

increasing for a son, Ralph Edward (named after Bill's father), was born two months after Bill began his studies at Tulsa University. In January of 1939, a second son, Don Harold, was born.

The professors at the University, especially Dr. Snuggs, professor of religion and philosophy, encouraged Bill to continue his education by embarking upon a doctoral program in religion or philosophy. Just before receiving his bachelor of arts degree from the University in May of 1939, Alexander was awarded a joint scholarship from the University of Chicago and the Chicago Disciples Divinity House, enabling him to undertake post-graduate work in that University's divinity school.

Eventful Interim at Stroud

Alexander worked strenuously at the church during the summer of 1939, preparatory to the long absence necessitated by residency requirements at the University of Chicago; he would be away from Stroud from October, 1939 through June of 1940. Much of deepest interest was transpiring, varying from local concerns to international problems of greatest consequence.

The church at Stroud was enjoying continued growth, now having reached 300 members; buses were running to outlying rural areas to bring worshippers to church each Sunday. A solid Sunday School program was in operation, reaching many young people in and around Stroud. The church building was freshly painted, had a new roof, and now boasted a pipe organ. Alexander had been pushing the church toward the inauguration of a youth center where the community's youngsters could congregate for ping-pong, card playing, dancing, or just sharing a coke. After three years of Alexander's agitation for such a program, conditions seemed

more favorable and immediate than ever before. Until recently, in spite of all the persuasion Bill could muster, his church members had resisted the idea of a church-sponsored entertainment center. However, when a high school girl who became pregnant outside of marriage took her own life, many of the townspeople were more receptive to the idea of a program to keep young people out of trouble. The girl was said to have fallen into bad company by frequenting a local tavern where many of the young people met. Alexander told his congregation:

> The church ought to have a place where young people can come together and talk, or dance, or play games, and while doing this be associating with Christian young people who believe in and practice the high ideals of Jesus Christ--Why should our young people have to sneak off to honky-tonks to dance? Why should the pool-rooms be full of our high-school boys every day? Why shouldn't the kids of this town--or any other town--be able to do these things within the shadow of the church of Jesus Christ?[1]

Bill drove hard for a decision, making use of the increased sensitivity to the needs of the youth which had been quickened within the people through the girl's suicide. Before he left for Chicago a large frame structure filled part of the back lot of the church property. This youth center soon became the mecca for young people in the area; not only did the center accomodate weekend "teentowns," but birthday parties, anniversaries, choir practice, and the Christmas shows were staged in the new building. Alexander's first youth center had been launched.

In mid-July Bill received a letter from his mother in St. Louis notifying him that his father had been hurt in a car wreck. The full extent of injury was not determined; the doctors, however, diagnosed a concussion of sufficient seriousness that they advised Reverend Alexander

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[1]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 85.

to rest and recuperate for a while before returning to work.[1] Bill's dad decided to use the time to look in on his son's work at Stroud; he would arrive the first week of August.

The St. Louis pastor enjoyed his visit to Oklahoma. He found great satisfaction in seeing the evidences of his son's successful ministry and playing with his little grandsons was, of course, a great delight for the aging gentleman. Bill scheduled a special revival effort for the occasion; the father and son team preached on alternate evenings through the week.

On Sunday, August 27, Bill's father said he would be a little late to worship that morning. He felt like taking it slow and easy but he would be there soon. Bill went to the church building expecting that his father would come along with Charlsie and the boys in a few minutes. During the song service that morning an usher came up to the platform to inform Bill that his father had just passed away.

Bill took his father's remains back to St. Louis by train, did what he could to comfort his mother, sister, and brother, and performed the sad duty of preaching his father's funeral. He closed the funeral message with some verse he wrote for the occasion:

> He helped to make a thousand burdens lighter,
> He cared a lot when others failed to care;
> And he made this world a better place to live in,
> Before he journeyed onward over there.[2]

In late September, 1939 Alexander made preparation for his extended stay at Chicago. He would be gone from his family and his church for nine months. He had arranged for an interim pastor from Phillips to help sustain the work at Stroud. The very times must have seemed

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[1] Ibid., p. 99. [2] Ibid., p. 104.

appropriate to such departures as Bill's. September, 1939 was a month Americans stayed close to their radios, hearing H. V. Kaltenborn, Lowell Thomas, Raymond Gram Swing and other commentators report the Nazi invasion of Poland, the disastrous defeat of the Polish defenders by Hitler's lightning warfare strategies, and of the declaration of war by France and Great Britain. A nervous America began slowly gearing its economy and industry for defense.

The last Sunday in September the congregation took up a special collection to help pay Bill's expenses to Chicago; the people gave generously: the offering amounted to a little over a hundred dollars. The next day as Bill was packing some books away, a Reverend White, the Christian Church preacher at Chandler stopped by. The two had become good friends and had occasionally exchanged pulpits during the past two years. Reverend White told Bill he had just been commissioned as a missionary to China and was to leave for the Far East in just a few days. During the conversation, Bill learned that while White's expenses from the United States to China were covered by the Board of Missions, the young evangelist had no money to finance his trip to the west coast. Alexander handed White an envelope, telling him that this was his lucky day; the Stroud church had taken up a collection the day before which should cover the cost of White's trip. Alexander insisted his colleague accept the money, telling him that the very purpose of the collection was to pay the travel expenses of the ministry. The young missionary left Stroud in a state of wonderment and gratitude.

Later that day when Claude Smith, the church elder, came to say a final farewell to Bill, he mentioned the contribution of the day before,

suggesting the amount should pay for gas, meals, and lodging with perhaps enough to pay for repairs to the old Buick, in case it should break down again. Bill astonished the church leader when he told him he gave the $100.00 to the Chandler preacher-turned-missionary and had nothing left for the trip to Chicago. Smith remonstrated with the younger man, asserting there was no more money available for such expenses and he may find himself hitch-hiking his way to school. Alexander tossed off Smith's fears, saying he felt sure that the Lord would provide him a way to Chicago; he had never failed yet. While Bill reminisced with Smith about the past four years as proof that the Lord supplied the needs of His people, Mrs. Joe Pickard, a sister in the church, came by to apologize for not being able to be at church the day before. She explained that she had heard about the special collection and wanted to have a part in helping her preacher further his education. Mrs. Pickard handed Bill a check for $100.00 and, with a fond goodbye, left Bill standing in the doorway with the check in his hand and a broad smile on his face. Claude Smith stood there shaking his head in mock disbelief.[1]

University of Chicago

At the University of Chicago Alexander explored theology under the tutelage of such brilliant scholars and teachers as Edward Scribner Ames, the famous pragmatist, who was dean of the Disciples Divinity House. Ames took a special interest in Bill, believing the young minister's gifts too great to be spent in pastoral work. Ames hoped Alexander would one day teach theology and philosophy at the University of Chicago

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[1]Interview with Claude Smith, August 11, 1970.

or a comparable school; however, he knew that strong competition would come from Bill's gregarious nature which had already found satisfactory expression in the work of a pastor.[1] In December, 1939, when Ames was asked by the leadership of North Shore Christian Church to supply a pastor, he recommended Bill Alexander. Ames wanted the congregation to have the services of the best talent available and he felt sure Alexander would meet the church's needs very well. Knowing Bill's drive and powers of quick study, Ames felt that he could handle both the pastorate and his studies without much difficulty. Yet the dean was uneasy about his recommendation, knowing Alexander became so committed to persons and churches that he might be wooed from his course of study. Years later, when Alexander did not return to the Divinity School, Ames regretted sending his promising student to North Shore.[2]

Alexander's energies were scattered in several directions while at Chicago. He was invited to conferences, was a popular dinner guest and accepted invitations to speak to churches, school assemblies, and civic groups, in addition to his pastoral duties at North Shore Christian Church. His ability to organize people was in full evidence, too. One of his fellow students, Richard Pope, remembers that Alexander put together a Saturday afternoon ball club, organized a group of students taking the same courses to study together for finals, and brought together groups to go out on the town from time to time.[3]

During the spring of 1940, Alexander was asked to enter the

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[1]Letter from W. B. Blakemore, Dean of Disciples Divinity House, Chicago, Illinois, August 31, 1970.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Letter, Lexington, Kentucky, June 20, 1970.

Disciples Divinity House annual preaching contest. Edward Scribner Ames and others who judged the event had no difficulty selecting the winner. Bill Alexander had a powerful message delivered with such winsomeness, earnestness, and vitality that, in the words of another Divinity House student, "He won the thing going away."[1] Not long afterward, however, it was discovered that the winning sermon Bill had preached was authored by Edgar DeWitt Jones, a much-published preacher of the denomination. When Ames asked Alexander about the authorship of the sermon, he was given the disarming answer, "Yes sir, that was Edgar DeWitt Jones's sermon--but I've never seen the day when I couldn't preach it better!"[2] The ingenuousness of Bill's admission caused Ames to be more amused than dismayed with his student's plagiarism. Also, the extreme busy-ness of Alexander's schedule probably served to further mitigate the circumstances. No action was taken against the contest-winner.

Stroud: Closing a Chapter

Alexander returned, as planned, to his church at Stroud during the late summer of 1940. His intentions were to continue his academic program through the doctoral level by attending summer sessions for the next few years. His grades at Chicago were "A's" and "B's." While Alexander did return to the University for two summer terms, he completed neither the doctoral nor the master's program.[3]

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[1]Interview with Fred A. Miller at Norman, Oklahoma, April 29, 1970.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Letter from W. B. Blakemore, Dean of Disciples Divinity House, Chicago, Illinois, August 31, 1970. Dr. Ames visited Bill at Stroud, encouraging him to pursue his course of study to completion; during the

Stroud, like the rest of the nation, was undergoing changes. Some of the young men were enlisting in the armed services; others would soon be receiving draft notices. There was a stir among the farmers as talk circulated about increased production for a war economy. Some of the townspeople moved away: some to shipyards in San Francisco, others to arsenals in Alabama, still others to aircraft factories in Wichita and Tulsa.

Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and France were now the occupied victims of Nazi aggression. Great Britain was being "blitzed" by Hitler's bombers; many gave her only a few months before surrender would come. President Roosevelt, in the midst of the 1940 election campaign, gave his attention to mobilizing a nation for defense; such men as Charles Lindbergh, Father Coughlin, Robert E. Wood, and William Randolph Hearst resisted the efforts of the administration to aid the allies and gear for war. Many of the nation's clergy, notably Harry Emerson Fosdick, adamantly held to convictions earlier expressed that they would neither sanction nor actively participate in any war. On November 30, 1940, Bill Alexander filled out his selective service questionnaire, writing "in case of America being attacked I will fight in front line trenches" in answer to the question--under what circumstances, if any, did the applicant believe in the use of force.[1] Asked "would you in uniform defend your country if attacked?," the minister said he would, stating that he would give his last drop of blood to defend his country if attacked.

1940's, Alexander often wrote his teacher, telling him of his plans to enroll in various summer, fall, and spring terms but he did not continue.

[1] Tulsa Tribune, April 21, 1950.

Then he added that he did not believe in a war of aggression on foreign soil.[1] This last sentence, so appropriate to the times, would bring repercussions in years to come.

After returning from Chicago, Alexander sought ways to expand his ministry; offers came from other churches in Oklahoma who were seeking aggressive and innovative leadership, but Alexander did not feel his ministry at Stroud was over. In January, 1941 the showman-preacher discovered the medium by which he would extend his ministry: radio. Alexander visited with Eddie Koontz, program director at radio station KVOO in Tulsa about a daily broadcast over the 50,000 watt facilities, the most powerful in the region, serving listeners in Oklahoma and Colorado. Arrangements were made for a program of 15 minutes length broadcast at 8:30 a.m. daily with a full hour broadcast of the Sunday morning service. Reprints of the daily sermonettes sent on request to listeners reveal a simple message on broad, non-denominational themes such as Jesus's forgiving spirit applied to daily problems, quotes from Will Rogers and bits of poetry of a homespun nature combined with brief dedicatory prayers to garnish the programs.[2]

Response to the program was surprising in its immediacy and wide outreach. On April 24, 1941, Bill wrote his teacher, Dr. Ames:

> I truly believe that I have accomplished more good in the last three months via this radio program than in my entire six months of ministry previously. We have received the largest mail response of any daily program on KVOO which, by the way, is the most powerful

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[1] Tulsa Tribune, April 25, 1950.

[2] Broadcast Reprints, March, 1941.

station between St. Louis, Denver, and Dallas.[1]

On June 11, 1941 the radio preacher wrote Dr. Ames, "The radio program is reaching the heights--three other radio stations are after us and we love it."

Unfortunately, local interest in Alexander's broadcast ministry was as apathetic as his distant response was exciting. While Bill was receiving financial support and letters of encouragement from people in Kansas, Missouri, and northeastern Oklahoma, his own townspeople were so conspicuously unresponsive that the newspaper editor commented:

> Although no funds are asked for on the broadcast thus far, many of the letters contained contributions to support the plan. Letters sent direct to Stroud came from Chandler, Tulsa, Sapulpa, Wewoka, Norman, Atoka, Seminole, Lawton, Holdenville, Oklahoma City, and Vinita, Oklahoma. Plainview, Texas, Arkansas City, Kansas, McPherson Kansas, Pittsburg, Kansas and Bolivar, Missouri.
>
> As listeners were asked to write their reactions to the broadcast in care of KVOO, undoubtedly many more letters went into the Tulsa studios of the station. All the letters except those from Chandler were from persons unknown to Stroud.[2]

As the program developed, visitors came from all over the state to attend the broadcast which emanated from "The Little Church Around the Corner." Still the popular program generated so little interest and financial support from the residents of Stroud that Alexander was both concerned and disappointed. On April 4, 1941 a newspaper article captioned "An Urgent Word From Our Radio Minister" carried a plea to the townsfolk to send in contributions to keep the program on the air. While the program continued until Alexander's resignation in August of that year, there is

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[1]The letterhead on Alexander's stationery at this time read: "OKLAHOMA'S LITTLE CHURCH AROUND THE CORNER . . .Broadcasting over KVOO direct from Stroud, Oklahoma."

[2]Stroud Democrat, January 31, 1941, p. 1.

no indication that the people of Stroud ever committed themselves to the support of the radio feature. Dr. Bailey suggested this disinterest was a factor in Alexander's ultimate alienation from the church there.

> Bill didn't feel the congregation gave him the help it should have on his radio program. While he got some money from listeners here and there, he just didn't get enough from local people. Bill scolded the church on one occasion for their lack of support.[1]

The reasons for the preacher's leaving Stroud were complex and perhaps beyond clear determination today. Alexander's reputation as a spellbinding speaker and church activator was building; he was out-of-town more frequently as he kept speaking and preaching appointments. He either could not or would not please certain influential members of the church who covertly and overtly expressed their dissatisfaction about idiosyncrasies of their preacher. One, a chief pillar in Stroud's Christian church, became alienated over an incident too trivial and involved to be recounted here; her influence pervaded the church until the board members were also seriously dissatisfied. About this time the treasurer of the church, a longtime and seemingly trustworthy member, was discovered to have "come up short quite a bit" at the time of the auditing of the books.[2] While Alexander was in no way to blame for this discrepancy, disfavor with the minister seemed to escalate when anything of a negative nature happened.

Alexander's liberality of view probably added yet another disturbing element to the building dissatisfaction of the townsfolk. For example, in August of 1941, when serious opposition arose to prevent aviation hero Charles Lindbergh's scheduled address to an Oklahoma City audience, it was Alexander who defended him. The Stroud pastor, in

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[1]Dr. Carl Bailey. [2]Claude Smith.

Oklahoma City to speak to a Christian Endeavor Convention, made it clear that while he did not agree with Lindbergh, he felt it was nonetheless "dangerously undemocratic" to deny Lindbergh permission to express his ideas. The Oklahoma City Times quoted Alexander as saying:

> . . . in trying to protect our democracy we destroy it. Anytime you interfere with freedom of speech democratic ideas are in danger. And while I do not agree with Lindbergh's ideas I say with Voltaire that I would die for his right to express those ideas.[1]

Moreover, Alexander was beginning to feel that he had accomplished all that he could at the post in Stroud.[2] He began visiting churches in Ada, Tulsa, Bristow as well as other places, letting it be known that he might leave "The Little Church Around the Corner" which had grown so much during his ministry there. When his close friend, Paul McBride, left Bristow's Christian Church to come to the Eastside Christian at Tulsa, Alexander filled the Bristow pulpit.

The First Christian Church of Bristow, a town of about 4,000 some 30 miles east of Stroud, was a larger church than the sister church where Alexander had just completed six years of service. Interest was high there as Bill continued his daily broadcasting over KVOO, changing the name of the program from "The Little Church Around the Corner," to "The Daily Quiet Hour." The preacher also kept a heavy schedule of outside speaking appointments while at the Bristow church, making "frequent appearances as a lecturer at high school and civic affairs."[3] Through his radio broadcasting and extra-clerical speaking, Alexander expanded his audience far beyond the church sanctuary, becoming a well-known figure throughout the state--and beyond.

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[1] "Pastor Censures Lindbergh Ban," August 27, 1947.

[2] Dr. Carl Bailey.

[3] Tulsa Tribune, February 25, 1943.

Alexander's tenure at First Christian Church of Bristow was brief. Without such ties as those which had kept him six years at Stroud, the popular spokesman was finding it increasingly hard to resist calls from large churches in populous areas. When Los Angeles' McCarty Memorial Church issued a call in December, 1941, Alexander accepted. The December 12 Bristow Daily Record carried the remarks below beneath the caption, "A Goodbye from Reverend Alexander:"

> It is with a tear in my eyes that I bid "au revoir" to the good people of Bristow who have been so gracious to me during these few months of my ministry here. I sincerely believe that there are more sizable people in Bristow per capita than in any other given spot in the world.
>
> You are a great little city because you are a great people, and I shall never forget your splendid co-operation in every way. I am leaving only because it is my sincere and humble belief that this Los Angeles situation offers the opportunity of a lifetime for Kingdom building service. As my last word of admonition, I say humbly to each one of you, "keep close to Jesus the Christ--He is the way, the truth and the life."
>
> "Somewhere, some way, some time each day
> Even though 2,000 miles away
> I shall turn aside to stop and pray
> That Bristow will remain true to God."
>
> Sincerely,
> W. H. (Bill) Alexander[1]

Pulpit in the West

On January 5, 1942, Bill Alexander assumed the pastorate of the $400,000 "Cathedral Beautiful," thought to be one of the prize catches among Christian Church pulpits. Launching into his responsibilities with his customary vigor, the still youthful preacher soon established himself as a leader in the area. Under his direction, the church enjoyed an increase in membership averaging three additions per week. Alexander put

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[1] Bristow Daily Record, December 12, 1941, p. 6.

his broadcast skills to work, building an enviable radio audience in minimal time.[1] Only a few months after his arrival, Alexander became president of the Radio Commission of the Church federation of Los Angeles.[2]

At the clost of services one Sunday morning Bill was greeting his parishioners and guests at the door of the McCarty Church when Frank Buttram, an Oklahoma City oilman, introduced himself. Alexander invited the Oklahoman to his home for Sunday dinner and Buttram accepted. The two liked each other at once; when Bill suggested the older man come to Tulsa late that summer for a revival meeting which Alexander was scheduled to preach, Buttram agreed to come.[3]

While in Tulsa that summer, Alexander agreed to Buttram's request to come and preach for Oklahoma City's First Christian Church, where Buttram was a key member. Alexander's effect upon the congregation that morning was, as Buttram had anticipated, sensational. That afternoon as the preacher and the oil man walked over the vast, luxurious Buttram estate, Buttram told Alexander that he hoped to see First Christian Church significantly expand its program and reach new goals which he had dreamed for it. Buttram had been searching for the leadership necessary to carry out his visionary objectives. He told twenty-seven year old Alexander he felt sure that he was the man for the Oklahoma City pulpit. The oilman, who was chairman of the general board, already had the board's approval, and told Alexander that the congregation

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[1] Tulsa Tribune, December 5, 1949.

[2] Oklahoma City Times news clipping, c. 1944.

[3] Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City.

was clearly excited about the prospects of Alexander's becoming their pastor.

Alexander's desire to say yes to Buttram's proposition needed no stimulation; he was already happily impressed with First Christian, largely because of an attractive, new youth building adjacent to the main edifice. The youth center had a spacious lounge for dancing, and was equipped with pool tables, ping-pong tables, and bowling alleys. Buttram's manner of solid confidence in Bill's ability to direct the affairs of the large and progressive congregation was greatly reassuring to the young redhead. Alexander replied he earnestly wanted to come but that it was not possible because of his commitments to his church in Los Angeles. Buttram was not dissuaded; later that afternoon he arranged for the board to meet with Alexander. Under their encouragement and insistence, Alexander's resolve to finish the work he had set out to do at McCarty Memorial weakened. Buttram and others on the board suggested they would be happy to do all they could to locate a replacement for Alexander's California pulpit. Could he suggest a likely candidate? Alexander recommended a friend and former Phillips University classmate, Jimmy Sowell, who was at that time preaching in Oklahoma City. Before the day was over, preliminary arrangements were settled: in November, Sowell would move to Los Angeles and Alexander would return to Oklahoma.[1]

During the week preceding Sunday, November 1, 1942, each member of Oklahoma City's First Christian Church received an invitation card

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[1]Sowell enjoyed a long and successful ministry at McCarty Memorial Church, serving there from 1942 to 1955.

with envelope postmarked Los Angeles, stating:

> To the members of the First Christian Church, Oklahoma City.
> Dear Friend:
> The challenge for the year ahead for the First Christian Church of Oklahoma City is like the challenge of bugles--like the restless rattling of drums in the dark. Together we can build the most vital Church of our Brotherhood and through all, and above all, will stand that strange Man of Galilee. In this challenge I see magnificent march of the living God and I hear the thunder of His feet.
> As your new minister, may I greet you at your church this coming Sunday?
>
> Affectionately,
> W. H. Alexander

The Church of a Lifetime

Almost from its founding at the time of the Oklahoma Run in 1889,[1] Oklahoma City's First Christian Church was one of the most influential congregations in the state. Blessed with enterprising men and women of vision, its early history was marked by steady increases of membership, progressively better buildings and locations, and characteristic additions of leading families in the community. At the time of Alexander's selection, there was a venerable tradition of well-known, able pulpitmen. Alexander brought vitality, gifts of innovation, and a showman's flair for drawing people--especially the youth of the community.

The composition of First Christian Church during the Alexander years would have presented a challenge to almost any preacher--especially to one of only twenty-seven years of age. The membership was probably the most sophisticated of any church in the state, comprised of a cross-section of business leaders and professional people with few, if any, farmers, tradesmen or laborers. Vera Stovell, First Christian Church

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[1] L. C. Mersfelder, ed., The Church of Tomorrow . . . Yesterday and Today (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: First Christian Church, 1964), p. 10.

secretary since 1958 and longtime member of the congregation, described the audience in this way,

> Many of First Christian's members have been business people and professional people--people who were middle class, upper middle class and wealthy. We've generally had our share of the city's bankers, doctors, architects, owners of automobile agencies, stock brokers and attorneys. We have small businessmen and some clerical people but we don't get the actual denim shirt workmen. Of course, they would be treated wonderfully if they came. But they probably think, "Oh, I couldn't afford to belong to that church--it's too grand." Or, if they came, perhaps they would be awed by the place or the people and they wouldn't join.[1]

A look at the church's membership and the preacher's circle of friends lends substance to a charge made in the 1950 political campaign that Alexander was a "society preacher."[2] Oil millionaire Frank Buttram, who was perhaps Bill's staunchest ally through the seventeen-year period of Alexander's ministry there, was a deeply religious man, fervent in prayer and enthusiastic in church leadership. Fred Jones, who founded and headed the largest Ford agency in the southwest and Harvey Everest, President of the Liberty National Bank, were also key members during most of Alexander's tenure. Additionally, there were key executives of wholesale drug companies, other oil men, railroad officials, contractors, doctors, dentists, business entrepeneurs, and many others who helped comprise the membership of this dominant congregation in the state's capital.

Alexander had other friends, several of whom came to his church and donated to its work but who never formally affiliated with the church. These men worked with him on other community projects such as the Oklahoma City Symphony, Oklahoma Committee for Mental Hygiene, the State Cancer Drive, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, the United Fund drives,

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[1] Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City, August 13, 1970.

[2] Tulsa Daily World, January 9, 1950, p. 1.

Bond Rallies; some were, like the preacher, inveterate card-players--especially bridge. These friends included C. R. Anthony, merchandising leader; E. K. Gaylord, publishing magnate; Roger Dolese, cement company millionaire; and U. S. Senator Robert S. Kerr, a close personal friend of Alexander's who was an active Baptist layman.

Alexander would receive many attractive offers from other churches during the seventeen and a half years he served as pastor of Oklahoma City's First Christian Church. Giant business corporations would offer lush contracts for his services as organizer and persuader, Hollywood's agents would try to woo him back to a career in showbusiness, and political leaders would appeal to his desire for social reform to draw him into their arena. Only once--when he wanted to be a United States Senator--did Bill seriously consider a change of position. Even then, he saw himself as adding a role rather than substituting one, for he thought he could serve the Senate during the week and his congregation on weekends. For Bill Alexander, First Christian Church of Oklahoma City was the church of a lifetime.

War Years: 1942 - 1945

Alexander's first year at First Christian was a splendid one. At the close of the first Sunday morning service, ten came forward and joined the church.[1] This was not a one-time occurence; during the first four and one-half months, over 200 had been added to the church rolls.[2] Response was so encouraging that on April 21, 1943, Bill wrote Dr. Ames,

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[1]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 103c.

[2]Ibid.

"Last Sunday morning we had over 2,300 people in our morning worship service and turned over 300 away. We have had 40 additions the last three Sunday mornings."

Pews were filled fifteen minutes before services began. The church sanctuary was strained to capacity, with folding chairs in every aisle and people crowding in to sit on balcony steps, platform space and in the outer halls. Fire marshalls attended and watched carefully every Sunday morning to be sure safety ordinances were observed. Taxi drivers were so well acquainted with the situation at "Bill's Church" that they urged their regular Sunday morning passengers to call early if they wanted to get in to hear the popular redhead.[1]

Alexander, already excited at having a model youth center to work with, spent much of his free time playing shuffleboard, ping-pong and billiards, Indian wrestling with the youngsters, and delivering ten-minute sermonettes during devotional breaks on Sunday evenings. Soon the center was open every day and evening, serving the youth of the city without regard to church association.

The five military bases in the Oklahoma City area, operating at capacity during these war years, supplied the community with thousands of servicemen looking for social contact and entertainment wherever they could find it. First Christian Church inaugurated a "home-away-from-home" program with families taking soldiers and sailors home to dinner on Sunday; Alexander also promoted a "stage door canteen," drawing hundreds of servicemen to the church on week-ends.

Another innovation of Alexander's first year at Oklahoma City

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[1]Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City, August 13, 1970.

was the introduction of "The inner sanctuary," a chapel open day and night for people to stop in, mediate, and pray. The progress of Alexander's first year may also be seen in the church's financial history. In January, 1944, Frank Buttram announced a $35,000 mortgage burning to be held during the next Sunday morning services, saying the church would be completely free from debt for the first time in its history.[1] The news report said further:

> "We are in the best shape spiritually and financially, in the history of the church," Buttram said. He pointed out that collections during 1943 amounted to about $84,000, a record for the church which, with the largest auditorium in the city was said to attract about 2,000 persons each Sunday morning. . . . Membership of the church is now about 2,500.[2]

Not only was the congregation's giving at an all-time high; but pledges for the total annual budget were received without personal solicitation, an almost unprecedented practice in churches with large budgets.

At year's end, 1943, First Christian Church led the denomination in number of additions. During that year, 468 people had been added to the congregation's membership.[3] This leadership position in the Disciples movement was sustained during the next three years.

While Alexander was thoroughly pleased with the capacity crowds in the church's sanctuary, he was uncomfortable about the many people First Christian was not reaching. He was especially disappointed at seeing crowds being turned away because they could not be seated even in the overflow spaces. During the autumn months of 1944, the church announced a series of Sunday Evening Worship Services to be held at the Municipal Auditorium. The Sunday evening programs for youth, servicemen, and others of the membership and the community had outgrown the available

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[1] Daily Oklahoman, January, 1944. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

facilities at Tenth and Robinson. However, holding a service in the 6500 seating capacity of the Municipal Auditorium seemed an unduly ambitious undertaking. While the inability to accomodate everyone was regrettable, a large hall, sparsely filled, would offer a more discouraging picture to those in attendance. Bill and the rest of the church were both thrilled and relieved at the results of the special series: during the October and November event attendance at the Sunday evening services averaged more than 5,000 people.[1]

Bill Alexander, War Correspondent

During these war years many demands were made upon Alexander's energies. In addition to his preaching duties, he was extremely busy with guiding the youth program, encouraging and entertaining the hundreds of servicemen who were drawn to the progressive and hospitable church, making hospital calls, visiting children's homes, counselling with troubled families and making speeches to civic groups in the area and region. Moreover, his involvement with the young people had led to his having several juvenile delinquents released to his supervision on probationary status.

Even with such outlets for his drive toward fulfillment, Alexander was not satisfied. Perhaps the continuous contact with soldiers, sailors, and marines who were leaving for distant war zones created within the pastor a restless desire for adventure. Possibly the preferred status of his ministerial draft classification did not fit well with Bill's vigorous, aggressive even combative nature. Early in 1945

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[1]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 110.

Bill asked his church to release him so that he might serve the nation's armed forces as a chaplain. The members of the general board of the church were sympathetic with Alexander's desire to serve with the troops overseas, but told Bill that obtaining a chaplaincy took an extended period of time beyond what the young preacher had anticipated. However, should Alexander become a war correspondent, he could get to the fighting front with much less delay and, hopefully, return to the pulpit sooner. The church advised Bill that they would underwrite his trip to the war zone should he go.

Alexander made inquiries and very soon was accredited as war correspondent to The Christian Evangelist, The Daily Oklahoman, and Oklahoma City Times. However, his request for permission to leave the United States for overseas service as war correspondent was denied by his draft board at Chandler. The board, in reviewing Alexander's selective service questionnaire which he had filled out in 1940, noted he had declared an unwillingness to participate in a foreign war of aggression; on the basis of this statement, the draft board concluded that Alexander should remain away from battle areas. The Chandler board wrote government officials to withhold from the Oklahoma City minister any credentials for foreign travel.[1] Bill protested the decision, pointing out that he had also written on the questionnaire that "in case of America being attacked I would fight in front line trenches," demonstrating that while he was opposed to his nation entering war as an aggressor nation, he was deeply committed to resisting any takeover of his country by

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[1]The Daily Oklahoman, June 24, 1945.

tyranny.[1] The board, however, was unmoved by Alexander's plea. Some key members at First Christian Church, who were as disturbed as Bill by the action of the Lincoln County Draft Board at Chandler, assisted Alexander in an appeal made directly to General Lewis B. Hershey, National Director of Selective Service; Hershey over-ruled the local board, granting Alexander permission to embark for the Mediterranean theatre of war. On March 5, 1945 Alexander said goodby to his family and church. Six weeks later Alexander was in a battle area in northern Italy, near Bologna, taking refuge with American infantrymen from artillery barrages laid down by the retreating German Army.[2]

While in Italy, Alexander observed first hand the pillage, carnage, destruction, and death accompanying warfare. In addition to his experience with the footsoldiers, the preacher-war correspondent shared the perils of the airmen as he flew with them on bombing missions. When the European war was secured in early May, Alexander visited Rome, bringing home unforgetable memories of homeless, wandering children foraging for food rather than recollections of cathedral art and architecture.

On May 20, 1945, Alexander returned to his church with a rekindled commitment to reach more young people with his message of peace, happiness and good will through a liberalized Christianity.[3] He spoke of the wounded men he had tried to comfort; he spoke of a young man named Jimmy who died in his arms. He told his church that after seeing the suffering children of the cities of Italy, he was more earnest than ever before in his desire to reach the unchurched, the delinquents, the

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[1] Tulsa Tribune, April 21, 1950.

[2] Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 111.

[3] Daily Oklahoman, June 24, 1945.

troubled and confused boys and girls in Oklahoma City. He painted dreams of a new kind of a church with a broader outreach . . . a "Church of Tomorrow."

Alexander, however, had more immediate and personal concerns during the weeks following his homecoming. He was quickly notified by the Lincoln county draft board at Chandler that his draft classification had been changed from 4-D of a minister to 4-E, denoting he was now considered a conscientious objector. The ex-war correspondent was ordered to report to the Oklahoma army induction center for a physical examination; if Alexander passed his physical, the draft board would then send him to a work camp for conscientious objectors. J. B. Kent, chairman of the draft board declared that when Alexander went to Europe as war correspondent he forfeited his minister's classification. In reclassifying Alexander, Kent said he and the other members of the board, Fred Nichols and Leonard Burt, "found him to qualify for no other classification except 4-E."[1] The newspaper story, which was given front page headlines, reported:

> The board contends, Kent said, that issuance of permits to selective service registrants to leave this country is a prerogative only of the local board.
>
> "There is no antipathy in this," Kent said. "It is the law and pleas, prayers and tears can't change the law."

On Friday, June 22, Alexander reported to the induction center for his physical examination, in compliance with the directives of his draft board.[2] Early the next week, the Oklahoma City minister filed an appeal with the state selective service appeals board declaring that since his church approved of his overseas service, paying his expenses

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

because it felt his work was a part of his ministerial duties, therefore the change of classification was in error.[1] The appeal further alleged that the Chandler draft board appeared "to take an attitude that it was a personal affront" when the church appealed to General Hershey for the travel permit.[2]

On July 24, 1945 the Oklahoma City Times under the front page headline "Draft Appeals Board Clears Pastor" reported:

> Reverend William H. Alexander, pastor of the First Christian Church here, is not a conscientious objector, and Lincoln county draft board No. 1 was wrong in classifying him as such, the state selective service appeals board has decided unanimously.
> . . . . . .
> The appeal board's action closes the case . . . unless some new evidence is presented.[3]

The case was officially closed and no new evidence came forth. Even so, the issue of Alexander's World War II draft status would be revived in less than five years.

New Vistas: 1946 - 1949

A Professional Musical Program

Alexander returned home to find his church was without a choir director. Bill knew the value of a good church music program and felt that his congregation, which was enthusiastic about singing, needed an extraordinary music director who would provide the talent and leadership necessary to make First Christian's music program outstanding. Alexander's first choice for the position was Tracy Silvester, a singer and choral director who was singing at the St. Louis night club at the

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[1] Oklahoma City Times, July 24, 1945.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

same time Bill was master-of-ceremonies there. Although it had been twelve years since he had seen him, Bill remembered well Silvester's gifted voice, his ready wit, and showman's command of an audience.[1]

In 1945 Silvester was minister of music at the Detroit church where Edgar DeWitt Jones was pastor. After a few inquiries Alexander located Silvester, persuading him by phone to come and help him build the church of tomorrow. A month later, with the arrival of Silvester, a team was formed which proved superlatively effective. The blend of the two showbusiness personalities with their respective talents provided inspiration, thrills, and laughter to thousands of people in and out of the church for fifteen years.

The Edgemere Dream

By 1946 Alexander felt his church was suffering from growing pains which must soon be relieved if progress was not impeded. Despite the help of policemen on duty Sunday mornings, traffic was snarled and frustrating; parking facilities were hopelessly inadequate; Tracy Silvester's expanded music program soon outgrew the Tenth and Robinson facilities; the youth center, only recently considered large beyond its needs was now too small to meet the demands; and the church, even with the public address system just added to serve the crowd overflowing into adjacent and basement rooms, was no longer able to accomodate the worshippers.

As Alexander's plans for a new church facility took form, it became apparent that the replacement for Tenth and Robinson would be both

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[1]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 115.

innovative and ambitious. He talked of spaciousness, not in terms of lots, but of acres; recreation would not be confined to youth centers with lounges, pool tables, and bowling alleys--progressive as these still seemed to many. Bill spoke of tennis courts, baseball fields, swimming pools, picnic and camping areas, perhaps even a bridle trail. Edgemere Golf Course was near the parsonage; Alexander had probably cast a longing eye on the forty acres of rolling lawn and timber, plotting where the various features of his dream church might stand.

In the spring of 1946 the school land commission announced that the golf course would be sold at auction. Bill began talking to board members, deacons, and others in the church about a church with a forty-acre opportunity to serve the community. The response was not especially encouraging. The location, N.E. 36th and Walker, which proved to be close-in, at the time seemed too far from downtown. The times were too uncertain; while churches were enjoying a post-war boom, no one knew how long such interest would last. The golf course property would probably not be cheaply priced; perhaps after the church bought it, the property values would drop. Accompanying the objections, however, was considerable enthusiasm created by the new and visionary goal. Various meetings within the church were held to discuss the advisability of the undertaking; Bill spoke with fervor as he painted the possibilities of a property with a landmark, futuristic sanctuary, a youth center with spacious indoor and outdoor facilities, a little theatre, a new education building for their burgeoning Sunday School program, an amphitheatre for programs "under the stars," and an abundance of parking spaces. By the date set for the auction, the church leaders agreed to pay as much as $50,000; hoping to make

the purchase for $20,000 less.

A few weeks later, Frank Buttram, chairman of the general board and several members of the board, stood with Alexander as the auctioneer called for bids on the Edgemere property. Other investors with higher evaluations for the land entered the bidding; it took but a few moments for the offers to exceed $50,000. Some of the men from First Christian shook their heads at Alexander and Buttram, signalling them to cease bidding. Buttram instead bid again and again, keeping his edge with the competing bidders. Soon the price exceeded the evaluation set by the state authorities. As other churchmen shook their heads in disappointment, Buttram kept bidding . . . $80,000 . . . $90,000 . . . $105,000. At this point, the raises diminished in size, edging up at smaller increments until Buttram's final nod secured the property at the cost of $116,000.[1] At the transaction's close, some of the men from First Christian remonstrated with Alexander and Buttram for spending more than twice the predetermined top figure. Alexander promised they would raise necessary funds. The money was raised--largely through Alexander's fund-raising activities. He phoned people all over the nation, sharing with entertainers, stockmen, merchants, builders, educators, politicians, and philanthropists the essence of First Christian's dream church. The money came in. In very little time, a club house was erected at Edgemere and the people of First Christian were hiking, picnicking, and playing ball on their new property. In August, 1947 a 3500-seat amphitheater was dedicated; evening worship services which were held in the impressive, natural setting became unforgettable experiences for many people in the

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[1]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 120.

community.

Portable Pulpit Becomes National Lectern

Demands for Alexander's services as speaker steadily increased as his abilities to entertain and inspire became more widely known. Bill was soon sharing his wit and wisdom with high school and college assemblies, civic club luncheon meetings, salesmen's conventions, women's clubs' gatherings, chambers of commerce meetings and even undertakers conventions.

As his out-of-town commitments increased, his services to the community did not slacken. When the Oklahoma City Symphony, long in financial difficulties, honored Alexander with the office of President, Bill responded with a whirlwind schedule of fund-raising speeches and concerts which put the institution in the black. Civic leaders, appalled at the plight of the state's mentally ill, formed the Oklahoma Committee for Mental Hygiene, installing Bill Alexander as Chairman. In two days, Alexander raised $18,000, most of the money coming from modest contributions. When the Community Chest fell short of its goal, Alexander promoted speeches and benefit performances in which he sang, joked, and exhorted over 200 audiences whose donations exceeded the set objectives.

As Alexander's ability to impress audiences became widely known, out-of-town speaking engagements developed into career status. The early phase of Bill's "outside" speaking was dominated by religious events. During 1946 and 1947 Alexander was a featured speaker at Religious Emphasis Weeks at universities and colleges throughout the Midwest and Southwest. Some of these occasions were marked by unprecedented responses. At Iowa State University's Religious Emphasis Week, Bill spoke to a field

house audience from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., then answered questions from the audience until 1:45 p.m. At Drury College in Springfield, Missouri he was warned to be off the chapel stage by 11:40; the students became demonstrably agitated if chapel services extended beyond that time. Alexander spoke until 12:30 to a rapt audience. Bill preached revivals in places as diverse as Hugo, Oklahoma and Des Moines, Iowa, with sensational publicity attending the events. The Des Moines event began in a spacious church building, moving to a downtown theatre to accomodate overflow crowds.

Requests for Bill's services as speaker included nearly every imaginable kind of event. Soon demands for his spokesmanship for secular causes came to claim the greater part of his agenda. Alexander viewed the occasions as a way to expand his ministry, reaching people whom he otherwise would not contact with his message of a life of faith and service.[1] A sampling from Alexander's 1947 itinerary for "outside speeches" indicates some of the diversity of the lecturer's audiences as he broadened his outreach.

Kiwanis Club, Lawton, Oklahoma

Rotary Club, Durant, Oklahoma

High School, Anadarko, Oklahoma

Mountain View Chamber of Commerce

Johnson County Teachers Banquet, Kansas City, Kansas

First Presbyterian Church, Wichita, Kansas

Retail Grocers Association, Wichita, Kansas

First Christian Church, Amarillo, Texas

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[1]Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City, January 28, 1970.

Texas A & M, College Station, Texas

Kansas Bankers Association, Wichita, Kansas

High School Commencement, Henryetta, Oklahoma

High School Commencement, Coffeyville, Kansas

Chiropidist Convention, Galveston, Texas

Texas Pharmaceutical Association, Fort Worth, Texas

Demolay Conference, Harlinger, Texas

Piggly-Wiggly Convention, Denver, Colorado

Idaho Food Dealers Convention, Sun Valley, Idaho

Community Christian Church, Kansas City, Missouri

Ministers Convention, Chickasha, Oklahoma

Missouri Retail Grocers' Association, Springfield, Missouri

Dedication of Church, Watonga, Oklahoma

Oregon Retail Grocers' Association, Portland, Oregon

High School, Pampa, Texas

Oklahoma College for Women, Chickasha, Oklahoma

Lions Club, Odessa, Texas

Sales Executive Club, Memphis, Tennessee

Central High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma

With so many invitations from increasingly distant places, Alexander was becoming something of a celebrity across the country. During the late 1940's he caught the attention of a national speaker's bureau which sponsored some of the most popular public speakers in the country. The General Motors Speakers Bureau served as a clearing house for spokesmen who advocated the free enterprise system, individual initiative and responsibility, and success through application of the traditional American work ethic. Automobile dealers throughout the United

States relayed inquiries and information about speaking appointments to General Motors public relations men in Detroit who phoned or wired such polished speakers as Kenneth McFarland to confirm engagements at teachers conclaves at Portland, Maine to food distributor conventions at Honolulu.

The demand for Bill Alexander, the lecturer-entertainer, built rapidly; Bill's periodic increases in the level of honorariums proved to be insufficient discentive to the many program chairmen who sought him. In trying to accomodate most of the requests Alexander found himself out-of-town four and five nights a week, often catching sleep on cross-country flights. The extra income from speaking enabled him to indulge his passion for flamboyant dress and other extravagances. A sizeable portion of the money went for such projects as Sunbeam Children's Home, missionary causes, and other philanthropies.[1]

Alexander's brethren viewed the colorful pastor's forays into the lecture-entertainment field through various perspectives. One of the most enthusiastic supporters of his secular efforts at persuasion was George Davis, writer for Front Rank, a Disciples publication. Davis was present at the Midland Empire Music Festival, an "under the stars" talent extravaganza held at St. Joseph, Missouri's Krug Park Bowl during June and July of 1948. For four evenings, two each month, thousands of spectators flocked into the Bowl to hear opera and movie star Risé Stevens, world-famed pianist Eugene List, Woody Herman and his orchestra as well as other musical stars, barbershop quartets, and chorale groups. According to Davis, the sensational success of the festival was due in

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[1]Alexander characteristically "tithed" one-third of his income to his church and similar causes. Interview with Ralph Alexander, Lawton, Oklahoma.

no small measure to the Disciples minister who was master-of-ceremonies: Bill Alexander. Davis was so overwhelmed by Alexander's performance that he nearly exhausted his store of superlatives.

> W. H. "Bill" Alexander is a man of many talents. He is capable of everything from acting like a gorilla (which he does in a convincing way to the amusement of children from six to sixty) to lifting people to a level where they "hear the rustle of angels' wings." The Krug Park Bowl Association all set for the Midland Empire Music Festival needed a master of ceremonies, one who could tie together programs ranging from Woody Herman to Risé Stevens, and from the "Donkey Serenade" to the "Hallelujah Chorus." Bill Alexander was that man. "He came, he saw, he conquered." When the last song was sung, the last note had died away in the distance of the hills, the people were talking about Bill. When the author of this account announced the programs to his people, he said, "When Risé Stevens and Eugene List are forgotten here, there will still be talk about Bill Alexander." And there is still talk, good talk, favorable talk. The young Disciples minister left a good taste in the mouths of the people.
>
> This article is not written to defend the right of ministers to be entertainers on the side. It is not written to declare that people should allow the memory of Risé Stevens' songs and Eugene Lists' music slip into the background while they remember a redheaded preacher who created a sensation and left most of those who see and hear him gasping, and crying, "More."[1]

Davis went on to say, "Alexander was a riot. Expertly he created a unified show of unrelated acts."[2] Davis defended Alexander from those who criticised him for his comic foolishness and his love of showbusiness. Davis rebuked "stuffed shirt" Christians and said:

> In his own unique and interesting style (God did not make all of us alike, for which we may thank him and take courage), Bill along with his foolishness as master-of-ceremonies got in some telling blows for the church, the kingdom of God, for human brotherhood and good will. He did credit to his great church in Oklahoma City. The author is not fully acquainted with the program conducted in that church, therefore could not speak critically or favorably. He does know Bill's wholesome attitude and dynamic personality in St. Joseph were good for the soul, and good for the church in a very sick day.[3]

While Davis insisted he saw no real conflict between Alexander's gifts

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[1] George Davis, "The Preacher Rang the Bell," Front Rank, LVII (August 29, 1948), 6.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

of showmanship and his vocation as Christian minister he acknowledged that Bill's gifts might be in a more single-minded direction of his talents.

> The author has heard it said that Bill Alexander would not have much without the theatrical element in his nature. To the contrary, Bill could lose his joke book tomorrow, never imitate a gorilla again, never kneel like Al Jolson singing "Mammy" again, and still be one of the greatest preachers of our generation, even a greater voice for God than he is now.[1]

There were others of Alexander's fellowship--many of them--who encouraged Alexander in his "national ministry"; these loved to hear Bill tell about his experiences "on the circuit," as he mentioned celebrities whom he met and worked with in his speaking engagements. Some of the members of his own congregation were dubious at first, but were won over in time. For example, one elder, Emil DeVilbiss, had consistently opposed the preacher's outside engagements, complaining that Bill's time and energies were being unduly diverted from the church program. However, on one occasion DeVilbiss was in attendance at a meeting which featured Alexander as guest speaker; at the close of his speech the audience gave the minister a standing ovation. The next day DeVilbiss came to Bill with a remorseful apology for his past opposition saying with tears in his eyes, "If that's what you are doing, go with my blessing."[2] There were others, of course, who were never reconciled to Bill's frequent absences. Doubtless some of these were eventually lost to the membership.

While Alexander alienated some local people because of the many

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City, January 28, 1970.

restless activities which crowded his schedule, he won many to his cause through the wider exposure of his colorfully persuasive personality. The ubiquitous showman-preacher was soon attracting the attention of the national mass media. In January, 1947 CBS presented Oklahoma City's First Christian Church services to the nation via the Columbia "Church of the Air" network. There were over 12,000 mail requests for reprints of the program which was conducted by Bill Alexander with music under the direction of Tracy Silvester.

Alexander's showbusiness predilections were accentuated through the publicity attending the wedding of Hollywood personalities Roy Rogers and his co-star Dale Evans. The April, 1948 edition of Movie Life carried a pictorial feature about the ceremony, which was performed by the stars' friend, Bill Alexander.

The August 3, 1948 issue of Look magazine contained a five page feature article titled "The Happy Preacher" which might have passed for a polished public relations piece promoting the winsome personality of Bill Alexander. The extensive feature, written by Look staff writer Lewis W. Gillenson in a lively and laudatory style, probably aroused enthusiasm for Alexander and his "Church of Tomorrow" program among nearly all the Look readership--except those at Stroud, Oklahoma, many of whom were incensed by the suggestion that Stroud's Christian Church building and program was so bleak when Alexander accepted the pastorate in 1935. The August 13, 1948 Stroud Democrat editorial captioned "Alexander Story Draws Bitter Denunciations," reported:

> A lot of controversy has arisen around town concerning the recently published story of the life of Bill Alexander in Look magazine. There seems to be a multitude of people who disagree with the Stroud chapter of that story. . . . The general consensus of opinion

is that Alexander grossly misrepresented the facts. . . .

The editor, Ellis Adams, went on to say that the congregation's membership was not 34, as Alexander was quoted to say, but 300; that Alexander's salary was not $7.50 a week but much more; that the building was not delapidated but was neat and in good repair; that the church was not "dead" but rather was the major impetus for Alexander's now nationally famous reputation.

The Oklahoma City Times reported on August 18, 1948:

> Stroud has removed a sign erected by Alexander in front of the Christian Church during his pastorate here. The sign dubbed the church as "Oklahoma's Little Church Around the Corner." Local citizens were irked by statements attributed to Alexander in a recent edition of Look magazine. An editorial in the Stroud Democrat asks if Alexander has not bitten the hand that fed him.

Alexander's national notoriety, then, was not without its cost. Although Gillenson wrote the people of Stroud a lengthy letter of explanation and apology which was published in the Stroud Democrat, the injured feelings were not soothed, the Stroud editor asserting "The letter . . . fails to settle the controversy and dodges the issue of facts. . . ."[1] Four weeks later the Democrat published another letter--this one from the former Stroud pastor himself. While the Stroud paper printed its contents without comment or follow-up to indicate the letter's effectiveness in assuaging the resentment in the community, it is difficult to imagine readers being so bitter over the issue that they would not be greatly softened by Alexander's expression of devotion to his first church.

> On returning to Oklahoma from Europe, I was saddened to learn that many of my friends in Stroud sincerely felt that I had done them and our beloved church there an injustice, re the Look magazine

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[1] Ibid.

article of August 3rd.

From the pulpit of the First Christian Church in Oklahoma City and in many other informal conversations, including a short talk to my brother Masons after receiving the Master's Degree, I have said repeatedly, "No other church will be able to take the place of First Christian Church, Stroud, Oklahoma. It has a little place of its own and I shall always reverence it."

Some reading this letter may say the Look magazine article doesn't show that feeling, to which I answer: Anything derogatory to Stroud never came from my lips or pen and anything in that article that is not 100 per cent true is a result of what is generally referred to as "the press treatment." There are some sentences that were put into my mouth which I wish hadn't been printed, but I had no opportunity to see that article before it was published and despite these sentences the tremendous response to Mr. Gillenson's article has largely been from people who are literally starving for a down-to-earth Christianity which makes sense in everyday living.

All who know me well know that I am capable of wrong doing, but I am not capable of being unkind.

May I close this love letter by saying simply that I loved Stroud when I lived there--I love Stroud now and in the future, regardless of anything derogatory about me that Stroud may say--I shall love Stroud with all of my heart.

Thank you for printing this.
Sincerely and affectionately,
W. H. Alexander

Clergyman in Controversy: Alexander as Reformer

Controversy was no new experience to Alexander. He was at the center of controversies at Beaumont High, Phillips University and, as we have seen, at Stroud, and Oklahoma City. As he moved to the center of regional and national spotlights he emerged more and more as a controversial reform figure in the tradition of Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Ernest Fremont Tittle. There were three major issues around which Alexander's controversial reform image centered. These were: racial discrimination, neglect of the mentally ill, and liquor prohibition.

Racial Discrimination. Gillenson remarked on Alexander's

"blasting as un-Christian the Jim Crow law forbidding Negroes and Whites to attend the same church. In the Southwest, and even in Alexander's progressive Disciples of Christ Protestant Church, such a position sounded alarmingly radical."[1] Not long after Alexander returned from the war in Europe, a situation developed in his church which offended the sensitivities of some of his members. A Negro tenor from a church choir in another city came to Alexander asking if he knew of an available church sanctuary large enough to hold a recital for the Negro churches of the city. Since there was nothing scheduled in First Christian's sanctuary on the date of the recital, Alexander suggested the event be held there. The Negro singer expressed his appreciation, the church secretary scheduled the recital, and Bill thought no more about it. The following Sunday morning an elder who had heard that Negroes would be occupying the church that afternoon told Alexander there would be no "niggers" taking over the First Christian Church. When several other elders agreed with the protesting elder (who proudly claimed his Texas upbringing as proof of his position) Alexander proferred his resignation, telling them if they held such views toward their fellow men and Christian brothers, then he had failed them as their minister. When an elder suggested postponing the recital til all concerned could discuss the issue, Alexander refused, saying he could not break his promise to the singer nor could he disappoint the large number of people expected at the recital only three hours from then. Alexander again said he would leave his pastorate before he would deny the use of his church for reasons of racial discrimination. That afternoon a large crowd from the

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[1]Gillenson, "The Happy Preacher," p. 49.

Oklahoma City's Negro community enjoyed a musical program at First Christian Church.[1]

As a result of his hospitality on this occasion, Alexander received invitations to speak to Negro churches and to other groups in the state's black communities. Bill seldom enjoyed speaking so much as when he addressed black audiences with their characteristic instant feedback. Alexander developed anecdotes and illustrations from these encounters and used them in his appeals for social reform on the part of white people. Bill drew one of his most frequently used stories from a speaking engagement he kept at Oklahoma's Negro university in the late 1940's. In his appeal for fairness and compassion toward colored people, Alexander said:

> A Negro professor at Langston University said to me, "Bill, if you tell me you will have nothing to do with me because I am uneducated, I will get an education. If you say you will have nothing to do with me because I am unclean or don't smell well, I can study sanitation and do something about it. But if you tell me you will have nothing to do with me because of the color of my skin, then there is nothing I can do but grow bitter within. There is nothing I can do about my skin, you see."[2]

Alexander often told, in unmistakably bitter tones, of seeing a black student sitting in the hall outside a classroom at the University of Oklahoma. Laws which made such situations necessary must be amended, according to the reform-minded pastor.

The success of Alexander's efforts on the part of his colored brethren was limited because of the times and conditions in his day. Nevertheless, significant progress was made, especially among the

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[1] Notes of Ralph Alexander, pp. 138-141.

[2] Ibid., p. 142.

Disciples churches in Oklahoma City. While Alexander encouraged his colored brethren to come and worship at First Christian, when he saw that the blacks themselves generally preferred their own places and styles of worship, he campaigned for funds to help supply buildings and other necessities.[1]

Further evidence of Alexander's commitment to alleviation of racial discrimination is seen in his leadership work in promoting improved relations with the Jewish people in the local and national community. He counted among his dear friends the rabbis in local synagogues and he was active in speaking programs for the National Association of Christians and Jews.

Mental Health. Alexander's commitment to the social gospel was also seen in his campaign for better care of the mentally ill. The influence of his mother, a social reformer herself, was reinforced by his training at the University of Chicago, where he read Rauschenbusch and Fosdick, leading intellectuals in the movement for Christian reform. When speaking for reform, the Oklahoma City preacher sounded very much like his teacher as he declared:

> In my Good Book it says that religion cannot exist on the fringe of life. It must be inherent in every phase of life. That means the church must take an active part in social, economic and cultural affairs. Any business for man's betterment is church business.[2]

As Alexander was drawn into public affairs, he became aware of the human misery so characteristic of the mental hospitals of his adopted state. As he visited these institutions, saw first hand the neglect of so many

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[1]Gillenson, "The Happy Preacher," p. 49. [2]Ibid.

suffering patients and spoke with staff members of their frustrations over inadequate funding, Bill began sharing his experiences with audiences across the state. His concern developed into a four-year crusade as he preached sweeping reform of state mental health care. Alexander's campaign inspired a series of hard-hitting articles in the Daily Oklahoman exposing the miserable conditions to its readership while pleading for passage of legislative measures to alleviate some of the problems. As a result of these combined efforts the Oklahoma Mental Hygiene Association was formed, drafting as its chairman William H. Alexander.

The Preacher and Prohibition. Alexander's reform efforts toward repeal of Oklahoma's prohibition law brought him more notoriety than perhaps all his other campaigns for social change. Most of Alexander's fellow Oklahomans probably viewed the controversial reformer's outspoken opposition of prohibition as ill-fitting a Christian minister.

On March 9, 1949, the front page of the Oklahoma City Times' Final edition carried headlines which read "CITY PASTORS CLASH OVER 'INSINUATIONS' AT REPEAL HEARING." The First Christian Church preacher had had a busy day; the newspaper told the story in two columns side by side, both featuring the Alexander's exploits. First was the story of his appearance as speaker at a university chapel service.

> Reverend William H. Alexander's declaration that "since prohibition cannot be enforced, it ought to be repealed," changed the usually conservative chapel service of Oklahoma City University into a lively session Wednesday morning. Students reported both cheers and boos accompanied an exchange between the minister and President C. Q. Smith.
>
> Mr. Alexander was given his choice of subjects and in a surprise move used the occasion to give his reason for believing repeal is best for the state. Dr. Smith answered the pastor of the First Christian Church, and a spirited debate ensued. Mr. Alexander insisted that every boy and girl in the city could pick up a phone and

order a bottle of whisky. Dr. Smith insisted that was not true.

. . . Mr. Alexander appeared at the OCU chapel service before going to the capitol to express his views before a senate committee.

The next stop for Alexander, the state senate committee hearing on the question of prohibition repeal, was described by the Times in this way:

While 400 persons overflowed galleries of the senate chamber, sparks flew from the rostrum as proponents and opponents of repeal challenged each other's statements.

Hottest bombshell thrown into the hearing was the statement by Mr. Alexander; he favored repeal with rigid control over the "present damnable situation."

"I am unalterably opposed to repeal unless you bring along with it a sensible and rigid control," he declared. "There should be no Sunday liquor sales, no sales to minors, only package sales and a close follow-up on drunkenness.

"I would be for repeal with such a program."

At this hearing, Alexander found himself in a quick exchange with another city clergyman, this time a Baptist who favored prohibition.

Reverend William H. Alexander, pastor of the First Christian Church, objected to "insinuations" against him and his son by Reverend Roy Hollomon, pastor of the Exchange Avenue Baptist Church. Both appeared before the committee on the repeal issue. Mr. Alexander asking the legislature to study a good control measure and Mr. Hollomon opposed a special election.

The clash developed this way: Mr. Alexander had declared it is possible for "my 10-year-old son to dial 100 numbers in Oklahoma City and get whisky delivered if he has the money."

Hollomon, following him to the stand, said he had tried for three days to purchase whisky for a Sunday School class demonstration and had failed. "Maybe I don't know my way around well enough, though," he added.

Mr. Alexander then took the floor to say: "I am sorry that my good friend has decided to become a little personal. Neither I nor my son has ever called a bootlegger.

"But I believe that any minister who can live in Oklahoma City and . . . then not know that it is possible to pick up a telephone receiver and have it delivered any place, any time, is not near enough to his people to properly minister to them. Let's keep off personal insinuations." (Alexander said.)

Mr. Hollomon then said he had "not insinuated anything." He repeated, however, that perhaps he had not been well enough acquainted to find liquor.

"That's another insinuation," Mr. Alexander said in a low voice from his seat at the side of the senate chamber.

For his outspoken stand on such an emotion-charged issue, Alexander received his share of rebuffs. Once he was scheduled to speak to a civic group which met in a church sanctuary: his reputation as a spokesman for repeal had preceded him. The Tulsa World reported the local reaction with its headline, "MINISTER'S STAND ON REPEAL BARS HIM FROM NOWATA CHURCH." The article went on to report First Methodist Church pastor Reverend Alfred O. Pace had denied the civic group permission to meet in the building "because of Alexander's attitude on the repeal of liquor." The organization, Nowata's Chamber of Commerce, made plans to meet elsewhere so they could hear Alexander. This meeting, held on March 31, 1949, was covered by the Nowata Daily, whose account of the event and its aftermath was more pro-Alexander than most Oklahoma papers dared to be.

> Everyone has a right to his own ideas. And whether you agreed with Big Bill Alexander in the things he said last night at the annual Chamber of Commerce meeting doesn't matter. The main thing is that he has every right to say what he thinks, even though doing so has brought a great deal of criticism and slander down on his red head.
>
> Big Bill is no wild-eyed fanatic. He is a calm thinker, a guy who does not let prejudices sway his reason. His talk last night convinced most people of that.
>
> Big Bill realized that he's in a tough spot. Imagine, a preacher spouting off some of the things he's been saying! A preacher just doesn't do those things, it sez here.
>
> When Bill Alexander put a bowling alley and pool tables in his church youth center in Oklahoma City the cry could be heard from Kansas to Texas. But when you take a pool table out of a pool hall, the game becomes about as harmless as croquet. And bowling is one of the grand old sports of England from years back. But "Alexander's Pool Hall," as he called it, nevertheless came in for much criticism, even though it kept the younger generation out of pool halls all over Oklahoma City.
>
> Well, as we were saying, everyone is entitled to his own ideas. One of those persons entitled to her own idea is an irate reader who sent us this postcard when we invited country people to come in and hear Bill talk in this left-hand furrow the other day.
>
> "I consider you dear folk's column an insult to country people. Some of our greatest people, Abraham Lincoln, Will Rogers and others

> were raised in the country. To me Bill Alexander is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Like Bob Ingersoll, he is not content on going to hell alone. He is taking the youth with him, and it seems, people are willing to assist him. I dare you to put this in your column! Signed Mrs. D. A. Coble, Alluwe."
>
> Well, now, we don't expect everyone to agree with us. In fact there have been a large number of people send us "fan mail" when they disagreed with what we were jotting down in this space. But, so help us, this is the first time we've received "fan mail" where the writer has had the courage to sign it. When we get unsigned fan mail, it immediately goes into the waste basket. When people take after us for something we've written, we want them to sign it if they expect to see it in this column. After all, we sign our stuff, don't we? We showed the postcard to Big Bill when we saw him off at the airport this morning. He merely smiled and shook his head. "This is tame," he said, "You ought to see some of the really good ones I get!" (signed) Dave Johnson.

While Alexander enlarged his reputation through his campaign for repeal of prohibition, his losses in popular support weighed heavily against his gains. Especially did he alienate the large segment of Oklahomans who supported the United Drys, a political group especially strong with the populous and powerful Southern Baptists.

On the eve of the election to decide whether Oklahoma should remain dry or go wet, Alexander withdrew his plea for prohibition's repeal declaring he had not been shown what safeguards the citizen would receive in return for repealing the present laws. In reply to his many critics--wet and dry--he insisted he had not reversed himself; he had consistently opposed ineffective laws and declared the wets had not brought forth better regulation than that already in force. Therefore, he could not favor repeal at that time.[1] By his early advocacy of repeal, Alexander had alienated the drys; by his belated refusal to support repeal, he had offended the wets. Through the stimulating publicity the controversial

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[1]The election, held in September, 1949, was won by the prohibition forces.

reformer had become one of the state's best-known public personalities. Switching positions on such a crucial issue, however, seemed to generate notoriety more than fame.

The Senate Campaign: 1950

Alexander's active commitment to social reform through political action continued to expand as the decade drew to a close. On December 19, 1949 a newspaper announced to the readers in Alexander's home town:

> The Reverend William H. Alexander 34-year-old former nightclub entertainer is on the verge of entering the 1950 Senate race.
>
> The eloquent pastor of Oklahoma City's First Christian Church wants to oppose 74-year-old Elmer Thomas, who will be seeking his fifth term. Both are Democrats. Alexander's 3,500 member congregation has given him permission to enter the race, providing he will continue as pastor of the church. The red-haired preacher says that if elected he would commute here from Washington in his private plane.
>
> Alexander has discussed his political ambitions frankly, with the congregation. Most of the members hope he runs.[1]

There were others, of course, who urged Alexander not to run for political office, warning him he risked losing his Christian influence, his congregation and perhaps even his family in such a race. Alexander appeared to vacillate as the year drew to a close. On Sunday morning, January 2, 1950, Alexander announced to his church that on the following Lord's Day, January 9, he would announce whether or not he would become a candidate for the United States Senate.

Throughout the week reporters from state newspapers and national news magazines sought an answer from Alexander but received none. As he had promised, Bill announced his decision from the pulpit: "I choose to run for the United States Senate." Bill Henthorne, reporter for the

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[1]"Pastor May Enter Oklahoma Senate Race, Says Religion, Politics Can Mix," St. Louis Star-Times.

Tulsa World covering the event, said:

> The announcement came with surprised shock to a great majority of his congregation--some 2,500 strong who overflowed into several Sunday School classrooms. The entire lower floor and balcony walls were lined with standing church members and others who came to hear, as he had promised in his sermon last week, what his final decision would be.
>
> . . . Alexander candidly admitted that a week ago today he had firmly decided not to get into politics. He admitted also virtually every personal friend he had contacted--and those with political knowledge, too--had urged him not to run.
>
> "But I spent last night on my knees in prayer in the pastor's sanctuary," he stated. "I remained there until 5:30 this morning--and I received my answer. I am going to run for U.S. Senator from Oklahoma."[1]

Maverick Candidate

Alexander, a registered Democrat in a state which since statehood had sent only three Republican senators to Washington, began a vigorous campaign for the Democratic nomination. Alexander broke most of the rules for political speaking, knowing little and perhaps caring less about the conventions of campaigning. To the Tulsa County Democratic Convention on January 21, he attacked the policies of the national administration which, he said, spawned the attitude that "if you don't work for a living, the government will take care of you."[2] He decried discriminatory treatment of Negroes, warning that if equal opportunities in social, educational and medical areas were not guaranteed America would suffer the consequences. The fact that Alexander's speeches contained more criticism of present Democratic policy than praise disturbed some of the party leaders in the state. At a meeting of the Democratic central committee held at Oklahoma City on February 20, the keynote

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[1] Tulsa Sunday World, January 9, 1950.

[2] Norman, Oklahoma Transcript, January 22, 1950.

speaker declared there was "no place in the Democratic Party for anyone who publicly disagreed with or criticized this great administration."[1] Alexander later said he felt such remarks were intended specifically for him. This conviction grew as he continued to express his dissatisfaction with administration policies which seemed essentially socialistic to Alexander.

The front page of the Daily Oklahoman on Sunday, March 12, 1950 carried the headline "Alexander Pulls a Switch! He's Running for Senate on the Republican Ticket." Alexander announced he had left the Democrats because he felt he could no longer feel free to criticize policies of past and present administrations which he believed were inimical to the best interest of Americans and Oklahomans. He had conferred with state Republican leaders and on being promised complete freedom to run his own campaign, he decided to run as a Republican. In language reminiscent of Winston Churchill's announcement when he had switched political parties in his campaign for parliament, Alexander declared that he had found it necessary to change political parties in order to remain true to his principles. Alexander's change of parties left the Democratic primary to the aging incumbent, Elmer Thomas and the challenging fifth district congressman A. S. Mike Monroney. Bill Alexander faced little opposition for the Republican nomination from Oklahoma. State Republican leaders expressed their elation at having a candidate of Alexander's stature and popularity. Oklahoma's Republican National Committeeman Bailie Vinson of Tulsa said, "We are 100 per cent behind him."[2] Declaring that the

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[1] The Daily Oklahoman, March 12, 1950.

[2] Ibid.

party was "pleased, happy and enthusiastic," Vinson said, "We think he'll be the next United States Senator."[1]

Democratic leaders did their utmost to see that Vinson's prophecy would not come to pass. The most telling blows came not from Monroney but from Democratic Senator Robert S. Kerr who had been enthusiastic about Alexander's candidacy before he changed parties. Now Kerr derided Alexander's "call" to the Senate race, asking if the Lord had his hand on Alexander's shoulder the night he decided to run as a Democrat, then " . . . whose arm was around his shoulder when he changed his mind?"[2] Kerr ignored Alexander's statement of January 9 which carefully avoided references of allegiance to any political party. Kerr, a Bible Student and active Baptist layman couched his sarcastic attacks on Alexander in New Testament parabolic style. The Daily Oklahoman of March 13, 1950 carried this news release.

"Kerr Offers a Parable"

> In Washington, Senator Kerr (D., Okla.) Sunday likened Alexander to a political "lost sheep" that had found his home. Senator Kerr, when asked for comment on the development, recalled the Biblical story of the lamb that got lost of the shepherd, leaving the other 99 sheep in the fold while he searched through the night for the lost one, and that when it was found, there was great rejoicing.
>
> "I am sure the Republican shepherds in Oklahoma are indulging in great rejoicing in the finding of the political sheep that was lost," Kerr said.

Although Alexander again and again gave his reasons for changing political horses, there were many people in Oklahoma who began to wonder about the preacher who changed his mind on such issues as prohibition and party loyalty.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Samuel Shaffer, "Preacher at the Polls," Newsweek, XXXVI (October 30, 1950), 22.

The Preacher in Politics: An Important Issue

Other observers seemed to believe Alexander's entry into the race signalled a change of vocations, deciding upon a career in politics instead of the Christian ministry. Clyde Wheeler, Alexander's close friend who was pastor of Crown Heights Christian said,"Church members everywhere in the state [ask] what will happen if Alexander wins his seat in the Senate? What will happen to the church? Will he continue as the minister? Will he return from Washington to preach on Sundays?"[1]

Alexander attempted to answer such questions in his speeches, publicity releases, and press interviews. On March 3, 1950 radio station KTOW broadcast an interview which supplied some answers about Alexander's career plans.

> Walter Harrison: Bill, just what are your plans about keeping your church ties here and serving as United States Senator at Washington when you're elected in November?
>
> Alexander: That's a broad question, Walter, but I'll try to give you a clear answer. In the first place, I realize that being pastor of a church is a full-time job and being a United States Senator also is a full-time job. By the same token, I assure you that I never intend to lose my identity as a minister. I expect to preach somewhere every Sunday. And I shall never let the people down while I am their representative in the Senate. I know I shall not be able to occupy the pulpit here while the Senate is in session. During part of the year, I shall be able to visit here only once a month, or perhaps every six weeks. But certainly I can remain, and shall remain, a Christian minister.[2]

This stance seemed more plausible than the earlier news reports which stated Alexander would fly back in his own plane every week-end so he could occupy the Oklahoma City pulpit.

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[1] J. Clyde Wheeler, "He Believes He Can Win," The Christian Century, LXVII (July 19, 1950), 685.

[2] Bill Alexander Interview by Walter Harrison, KTOW, 5:15-5:45 p.m. March 3, 1950.

While Alexander's stated intentions of remaining in the ministry would reassure many voters, some would remain negative toward the idea of a preacher entering politics. Phil Burns, Alexander's political campaign manager, said this attitude was so prevalent among the electorate that it was a major issue in the campaign. An editor in Moore, Oklahoma, shortly after Alexander announced his candidacy, stated his objection in this way, "We're not going to vote for the red haired preacher for U.S. Senator because we believe that a preacher belongs in a church and a senator in the senate, and not vice versa."[1]

Alexander and Burns, aware of the strength of this feeling, made no attempt to subordinate or bypass the issue of Alexander's status as Christian minister. Instead they attempted to capitalize upon his Christian calling, asking: who could be more needed in such a responsible office than a Christian statesman? On being made campaign manager, Burns announced, "The campaign will be in the nature of a crusade rather than a typical political campaign."[2] Alexander met the issue head-on with such declarations as the following:

> . . . I make you this promise and pledge: I entered this Senate race, motivated by the same principles that led me into the ministry in 1935, and I have this desire--to apply Christian principles to government! We can exchange the dog-eat-dog thuggery between nations for the brotherhood of man. We can exchange the rule of gold for the Golden Rule.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Science has far outstripped the diplomat and the statesman in his quest for peace. The A-Bomb and the projected H-Bomb are evidence of this. We must heed, "The Voice of Christ Once More, Heard in the Pause of the Cannon's Roar."
>
> The trite statement that "politics and religion do not mix" is basically false. Fooled by the power of the slogan, many people

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[1] Moore, Oklahoma Messenger, January 12, 1950.

[2] Muskogee Times-Democrat, January 18, 1950.

> confuse the American principle of the separation of Church and State with the occupancy of Senate seat by a religious man. Nothing is so false and few things are so un-American. For such an attitude discriminates against a large and valuable portion of our American citizenry. Religious men have made the greatest contributions to American democracy and to the progress of our country.
>
> . . . I do not apologize for being a Christian minister and I am convinced that the religious precepts which I have taught for fifteen years are realistic, not idealistic; that they can be demonstrated, not merely declared; that they can be possessed, not merely professed; that today they alone will solve the momentous problems facing our great country in government, economics, and international affairs.
>
> For too long, Christians have held back timidly while Communists shouted proudly--"We are Communists and we are changing the world." We who bear His name must be willing to say proudly anywhere and everywhere--"I am a Christian, and with God's help we can make this a Christian world."[1]

Alexander balanced and reinforced his hard-hitting approach to this issue with a soft-sell message from his showbusiness friend and celebrity, Roy Rogers. The Kansas City Star tells the story of how Alexander and Rogers teamed up to persuade the Oklahoma electorate that religion and politics were compatible agents.

> Late in July, Bill Alexander and his wife flew to Hollywood to talk things over with Roy Rogers, the cowboy movie star. It was the sort of performance that Oklahoma loves. Bill came back with a couple of dozen radio transcriptions which he and Roy had made together. They're being played on virtually every station in Oklahoma, and the voters hardly dare turn off their radios for fear they'll miss one of them.
>
> "Howdy, folks," Rogers says. "This is your old friend Roy Rogers, out here in Hollywood. I only wish that me and my horse, Trigger could ride the trail in every county in Oklahoma and tell you in person what I think of Bill Alexander, a lovable guy, an honest guy with Christian principles.
>
> "You know, back in Washington they've forgotten about the ten commandments. Don't you think it's about time that we sent to Washington a man who remembers and keeps the ten commandments? Bill Alexander is a man who is big enough to awaken the whole nation to a great crusade. And he's humble enough to lead little children."
>
> Then the Alexander bass breaks in:
>
> "You know, folks," he said, "I once had a real treat. I had the

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[1]William H. Alexander, Opening Campaign Speech, May 1, 1950, at Stroud, Oklahoma.

privilege of going down into Hereford Heaven two years ago last New Year's eve to perform the marriage ceremony for two of the grandest persons I've ever met--Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. I guess it was then that I decided to stick my neck out into politics, the roughest game in the world.

"When I announced for the United States Senate, Roy called me up from Hollywood and he said, "The Lord bless you, Bill." Roy Rogers not only is the greatest living hero of children all over the world. He's a great American."

Rogers takes it up again:

"You know, folks, out here in Hollywood my wife and I attend the Fountain Avenue Baptist church. It is a church which was founded by God-fearing men. . . ."

And Bill:

"Roy and Trigger are hitting the trail for good government. Good government is everybody's business . . . "

Bill is confident that the support of Roy and Trigger have won him many votes. The only real sour note on the transcriptions was the comment of Senator Kerr:

"I can only say that Trigger looks a whole lot more like a horse than Bill Alexander does a United States Senator."[1]

Alexander's characteristic good nature was becoming more sensitive to such barbs from people who, like Kerr, had been friends of his before he entered the political race. The taunts and attacks upon his status as a preacher in politics did not, however, deter him from sustaining and magnifying his positive approach to the issue. In a radio address on September 11, 1950, Alexander called for fellow crusaders to join his quest to recover the Holy Grail of Liberty.

. . . People, don't be taken in by my opponent's oft-repeated suggestion, and I quote: "Bill's a good preacher--let's keep him a preacher. And I'm a good politician--let's keep me a politician." end quote. Rather, people of Oklahoma, I suggest you say, "Let's apply Christian principles to government. Let's stop Mike from going east and turning left again."

Even at this early stage, thousands of good Democrats and Republicans in Oklahoma are forming the nucleus of the Crusade that will sweep across the state like a prairie fire in the weeks to come. The word "Crusade" is defined in Webster's dictionary as, and I quote: "Any of the seven militant expeditions undertaken by

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[1] Kansas City Star, November 5, 1950, pp. 19-20.

Christian powers in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries to recover the Holy Grail from the pagans." End quote.

We are now in the middle of the twentieth century, and once again, in the pioneering state of Oklahoma, the Christian powers are called upon to recover the Holy Grail of Liberty from the political pagans of collectivistic totalitarian thought. In this twilight of honor where the present Administration looks upon the Maragons, the Hisses, the Vaughns, and the five percenters as amusing scalawags instead of thieves and traiters who are robbing and destroying us, we must once again catch the vision of our forefathers, who, when they wrote the Declaration of Independence, said--"We pledge to this our sacred honor."

OUR SACRED HONOR! What has happened to that, my friends? It is not gone, but it has been clouded in the minds of many of us. At this moment, and in reverberating, challenging tones which will become deafening on November 7, people from every crossroads in Oklahoma, are heading the call to seize the Holy Grail of Liberty once again.

This is more than a job, people. A man can get sick of a job. This is like a bugle call at dawn--this is like the restless rattling of drums in the dark--it cannot be ignored. In this Crusade I see the magnificent march of the Living God and I hear the thunder of His feet!

[Here a chorus and baritone soloist sang.]

From the halls of our State Capitol
To the short grass country
There's a crusade now a-movin'
And it means our Liberty!

[Alexander resumed:]

. . . The kind of Crusade demanded in order to retain the Holy Grail of Liberty in Oklahoma this November cannot be won without crusaders who will get in on the front line and pitch between now and November 7. The Oklahoman who goes forth from this auditorium or from his radio with the determination to win ten other people to this cause of Freedom--that person is fighting for the freedom of America and the world just as much as our boys in Korea are fighting for the freedom of America and the world this night. Will you crusade with me?[1]

This kind of elevated appeal cast into the form of a big production number was Alexander's way of saying a preacher not only could be sent to the U.S. Senate but that he ought to be.

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[1]William H. Alexander, "It's a Clear-Cut Issue," Speech at Ardmore, Oklahoma, September 11, 1950.

Falsely Accused

Alexander's free spirit, his frequently iconoclastic pronouncements and his colorful exploits won many people to his cause, whether that cause was mental hygiene, youth rehabilitation, or a senatorial campaign. But the same traits which drew so many alienated others. Early in the senate campaign, a man Bill had offended in 1945 made an attempt to keep Alexander out of the U.S. Senate. On January 18, 1950, L. F. Nichols, who, as head of the Lincoln County Draft Board, had tried five years before to send the returning war correspondent to a work camp for conscientious objectors, said:

> "It is noted that Reverend Bill Alexander is going to open his campaign for U.S. Senator in Tulsa with an address titled 'Ballots or Bullets.' Judging on his draft record if the Reverend doesn't know more about the former than he does of the latter, he's in a tight spot."[1]

Nichols' animosity went beyond any party loyalties. In April after Alexander switched to the Republican Party, Nichols, in an editorial titled "Taking on a Liability," questioned whether a man who was a conscientious objector should be elected to the U.S. Senate. Nichols, certain that former servicemen would oppose such a candidate, suggested the Republican Party drop the controversial clergyman-candidate.

Raymond Fields, Guthrie publisher who was a candidate opposing Alexander in the Republican primary, tried to make use of the issue by bringing it to the attention of Tulsa editor Richard Lloyd Jones, leading figure among Oklahoma Republicans. Fields' attempt backfired. Jones wrote an editorial, "A Word to Raymond Fields," detailing facts which

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[1] Chandler, Oklahoma Republican, p. 1.

effectively refuted the charges made by Nichols, Fields and others.[1] While Alexander appreciated such support, he lost no time waiting for his friends to speak in his defense. A Tulsa Daily World story carried Alexander's reply to the charges that he had been a conscientious objector.

PASTOR RAPS 'LOW BLOWS'

> Reverend W. H. "Bill" Alexander today called charges that he was a conscientious objector during World War II "blows below the belt."
>
> A Republican candidate for U.S. Senator, the red-haired Oklahoma City pastor replied in heated terms to an editorial in the Lincoln County Republican, A Chandler newspaper edited by L. F. Nichols.
>
> . . . Alexander said the editorial "smacks of half-truths." He said half-truths are born of "viciousness and maliciousness" and nourished "by the courage of eagerness to 'get even.'"
>
> A former pastor at Stroud, in Lincoln County, Alexander said the editorial bringing up "this dead issue" afforded him "an opportunity to stop this whispering campaign of innuendoes."
>
> "Americans, especially Oklahomans, have a revolting distaste for blows below the belt," Alexander said.[2]

Alexander went on to explain in detail the controversy, clearing himself of the accusation by showing that the State Selective Service Appeal Board had unanimously declared that Alexander was in fact not a conscientious objector and that the Lincoln County Board No. 1 was wrong in so classifying him. Alexander suggested wounded pride and vindictiveness were responsible for the vitriolic attack upon his good name and character. Alexander's factual defense greatly exceeded the credibility of his accusers' reckless charges.

A Costly Experience

Alexander's experience as a political candidate was a costly one which he never forgot and never repeated. The costs, far too great for

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[1] The Tulsa Tribune, April 25, 1950.

[2] The Tulsa Daily World, April 22, 1950.

whatever benefits he won, were of various kinds.

Defeat

The taste of defeat was an uncommon and extremely unpleasant encounter for Bill Alexander. About midway through the campaign, Clyde Wheeler discussed the possible effect of defeat upon his friend and fellow minister, Bill Alexander.

> . . . [Alexander] is now making a fight for the office. He will continue to fight. And win or lose, Oklahoma will know he ran. If he does lose, than what? Ardent members of his own church say: "He still has his church, he still has his popularity! He can take up where he left off! He can get right back in the harness and go on doing the same good work, having the same fine influence on people, both at home and elsewhere." But there are others who are not so sure.
>
> Alexander, the Preacher, unlike another Alexander who died sighing for more worlds to conquer, has never known defeat. The word is not part of his vocabulary. He goes into a cause to win. If he had not believed sincerely in the cause of good government, and if he had not believed that the world is at a crossroads, if he had not believed that he had been called and is expected to do something about it, and if he had not believed absolutely that he could and will win, he would never have consented to run.[1]

As the race came to its climax, others close to the pastor must have speculated about the effect of a political drubbing on the young candidate. On November 7, 1950, Alexander drew the largest Republican vote in Oklahoma's history--but it wasn't enough to wrest the victory from his veteran opponent. As Monroney's lead showed the consistency of a trend (in the final tally he would lead the minister by 60,000 votes), Alexander conceded defeat. According to campaign manager, Phil Burns, defeat came to Bill unexpectedly; the optimistic candidate had fully expected to be in the Senate during its next session. Yet Alexander took the blow with a resilient graciousness. At about 2 a.m. he told

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[1]J. Clyde Wheeler, "He Believes He Can Win," The Christian Century, LXVII (July 19, 1950), 685.

his campaign workers in the Republican Suite at the Skirvin Hotel:

> Folks, I just want to say, if nothing more comes out of this campaign than meeting a bunch of wonderful people, it has been worth it. We are still fighting for a cause to which the future belongs.[1]

The next evening, at his church's midweek services, Alexander delivered his first sermon since he had began intensive campaigning six months before. Members of the congregation packed the dining hall to capacity and paid him the tribute of a standing ovation as he entered the hall. Bill's sentimental nature was deeply stirred by his church's expression of loyalty and affection. He wept as he said, "When a man comes back to his congregation and receives that kind of a reception no matter what, he didn't lose after all."[2] There were many others wiping tears from their eyes at First Christian Church that evening.

Alexander never again campaigned for political office. In 1954 Republican party leaders tried to persuade him to run for senator again, this time against incumbent Robert S. Kerr. Alexander declined the offer. In 1958 rumors that he would run for governor were circulated until Alexander stated he had no intentions of running for political office. Evidently the 1950 experience erased all ambition for such a career. Yet Alexander did not become bitter about his defeat. He spoke of his opponent with respect, testifying to his honesty and fairness.[3] He

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[1] Daily Oklahoman, November 9, 1950. [2] Ibid.

[3] Alexander's own fairness toward his political adversary is indicated in an incident during the campaign. Margaret Roso, secretary for Alexander during the 1940's, told of being present during a political program held at a school fieldhouse where Alexander and Monroney shared the platform. Monroney was speaking under severe difficulty as several members of the audience interrupted and loudly heckled him. Alexander rose from his chair, held up his hand for silence, and entreated the listeners to give Mike a courteous hearing, whether they

urged other concerned Christians to enter this vital area of public service. But Bill Alexander's first such experience remained his last.

Economic Costs

Although early in the race Alexander received considerable financial support from wealthy Republicans such as national committeeman, Bailey Vinson of Tulsa, his political effort was under-financed. By comparison with the Democratic opposition, Alexander ran a shoestring campaign. Fred Miller, (who sometimes served as associate pastor at First Christian) campaigned for Bill in Oklahoma's Little Dixie area of Pittsburgh, McCurtain and Choctaw counties. This area, in the southeast section of the state, was strongly Democratic in its political composition. Miller believes this section made the critical difference between Alexander's success and defeat. Moreover, he avers it was here that the Democrats, already favored by tradition, spent unusual sums to further entrench their position against the popular, red-haired newcomer. Some of the money paid for banquets and barbeques, some to "buy gas" for people who promised to "get-out-the-vote," some of it went to regular precinct workers.[1] Miller suggested if Alexander and his backers had been able to match the spending of the opposition, these three counties could have been neutralized by the popular preacher-candidate, thereby sending Alexander to the Senate.[2] Instead, the Republicans' support dwindled as the autumn polls showed Alexander trailing Monroney by

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agreed with him or not. Monroney continued his speech with no further difficulties. Interview with Roso, April 10, 1970.

[1]Interview with Fred Miller, April 29, 1970 at Norman, Oklahoma.

[2]Ibid.

increasing measures. The Democrats' high level of activities and expenditures--especially in their "pocket" counties in southern Oklahoma--is an index of their estimate of the powerful popularity of Monroney's opponent.

At the close of the campaign, Alexander's personal debt was estimated at between $50,000 and $60,000.[1] The loss of income from the scores of lectures he had cancelled in order to wage the campaign was a heavy blow to a man with the extravagant generosity of Bill Alexander. During the next few years he undertook heavy schedules of speaking engagements in order to recover from his 1950 losses.

More Personal Losses

The loss which hit Alexander with the most impact was not the bitter taste of defeat nor the burdensome debt incurred during the race. Nor was the tremendous strain on his characteristically robust health the greatest price paid by the vigorous, athletic Alexander.[2] The heaviest strain of all was upon the candidate's marriage relationship.

While Alexander's problems at home did not begin during the Senate race, the stress of the long campaign greatly aggravated an already tense relationship. Alexander had evidently alienated his wife by various neglects and offenses over the years. His unusually frequent absences had long been a source of irritation and, on occasion, he would commit a gigantic blunder which was unforgettable if

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Alexander's state-wide speaking schedule (1200 during the entire campaign, 361 of them in a twenty-nine day period) made even Alexander admit to being exhausted at bedtime. After a night's rest, he would put in another gruelling day at his usual breakneck pace. He was, however, more nervous and irritable than was usual for him.

not unforgiveable. Such an offense was his failure to write his wife once during the entire three months he was away as war correspondent. During this time, Charlsie Alexander had to rely on news releases and the stories Bill sent to the Daily Oklahoman to tell her if she was a wife or a widow. Bill admitted he was without excuse for such serious neglect.

Under the strain of the campaign, Bill's irascibility, usually rarely revealed, became chronic. Even so, Bill managed to control his irritable attitude in nearly all social situations not involving his wife. Now, his patience and tolerance with others formed a contrast with his brusque and demanding attitude toward Charlsie. Long-standing mutual differences between the two personalities became accentuated as the two grew farther apart. Even their deep love for their two sons and their two-year-old daughter, Ann (adopted when she was new-born), no longer drew them close. Charlsie, who had hoped to make the marriage last until the children were grown, began to wonder if she and Bill could endure the situation that long.[1]

Republican Party Chaplain

Once the campaign was over, Bill returned to his dual careers as First Christian's pastor and lecturer-at-large with increased vigor. In spite of Alexander's absence during much of the year, First Christian Church was, for the eighth straight year, among the first three in the denomination in terms of membership additions. One of the chief reasons for the sustained interest and growth was the choice of Don

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[1]Interview with Ralph Alexander, March 25, 1968.

Sheridan as associate pastor in 1948. Sheridan, once a Christian Church minister in a small Oklahoma town, was working as a reporter for the Daily Oklahoman when Bill persuaded him to re-enter the ministry as his associate at First Christian.[1] Neither of the two men ever regretted the arrangement; the general membership concurred that Sheridan, a quiet, methodical man of patient sagacity was the perfect complement to Alexander.[2] The two pastors dreamed and planned of the new church they hoped to build together--the Church of Tommorrow.

Free of his political commitments, Alexander again accepted a full schedule of outside speeches, partly to pay off his debts from the campaign period but mostly because he enjoyed the challenge and fulfillment of the lecture circuit. Some of the audience responses were extraordinary. One audience of two thousand rose to give Bill a standing ovation ten minutes in length.[3] From a high school where he was assembly speaker, Bill received a telegram of appreciation from the entire student body--with more than eighteen hundred names on the telegram.[4] An attorney at an annual convention of the Michigan State Bar Association remembered a strange reaction on the part of a colleague.

> . . . Dr. Alexander was a luncheon speaker--and what a magnificent job he did--I recall a comment made by one of our lawyers immediately following the speech. A man of the Catholic faith and Irish descent was so moved that he rose to his feet and applauded, crying out, "I am of a different faith but there is the man for me!"[5]

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[1]Interview with Fred Miller, April 29, 1970 at Norman, Oklahoma.

[2]Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City, January 28, 1970.

[3]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 162.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Letter of Milton E. Bachman, East Lansing, Michigan, February 26, 1971.

Alexander's ubiquitous presence, sensational delivery and memorable message brought him to the attention of various speakers' bureaus and other sponsors besides the General Motors Corporation under whose auspices he had been appearing several times a month all across America. Alexander rejected offers from other sponsors, preferring to operate independently, with the exception of his long standing association with General Motors. Then early in 1952 Alexander was approached by officials of the Republican Party who told the popular speaker that his services as a national spokesman could materially help the party bring about a change of administration through the November presidential and congressional elections. Alexander met with the Republican National Committee at San Francisco, was named official Chaplain of the Republican party, then announced to the press that he would take a year's leave of absence from his church in order to serve as a good-will ambassador for the party.[1] The announcement came as a surprise to the officials of his church, who noted in the newspaper that "His sermon Sunday will be his last until he returns. He and his family will move to Washington D.C. next week."[2] As Alexander anticipated, the general board of the church granted the year's leave of absence. Soon after, the Alexanders moved to Arlington, Virginia, a suburb of Washington D.C. During 1952 Alexander would speak for the party in every state in the union, averaging more than a speech per day for the entire year.[3] The heaviest demands of Alexander's speechmaking followed the Republican National Convention

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[1] Tulsa Daily World, January 20, 1952.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 189.

(which Bill addressed) in July. Alexander then campaigned intensively for Republican candidate Dwight Eisenhower, once making 74 speeches in 47 days in 28 states[1] for the General; the two became close friends. On December 1, 1952 after celebrating a resounding Republican victory at the polls in November, Alexander resumed his pastorate at Oklahoma City's First Christian Church.

The Marital Situation

The political victory shared by Alexander during 1952 was greatly offset by the personal defeat he suffered in the dissolution of his marriage that same year. Shortly after the Oklahoma newspapers carried notices of his rousing speech to the Republican National Convention, headlines announced the divorce proceedings initiated by Mrs. Alexander. Speaking of Alexander's wife of seventeen years, one newspaper account said:

> She told Judge Morris that Mr. Alexander's dominating personality virtually reduced her station to that of a servant. She said this precluded a happy union of the family.
>
> Mrs. Alexander was given custody of their three children, Ralph 14; Don, 13; and Ann, 4, during the nine-month school term. They will live with their father during the summer vacation period.[2]

The Daily Oklahoman's treatment seemed less kind: under the caption, "Reverend Alexander Sued for Divorce," the story ran:

> Charging that she had been 'unrelentingly dominated,' Mrs. Alexander stated that during her marriage her personality was entirely subjugated, and the normal considerations a husband has for the expressions and opinions of a wife was [sic] absent.
>
> . . . it was charged that Alexander had told his wife and others that he had no love for her.[3]

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[1] Daily Oklahoman, October 9, 1952.

[2] Oklahoma City Times, July 25, 1952.

[3] The Daily Oklahoman, Oklahoma City, June 21, 1952.

A close friend of the Alexanders (who requested anonymity) suggested Alexander's 1952 leave of absence was closely linked to the marital difficulties the couple was experiencing. According to this source, Mrs. Alexander agreed to the move in order to give Bill time to break the news of the approaching divorce to his mother in St. Louis and to remove themselves from Oklahoma City during the awkward divorce publicity. When Alexander, after many urgings, neglected to tell his mother, Charlsie moved back to Oklahoma City and sued for divorce. On July 25th the court granted Mrs. Alexander a divorce, giving her custody of the three children, Ralph, 14, Don, 13, and Ann, 4, during the nine-month school term; she also was awarded child support and a sizeable property settlement. In August Mrs. Alexander and the children moved to Denver, Colorado.[1]

In mid-September rumors circulated in Oklahoma City that Mrs. Alexander had remarried shortly after her move to Colorado. The Daily Oklahoman, January 3, 1953, reported her confirmation of her marriage to former Oklahoma City attorney F. Marshall Hulett. Alexander's former wife declined to say when the marriage took place.[2] Hulett had been a deacon at First Christian Church; he had also worked very closely with Bill Alexander during the 1950 campaign, Bill calling him "my right arm."[3] Hulett and his wife, Marylouise, had been among the closest friends of the pastor and his wife during the late 1940's and 1950-51. Hulett and his wife also obtained a divorce during the summer of 1952,

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[1] Daily Oklahoman, January 3, 1950.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Daily Oklahoman, November 9, 1950.

Hulett moving to Colorado. Marylouise and their daughter Jan, 2, moved to live with Mrs. Hulett's father, Elwood Rowsey, at Diamond Caverns, Kentucky. Rowsey and Bill Alexander were already acquainted; both lectured for the General Motors Speakers Bureau.

Church officials and others interviewed suggested the Alexander's divorce was looked upon with keen regret by the members of First Christian Church. However, there was no crisis or widespread dissent among the membership. The criticism which was voiced was directed, according to one source, at the former Mrs. Alexander; although she was held in high esteem by the membership, since she had filed for the divorce, what stigma there was fell upon her.[1]

Alexander returned to First Christian Church at the close of 1952 and threw himself into his work with renewed vision and commitment. Alexander gave priority to the fulfillment of the Edgemere Dream: The Church of Tomorrow. After much deliberation and consultation with some of the nation's leading church architects, Conner and Pojezney, a local firm was selected; incidentally, Conner and Pojezney were members of the congregation. The architects' plans incorporated concepts Alexander had expressed in his preaching; these ideas were reflected in the ultimate design of the most unusual sanctuaries in Christendom. On December 27, 1953, the church held ground-breaking ceremonies for the three buildings: sanctuary, educational building, and music and fine-arts center. Brochures were printed, new fund-raising activities were launched, and Bill's speaking agenda was more crowded than ever as he set out to bring his dream into reality, unashamedly proclaiming the Church of Tomorrow as a

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[1]Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City, January 28, 1970.

project worthy of the attention of donors of every faith.

Since his return in December, 1952, Alexander's concentration on church-building and lecturing had not prevented the spreading of rumors about his romantic interests in various ladies in the church and the community. Many of the members of the congregation made it plain that they felt a pastor should be a married man; they would not be disappointed if Bill remarried. Some of the unattached women in the church and out of the church were personally interested in Bill's choice, should he re-marry.[1]

The church as a whole was surprised, however, by their pastor's announcement from the pulpit Sunday morning, November 28, 1954. Bill said he had thought seriously about getting married, but wanted to be sure the match would be with "a woman with whom I could spend the rest of my life." He then announced the name of his wife-to-be as "Marylouise Rowsey of Diamond Springs, Kentucky . . . she is a wonderful girl."[2] The announcement was met by spontaneous applause. Alexander went on to say he first met Marylouise through her father, Dr. Elwood Rowsey, a Presbyterian minister who introduced Bill to a Masonic banquet in Omaha, where Dr. Rowsey served as pastor. Dr. Rowsey had since retired to Diamond Caverns, Kentucky where he had developed a vacation resort. Alexander said he became seriously interested in Marylouise during the previous summer when he and his sons had made a vacation trip to the Caverns.[3] The wedding was planned for December 19 at Colonial Lodge,

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Mary Goddard, "Will Take New Wife," Oklahoma City Times, November 30, 1954.

[3] Ibid.

the resort headquarters owned by Dr. Rowsey, who would perform the ceremony. Bill's sons, Ralph 16 and Don 15, his daughter Ann 6, and his mother, Mrs. Clara Alexander, were to fly to Kentucky with Bill following his morning sermon on December 19.

Alexander said nothing in his pulpit announcement about his bride-to-be's former identity as Mrs. F. Marshall Hulett, the man who was now married to Alexander's former wife, Charlsie. Probably he felt it would be in poor taste. It seems unlikely that he expected his congregation to link Marylouise Rowsey of Diamond Springs, Kentucky to the former Mrs. F. Marshall Hulett of Oklahoma City. Evidently he decided to leave it to the news media to reveal such details.

Two days later, local papers carrying the story stressed what the controversial pastor had omitted, some with captions such as "Bride is Former Wife of His Ex-Wife's Current Mate."[1] Less subtle was the headline of The Philadelphia Bulletin of December 1, 1954, declaring "Pastor and Divorcee Plan 'Swap Wedding.'" Newsweek's report of the congregation's attitude about their pastor's marriage accords with the remembrance of church secretary Vera Stovell and others interviewed.

> A few tongues may have wagged in Oklahoma City last week, but for the most part parishioners of the First Christian Church seemed pretty pleased. The Reverend William H. (Bill) Alexander, one of the most colorful and widely known ministers in the U.S., was getting married to the divorced wife of the man who married his divorced wife. Members of other sects have attacked Mr. Alexander for his offbeat approach to religion, but the only thing that might startle his Disciples of Christ would be a conventional act on his part.[2]

The article went on to say that the members of the congregation "were

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[1] Ibid.

[2] "Happy Pastor," Newsweek, XLIV (December 13, 1954), 55.

looking forward to a rousing wedding on December 19. . . . "[1]

It is difficult to imagine anyone who could create such loyalty in a large group of disciples as Bill Alexander developed in his membership at Oklahoma City. Tulsa's Eastside Christian Pastor Paul McBride, close friend of Alexander for twenty years, remarked about the extraordinary charm of his colleague.

> When Bill entered politics, I said to myself, 'That's the end of Bill at First Christian.' But I was mistaken. Then, when Bill went to Washington and became Chaplain of the Republican Party, I thought, 'Bill Alexander's through at First Christian.' But he wasn't. When he and Charlsie were divorced, I figured he would leave the church for sure. And when he married again, I told myself, 'Well, there went Bill Alexander.' I was wrong on every count. Bill's strength with people just can't be estimated.[2]

Anyone familiar with the deep bonds between Oklahoma City's First Christian Church and its pastor would concur with McBride's conclusion.

The Church of Tomorrow

Two weeks after Alexander's marriage, the formal contract for the construction of the new buildings was placed with the engineering contractors. Throughout the church excitement increased as members drove by to watch the construction of their spacious and unique new properties. As the sanctuary's dome was built--eight stories tall--members of the church and the community were impressed and some were surprised of the size of the undertaking. The architects' design reflected the theme of a sermon Alexander had preached called "Ceilings Unlimited." The 110' high dome represented the sky; in this spacious setting the member could

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Telephone interview, June 12, 1970, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

reflect that he was his own priest with nothing between himself and God.[1] On other occasions Bill had maintained that when people came to hear Jesus preach, they didn't sit in rows in front of Him, rather they gathered around Him. The new sanctuary therefore was in a huge semi-circular pattern with Bill's pulpit area jutting into the center of the disciples' twenty-two hundred theatre seats.

The four-storied educational building provided facilities for 2,600 people including large nurseries, 50 classrooms, a 500 capacity dining room and a $50,000 kitchen to service Bible classes, choirs, Boy Scouts and Great Books discussion groups. The music and fine arts building, called "The Jewel Box," would host theatrical productions including choral music, drama, musical comedy, beauty pageants, ballet, and opera productions.

Shortly before the new buildings were ready for occupancy, evangelist Billy Graham, in Oklahoma City for a crusade, spent the evening with Bill and Marylouise. After dinner the Alexander's took Graham to Edgemere. After being shown the various features of the futuristic church property, the personable revivalist (for whom Bill and Marylouise felt immediate affection) remarked, "If I ever build a church, I'm going to come back here and steal every one of your ideas."[2]

On December 23, 1956, the First Christian Church held its first service in their new sanctuary. Special services were held each day of the week, totalling twelve dedicatory events by the week's close. The church's expanded program provided for use of the facilities on a

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[1]Interview with Vera Stovell, August 13, 1970.

[2]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 193.

seven-day-a-week basis, in keeping with Alexander's idea that the church should be the hub of everyday community activity.

Although the sense of fulfillment shared by pastor and membership was satisfying, Alexander's dream was only partially fulfilled: the youth center he had so long dreamed about was still no more than a dream. The church had strained itself to the ultimate to buy the property and erect the sanctuary, educational building, music and fine arts building and bell tower. Until some of the debt was removed and funds set aside for a new project, the youth center would have to wait. The present structures were located on the west side of the creek; twenty-seven acres on the other side awaited the development of a youth program which had long occupied Alexander's dreams. Meanwhile the pool and ping-pong tables, shuffleboard, juke box and coke machines were installed on the top floor of the educational building to meet the young people's need of recreation until their own facilities materialized.

Resignation and Renewal

With the expanded facilities, First Christian Church widened its outreach, attracting new people to its church through such innovations as a "solo" Bible class, comprised of people who were no longer married because of death or divorce. Special programs featuring nationally known figures such as Congressman Walter Judd and Coach Bud Wilkinson drew large audiences. Dramatic and musical presentations soon became regular and popular additions to the city's entertainment fare.

Alexander did not curtail his heavy schedule of lectures; his weekly contacts with thousands of people throughout the nation brought in sizeable contributions to help the work of the Church of Tomorrow.

With Associate Minister Don Sheridan and Minister of Education William Herod taking care of day to day pastoral needs, Alexander felt free to continue his "national ministry." He was, therefore, taken by surprise when, at a meeting of the elders in January, 1958, he was asked to resign as pastor of First Christian Church. Only a few days before, Alexander had been elated to hear that his congregation's 350 additions had led the denomination for the previous year--the first in their new quarters.

The eighteen-member board of elders had various complaints against their pastor: Bill had just increased the budget by adding a minister of evangelism; Bill was not content to pay off the already tremendous church debt but was eager to undertake the additional burden of a visionary youth center; to some Bill's involvement in politics a few years before had revealed a divided interest unbecoming to a man called to the ministry; one elder suggested that Bill's divorce and remarriage had given the church a bad name. These issues, however, were subordinate to the overriding reason behind the elders' request that he resign: Alexander was away from the church entirely too much. A church with so many members and such an active program demanded a full time pastor, the elders insisted. Consolingly, they suggested Bill remain on the staff as "minister-at-large," while he continued his demanding lecture program.

Alexander, deeply hurt by the elders' loss of confidence in his leadership, offered no defense. The elders assured him their feelings reflected the wishes of the congregation and suggested the only course open to him was a quiet acceptance of the decision of the church. Bill agreed and promised to announce his resignation the following Sunday.

The Monday, February 3, 1958, edition of the Daily Oklahoman

carried the headline, "Alexander Resigns from Church Post"; reporter Loy Ferguson described the sad occasion.

> Reverend W. H. 'Bill' Alexander told a shocked congregation Sunday morning that the board of elders has agreed to his request that he be relieved from his pastoral and administrative duties at First Christian Church.
>
> The popular pastor is being retained as minister at large and will aid in promotion of the planned youth recreational and religious center on a 23-acre tract adjacent to the new church plant at NW 36 and Walker. The announcement came as a surprise to the Sunday morning congregation. The resolution passed by the church's board of elders Saturday, was read by Frank Buttram, city oilman and board chairman.
>
> Audience Stunned.
>
> 'People, I would be less than honest if I didn't say that a little bit of me dies this morning. Yet at the same time I believe that this is right--I believe it is the only way to solve the problem under all circumstances.' Alexander said following the announcement.
>
> 'If you love me, if you want to show your loyalty to me, you will work harder for this church, the dearest thing to my heart, than ever before,' the minister continued.
>
> Members of the audience seemed stunned when they first heard the announcement. Later, there was a buzz of conversation and several in the audience were quietly crying.
>
> Sanctuary Year Old.
>
> As worshippers left the sanctuary at the end of the services, Alexander greeted them. Tears were streaming down many of the women's faces and church members were obviously shocked and upset at the news.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Alexander explained that widespread speaking engagements, along with his pastoral duties, in recent years have kept him under terrible stress and strain. He said that although he turned down the great majority of speaking engagements, he was still often out of town.
>
> 'This is a church of four thousand members and it needs a seven day pastor,' he commented. Alexander said the current schedule has been 'a killing proposition.'[1]

Following the service, Bill and Marylouise, accompanied by Ralph and Don, took a chartered plane to St. Louis; Bill wanted his mother to receive the news from him personally. The following day, after consoling his saddened mother, the four returned to Oklahoma City. On his return, Alexander was surprised to read newspaper reports speculating that he

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[1]Loy Ferguson, Daily Oklahoman.

resigned the pastorate to become a Republican candidate for governor.[1] Bill told reporters and other inquirers that his resignation was in no way connected with any possible political activity.

Alexander was more surprised and concerned about another development which had transpired during his absence: a movement in the church to rescind his resignation. It now appeared that the desire for a change in the present arrangement was less the desire of the church at large than the desire of influential men on the board of elders. Alexander was kept busy much of Tuesday talking to people who telephoned him to let him know that they were opposed to the elders' move. Bill expressed his gratitude, then tried to persuade the callers to accept the decision, fearing such dissension would split the church.[2] In spite of his advice, a large body of First Christian Church members had agreed to re-hire Bill as their pastor, with the single stipulation that he preach Sunday mornings. Such an arrangement would leave him free to pursue his lecture career without future interference. As the time approached for the next official board meeting (to be held Wednesday, February 12), the movement to keep Bill as pastor was becoming formidable.

The General Board of First Christian Church was comprised of the eighteen elders, some eighty deacons and several deaconesses. At the February 12 meeting, several of the elders explained their reasons for asking Bill to resign as pastor, asserting the action was necessary for the good of the church. However, each reason for his dismissal given by an elder was countered by a reason for his retention advanced by a

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[1] Daily Oklahoman, February 4, 1958.

[2] Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 212.

deacon, moreover, the cumulative value of the deacons' arguments appeared to make the elders' defense weak by comparison.

Alexander remained silent during the entire proceeding. After hearing from all who wished to speak, the chairman of the General Board, Frank Buttram, called for a vote. The decision to accept or to reject Alexander's resignation was the prerogative of this body. When Buttram asked for all who were in favor of accepting Bill's resignation to signify by saying "aye," a dozen or so voices responded. When Buttram requested those who were not in favor of accepting the resignation say "no," he was met by a loud chorus of "no's," shortly followed by a great cheer. Alexander and Marylouise found themselves surrounded by people congratulating and encouraging them.[1]

The next Sunday morning, general board chairman Frank Buttram told the church that it was the decision of the general board to retain Alexander on the same basis as before. Buttram said, "Even the disciples did not always agree. We can, under Bill's leadership, make this God's Church of Tomorrow."[2] Alexander then said he saw great prospects for the church remarking that, although the year had hardly begun, the membership had already pledged $364,000 of their $385,000 budget. As for any political ambitions of his which might woo him from the ministry, Alexander said, "People, I would rather be minister of First Christian Church than be President of the United States."[3]

The elders' attempt to remove Bill as pastor was the toughest and final test of the strength and permanence of his leadership. The

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[1]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 218. [2]Ibid., p. 219.

[3]Notes of Ralph Alexander, p. 167.

general membership evidently held Alexander in such high esteem that his frequent absences, the changes in his domestic situation, his preoccupation with card playing, sports, and other forms of recreation were not sources of serious dissatisfaction. Three of the elders (those most opposed to Alexander's remaining in the pastorate) did resign, however, withdrawing their membership from the church. Others on the board of elders went to Alexander tendering their resignations; Bill refused to discuss such a possibility. They found in Alexander a marvellous capacity to forgive even those who had hurt him the deepest. The magnanimous spirit Alexander manifested in times of defeat and in times of victory was an unforgettable characteristic of the personality which held sway over the members of Oklahoma City's First Christian Church for seventeen and a half years. So powerful was this man's personality that no power but the power of death could break the ties of love and loyalty between the church and her pastor, William Hamilton Alexander.

PART II

CHAPTER IV

ALEXANDER'S PURPOSE AS A SPEAKER

"We shall preach to no purpose unless we have purpose in preaching," said R. W. Dale, eminent participant in the Yale Lectures on Preaching.[1] The purpose of a speaker has a solidly established place in rhetorical criticism as well as in homiletics. One of the five elements in Kenneth Burke's system of criticism is the speaker's purpose.[2] Marie Hochmuth Nichols includes the rhetoricians's purpose in her "six-celled organism" approach to the criticism of rhetoric.[3]

What was Alexander's purpose in his pastoral, occasional, and political speaking? Some of his critics have suggested his purpose was to make a name for himself, to build up a national reputation which would satisfy his massive ego while furnishing the income demanded by his extravagant life-style. The preacher-showman's admirers say rather that the energetic preacher selflessly spent his time and energies--and

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[1] Nine Lectures on Preaching (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), p. 24. Quoted in Batsell Barrett Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 239.

[2] A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950), p. 67. Quoted in Marie Hochmuth Nichols, Rhetoric and Criticism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), p. 83.

[3] "The Criticism of Rhetoric," in A History and Criticism of American Public Address, III (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), p. 12.

ultimately his life--serving the needs of others who benefited from experiencing his message. A study of his life and message indicates that both views are substantially correct, antithetical though they may seem. One of his closest friends (who prefers not to be identified here) remarked:

> When I was in college, I used to debate. Switch-side debating, we called it. Take one side and defend it. Then take the opposite view and advocate that. Bill Alexander was that kind of subject. I could take the negative and make a real case against Bill: his being intoxicated by applause, his self-indulgence, his excesses--and I'd be convincing, too. Or I could undertake his defense and tell you how he honestly loved everybody, how he would do anything for you no matter how you hurt him, how he never held a grudge against anybody, how he made everyone feel he was really somebody. That was Bill Alexander.[1]

Alexander, like most of us, was a contradictory as well as a controversial personality; therefore, his purposes at times appeared to others to be at cross purposes.

Perhaps the setting-forth of his purpose as speaker would be facilitated if we attempted a distinction between purpose and motive. Purpose may be thought of as the speaker's observable, conscious and establishable objective; motive as an inner, subconscious force which is difficult if not impossible for an observer to evaluate with accuracy. It is not within the scope of this analysis to attempt an assessment of the preacher's motives; it is, however, important to examine the available evidence and establish the spokesman's purpose as expressed in his speeches.

The Oklahoma preacher's purpose can be seen as a consistent thread binding all three genres of his oratory together. His aim was to

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[1]Personal Interview, 1970.

persuade his listeners that: (1) each individual should recognize his own immense capacity for good, and (2) through faith in God he can actualize an extraordinary degree of that potential, thereby (3) achieving great personal happiness while making this world a better place to live. This purpose was in constant evidence whether he was speaking to his own congregation on Sunday morning, to a group of tough-minded businessmen at a management convention, to officer candidates at Annapolis, or to a political rally in Little Dixie on the Fourth of July.

This purpose could be seen in the sermon he preached on January 8, 1956 as the enthusiastic minister was trying to stir his church into giving and pledging more support for the splendid new sanctuary, "The Church of Tomorrow," which they would occupy before the year was out. The preacher did not scold or intimidate; rather, he followed his characteristic theme as he told them:

> I have learned one thing from the Master. And that is that He always looked at people in terms of their possibilities. Jesus looked at all people this way. He might see a woman of Samaria who had committed most of the sins in the book, but when He looked at her there at the well, He looked at her in terms of what she could become. He looked at Peter and Peter said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." And Jesus looked at him in terms of what he could become and said, "Follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men."
> . . . . . .
> Jesus believed that the true nature of anything was what it could become.[1]

Alexander continued this theme throughout the sermon, encouraging his hearers to see themselves in terms of a new dimension. Closing the sermon, he said:

> I think maybe if I had to pick the verse that is the greatest verse in the New Testament, I might pick this . . . "To them who received Him, gave He the power to become." Shall we pray?

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[1]Manuscript of sermon.

> Our Father, we do want to become that which Thou wouldst have us be. Help us to realize that there is no such thing as a true belief in God that means anything unless it is accompanied by a reverence for man such as Jesus had. Help us to understand that we don't even have the right to bring our gifts here to Thy House if we have ought against our brother. . . . Help us to see what I have tried so inadequately to say this morning. And may this be a personal experience that we search for, of God in our lives, in everyday living, so that we will receive Him, and He will give us, then, the power to become. Amen.

The people brought their gifts; the new plant was built. Mortgages were paid off early. Alexander's entire ministry demonstrates the success of his approach in lifting people's estimates of their ability to achieve their goals through an increased faith. A poem the minister wrote illustrates this most popular theme of his, "The Power to Become."

> To such as received Him, gave He the power to become.
> To such gave He the power to become.
> This is a conceited statement coming from any less
> And yet He did just that, this Lord Whose Name we bless.
> He came so that we might someday attain to be children of God,
> In His own Name.
>
> Where shall we go from here, you and I who He died to restore?
> He is our Refuge, our Strength, our Guide forevermore.
> His it is to command the stars, His alone!
> His it is to determine ways, His it is to command you and me.
> The greatest of wisdom is to bend the knee, and confess that
> He alone can change and make our lives His praises sing.
>
> Sing of the One Whose Life is the sum
> Sing! He gave you the power to become![1]

The thrust of Alexander's life was to help people see themselves, not so much in terms of what they were, but in the light of what they could become through faith in God. This was his message to all of his audiences, varied as they were. While he did not, of course, lead prayer when he was guest speaker at an after-dinner occasion, he did not stray

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[1] Included in sermon preached to First Christian Church, Oklahoma City on February 5, 1956.

from his main purpose. His humor was more rollicking and more profuse, his language only somewhat less formal, his demeanor a little more relaxed and playful, but his chief aim was ever constant: to lift people's eyes to see their heritage as children of God. Invited to motivate a large group of salesmen at a southern conference, Alexander, after loosening up his audience with several jokes and anecdotes, said:

> I close by asking you, What do you believe? What is your philosophy of life, call it what you will? Do you agree with Theodore Dreiser? He says that man is just a parapatetic chemical laboratory driven about by a sex impulse. He says we're just spiders from the basement of the universe, spinning webs that will soon be brushed down and entirely forgotten. That's great, isn't it? Something to live by. I was one of three thousand men who heard him say that. We tittered as he spoke but when we walked out of there we hitched up our trousers and we threw back our shoulders and we lived, not by what Theodore Dreiser said we were, but by what a person named Jesus Christ said we were, potential sons of God, and it is not yet made manifest what they shall be. I believe that. The supreme thing that we need is an inspiration that will give us the power to make the most of the best that's in us, and I know of no one else in the history of man who continually believed in people at their best as did that lowly Galileean.[1]

The Oklahoma City preacher had the same message for the powerful National Association of Manufacturers when he addressed their 55th Annual Congress of American Industry at New York City. Alexander spoke of a new America, one of prosperity, freedom, honor, and justice. He concluded his inspirational message by saying:

> Some of you say, "You're dreaming. We can't build that kind of a world. My answer to that is this:
> Dreams, are they? But they are God's dreams,
> That men shall cease their hating
> And that war shall soon be abating;
> That the glory of kings and lords shall pale,
> That the love of humanity shall prevail.
>
> Dreams, are they? But they are God's dreams,
> That men shall love one another,

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[1]"Four Secrets of Success," p. 16.

That white shall call black man "brother";
That greed shall pass from the marketplace,
That man shall meet his God face to face.

Dreams, are they all--but shall we despise them,
God's dreams?

This is my last sentence: there is enough power within this room to save America, a free America, and to build a free world. Yes, we must be tough. We have to be. But I say to you that we can be as tough as we want to and if we do not have an undergirding of moral stability, all will be lost. I am not discouraged. I believe in the future. I believe in the future because I believe in men like you, the men who have made America great. The men who will combine themselves in the various churches and other organizations dedicated to lifting the spiritual level; because of men like you, the kind who will help to make God's dreams come true.[1]

Alexander's use of the dream metaphor was a favorite with him; he used it to stir his listeners' imagination with a vision of a finer self and of a better world. To the Chicago Executives' Club, the largest luncheon club in America, the minister spoke again through the medium of poetry about the frustrated dreams of man and of God. He closed his address by saying:

> You are a great club. There is enough power here to turn America upside down. You are not worms of the dust. You are potential sons of God. You know your primary job is to begin with yourselves and to help God make man come right.[2]

The message was the same whether the red-haired preacher spoke to an exclusive businessmen's club or to a broad scattering of the rural and urban voters in Oklahoma. When the unorthodox clergyman announced his candidacy for the United States Senate, some who knew him probably thought his changing into a political figure would divert him from his main theme of transforming man and the world through faith in God. Those

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[1] "Our Moral Needs," delivered December 6, 1950 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

[2] Executives' Club News, May, 1950, p. 5.

listening to his statewide radio address delivered at Stroud on May 1, 1950, would know his message was basically unchanged.

> I do not think I am worthy of wearing the mantle of the great religious statesmen who built this country on the foundation of trust in God and the personal freedom of every man who lives under the torch of liberty; but with God's help, I can honestly and conscientiously speak with your voice in the place where the decisions that shape the destiny of our world will be made. In that place I could stand against corruption; there I could cry out against the stifling of civil liberties, and more important, there I could help translate the lofty ideals of the brotherhood of man into the mind-shaking reality of a peaceful world. There I could stand for an unyielding allegiance to the infinite worth of every human personality. For these are the basic principles of the Christ to whom I dedicated my life fifteen years ago. I do not apologize for being a Christian minister and I am convinced that the religious precepts which I have taught for fifteen years are realistic, not idealistic; that they can be demonstrated, not merely declared; that they can be possessed, not merely professed; that today they alone will solve the momentous problems facing our great country in government, economics and international affairs. For too long, Christians have held back timidly while Communists shouted proudly, "We are Communists and we are changing the world." We who bear His name must be willing to say proudly anywhere and everywhere, yes, even on the floor of the United States Senate, "I am a Christian, and with God's help we can make this a Christian world."[1]

As the campaign intensified, Alexander remained constant to this theme of a better world through the life of faith. On July 3 at Oklahoma City, the preacher-candidate warmed to his theme, declaring:

> If we walk in the faith of our fathers, if we trust in God and Heaven securely, believing that God is and that He is the rewarder of them who seek Him; if we have faith in our democratic institutions and are willing to sacrifice for them; if we have faith in the necessity and dignity of toil, then this nation will endure and no enemy without can imperil us.[2]

Alexander then concluded the campaign speech by a stirring paraphrase of the eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews, rhythmically extolling the faith of the Pilgrim fathers, of George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt,

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[1]Manuscript of radio address, p. 8.

[2]Manuscript of radio address, p. 11.

Abraham Lincoln, and Woodrow Wilson, to enjoin upon his listeners the importance of having men of great faith serving as leaders in government.

The Oklahoma City preacher did not join the ranks of the venerated political leaders; he was defeated at the polls by the Democratic candidate, Mike Monroney. But in his campaign speaking as in his preaching and lecturing, he was constant in his purpose. He had tried through political oratory, a new medium of persuasion for him, to move people to a life of faith in God so that they would find, as he had found, personal fulfillment while working to make this world a safer and happier place to live.

CHAPTER V

HABITS OF PREPARATION

During his first years of preaching, Alexander spent many hours each week deciding upon sermon themes, developing discourse, polishing his style, and re-working his appeals. Saturday nights he could be found in the living room of the parsonage, dictating his thoughts to his wife Charlsie. Sometimes he would spend the night on his feet, pacing back and forth, spasmodically saying, "Take this down," as sermon ideas rushed into his consciousness.[1] Years later Charlsie Alexander would remark, "His sermons during those early years were so good. The best sermons he ever preached were the ones he struggled for--they were really great."[2]

In subsequent years, with the increased pressure of speaking engagements, Alexander began using short-cuts in the composition of his sermons. Several times he left a book of published sermons with the church secretary, having marked a selection for her to type. On a few occasions his return flight was so close to the time for the church service he would simply take the typed manuscript from the secretary's hand as he entered the sanctuary, scan it during the hymns and other

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[1] Interview with Ralph and Don Alexander, August 13, 1970, at Oklahoma City.

[2] Ibid.

preliminaries, rush up into the pulpit when it was time for the message, place the manuscript on the lectern and never glance at it again as he delivered the sermon.

It would be inaccurate to say that Alexander simply appropriated another minister's sermon and preached it as his own. Often the sermon he preached bore little resemblance to the sermon he had finished reading moments before launching into his discourse. The main idea might be identical, some of the instances might be carried over, but the message as a whole was, with very few exceptions, peculiarly Alexander's, rather than Fosdick's or Weatherhead's or others whose works he read.[1]

If Alexander felt any qualms about this plagiaristic or near-plagiaristic practice, it was never apparent to his closest associates. It is unlikely that the general membership would have cared one way or the other had they knownof their pastor's practice. Whatever Alexander said had his distinctive stamp upon it--his apparent affection for others, his lively wit, his fondness for anecdote, his coloring through vocal techniques--rendering the identity of anyone else inconsequential.

Sometimes, he would simply step into the pulpit with no clear idea of a text or theme, letting the general mood established by the preceding music, readings, and prayers lead him into a message appropriate to the circumstances. His secretary suggested still another of Alexander's approaches to sermon preparation:

> Bill didn't have any set method of preparing to preach. Most of his sermons were not written out. He just didn't have time. During the week, while he was flying around making speeches, an idea might catch his interest. He would think it over between speaking appointments, fly back home Sunday morning dead tired, lie down for an hour or two,

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[1]Interview with Vera Stovell, January 27, 1970.

> bounce into the pulpit with energy and enthusiasm and deliver a wonderful sermon without any special preparation--it would be the best sermon you ever heard.[1]

Miss Stovell went on to say, "Bill had a memory like a blotter. He would get just the least exposure to a quotation, a poem--almost anything and found it so easy to recall whenever he wanted to."[2] Such a gifted or cultivated memory was invaluable to a man with an agenda of five to seventeen speeches a week added to his sermons and other pastoral duties.

There is, however, a strong likelihood that Alexander would have radically modified his early practice of dictating, then writing and revising his sermons, even had he not assumed the load of a lecture career. Possibly with maturity in the ministry he would have developed such shortcuts as helater employed. Ralph W. Sockman, well-known preaching contemporary, told about a veteran minister's advice on preparing sermons. The minister told Sockman:

> Young man, when you've preached for twenty-five years you'll get a better sermon on Sunday morning after breakfast than you do now in four days. I used to write and rewrite my sermon three or four times . . . but now I get my text on Saturday night, mull it over in my sub-conscious mind during my sleep, go into my den or study at seven o'clock, have breakfast there, and go into the pulpit--and I preach a better sermon now than I used to in four days.[3]

Sockman, however, did not follow the elder's advice; he continued to devote the last three days of the week to preparing his sermon.[4] The old minister's advice would have been more to Alexander's preferences;

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

[3] Fred J. Barton, "Ralph Washington Sockman: Twentieth Century Circuit Rider," in American Public Address, Studies in Honor of Albert Craig Baird, ed. by Loren Reid (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1961), pp. 80-81.

[4] Ibid., p. 81.

actually it was quite similar to the Oklahoma City preacher's practice in preparation.

Moreover, Alexander enjoyed composing his sermons on his feet. The solitude of the study had no appeal to the gregarious showman; he preferred being thrown into contact with humanity. It was there that he felt he belonged and there he functioned best. In this he resembled an earlier master of the platform, Henry Ward Beecher. As a matter of fact, Alexander closely approximated Beecher in so many areas: habits of preparation, views of theology, choice of language, motivational appeals, and style of delivery, that one might think he had been the modern heir of the spirit of this pulpit artist of the previous century.

When preaching students asked about his method of sermon preparation, Beecher replied:

> I am afraid that I should ruin man. My whole life is a general preparation. Everything I read, everything I think, all the time--whether it is secular, philosophic, metaphysic, scientific--it all goes into the atmosphere with me, and then when the time comes for me to do anything--I do not know why it should be so, except that I am of that temperament--it crystallizes, and very suddenly too, and so much of it as I am going to use for that distinct time comes right up before my mind in full form, and I sketch it down and rely upon my facility, through long experience, to give utterance and full development to it after I come before an audience. There is nothing in this world that is such a stimulus to me as an audience; it wakes up the power of thinking and wakes up the power of imagination in me, and I should say it would be a great blessing if you were just so; but it is not worth your while to try it until after you have practiced alone a little while.[1]

It is possible that Alexander emulated Beecher in this practice of preparing and delivering messages in the presence of his audience. Perhaps Beecher's method was discussed in some of Alexander's course work in homiletics; it is also possible that he discovered this means through

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[1]Lionel Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1937), p. 34.

his independent reading. It seems more likely, though, that Alexander's quick mind, his ad lib experience in showbusiness, and his response to challenges combined to direct him into this style of preaching.

One of Alexander's close friends, Darrell Royal, whom Alexander coached in public speaking, saw the Oklahoma City speech figure as one of a kind: an actor who never needed a script. Royal recalled:

> I know, in trying to help me with my public speaking, he would make some suggestions which really did not fit my personality, but I could see how it was perfect for him.
>
> An audience really turned Bill on. I think he sincerely liked to go to a microphone before a noisy audience that was not paying too much attention to what was going on at the speaker's stand. This was the type of challenge he cherished. He had tremendous confidence in his speaking ability, and he knew that if he could get to the "mike," he soon would have the audience in his hand. He could do it, too.[1]

Composing while in the presence of his audience precluded the development of a clearly discernible message structure, but Alexander appears to have gained in speaker-audience interaction what he lost in clarity of sermon plan. The Oklahoma City preacher, uncommitted to a specific outline and unencumbered by written material, was alert to his hearers' concerns, moods, and attitudes, and he adapted his material and delivery to meet their needs of the moment.

In the mid-1950's, William R. Corvin heard Alexander speak at an Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce luncheon. Dr. Corvin (at the time minister of Muse Memorial Church) was a candidate for the Ph.D. degree in speech at the University of Oklahoma, and, therefore, better qualified than most to assess a speaker's effectiveness. When asked what communication traits Alexander employed to greatest advantage, Corvin replied:

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[1]Letter of July 25, 1970, from Austin, Texas.

> Well, his personality, of course, his ability to speak, the humor he used throughout his speech--but especially his ability to analyze the interests and needs of an audience and relate his interests to theirs.

Corvin went on to say that the Christian Church minister seemed, during the course of the speech, to decide what fit the moment, employing continuous adaptation throughout the speech.[1]

In this continuous identification with his audience, Alexander resembled the practice of a persuader of courtroom fame, Clarence Darrow. James H. Jackson, in his study of the lawyer's handling of his own defense said, "He knew how to verbalize the thoughts and feelings of his audience."[2] This skill which was so instrumental in the attorney's forensic successes in the pulpit was also very important to Alexander's effectiveness in the pulpit and on the platform. Although their fields of persuasion were significantly different, both men appeared to have the same approach to message preparation. Martin Maloney said of Darrow's practice of preparation:

> Perhaps the main observation to make is that Darrow seems to have spoken "by ear"; his technical skill in speech was largely habitual, almost instinctive. . . . His direct preparation was almost nonexistent. . . .[3]

James H. Jackson's description coincides with Maloney's while extending the similarity of Darrow and Alexander.

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[1]Interview with Dr. W. R. Corvin, President, Southwestern College, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, January 28, 1970.

[2]"Clarence Darrow's Plea in Defense of Himself," Western Speeches, XX (Fall, 1956), 193.

[3]"Clarence Darrow," in A History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed. by Marie Hochmuth, III (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), p. 309.

> According to the preface to his Plea, he did not use any particular method of preparation for this speech. He spoke from the overflow of his own spirit. This plea was not the product of a studied lawyer, but rather the expression of a man who had lived for a cause and believed in that cause. . . .[1]

Often Alexander appears to have spoken "from the overflow of his own spirit," generating the impression that his sermonic appeals were not the result of labors in the pastor's study, but "rather the expression of a man who had lived for a cause and believed in that cause."

Bishop Gerald Kennedy, an advocate of painstakingly thorough preparation for the pulpit (he customarily outlined his sermon on Wednesday morning, developing and polishing the work through Thursday, Friday and Saturday mornings) observed, "The more gifted a man is, the more tempted he is to neglect his preparation."[2] This view, shared by most professors of homiletics, was more comprehensively laid down by Paul Scherer, renowned participant in the Yale Lectures on Preaching.

> Heaven help the man of us who discovers that he is a ready speaker and presumes to rely on it! The years will undo him and let him down. His undisciplined mind will little by little fall back on "sound and fury," signifying nothing. The sermons he keeps shaking out of his sleeve will soon begin to bring the lining with them, as a dear friend of mine once phrased it (and he was himself no little given to such legerdemain!) "It makes no difference how readily preaching comes to you, how quick your wit, how facile your flow of language; you may be 'the spiritual speak-easy of America.'" I beg you never allow yourself to be betrayed into indolence by any such thing.[3]

Many feel this was precisely the situation with Bill Alexander. Dubert

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[1]James H. Jackson, "Clarence Darrow's Plea in Defense of Himself," Western Speech, XX (Fall, 1956), 191.

[2]"While I'm on My Feet," in The Rhetoric of Our Times, ed. by J. Jeffery Auer (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 339.

[3]For We Have This Treasure (New York: Harper & Brothers, Inc., 1944), p. 143. Quoted in Batsell Barrett Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 58.

Dennis, longtime friend and ministerial colleague, observed:

> He was the most effective speaker I've ever heard. He could sense the feeling of his audience. If he followed other long-winded speakers, he would relax the crowd by some physical action for them, with some music, and always some excellent stories that put everyone in a receptive mood. Herein was his greatest strength. Never did he bore or tire an audience. He could present his thought most forcefully. To me the great tragedy of his life was when he became so extremely popular as a speaker that he was in action all the time and neglected further study and reading. He had some basic points which he used as subject matter and would present those ideas in proper form to an audience--whether it be bankers or grade school children! He always made the talk fit, but he began to neglect further study and development of his own mind.[1]

One of the members of Alexander's congregation commented on the preacher's sometimes haphazard preparation in this way:

> His sermons were not always brilliant. He often joked that there were times when he'd been so busy during the week that we'd have to listen to last week's sermon again. And it's true that he did resort to cliches and tired aphorisms. He came into the pulpit on many a Sunday morning, directly from the airport, with nothing but a few notes scrawled on the back of an envelope. But, trite as the subject sometimes was, he did have a knack for twisting it around and showing it in a new light so that when he was finished you'd think, "Hmmmm. I never thought of it that way before." He must have read a great deal. Probably in airports and on planes. But he did not talk about what he'd read directly. He didn't quote anything but scripture or poetry. He did get ideas from what he'd read, though, and he incorporated them into his sermons.[2]

Others interviewed were basically in agreement about the preacher's evident neglect of the pursuit of knowledge through study of Bible commentaries, systematic theologies, religious journals, and other sources of preaching ideas.

As has been shown, the limited time Alexander spent in his study brought him criticism. But the criticism by some, important as it is to an understanding of how his preparation affected his speech career,

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[1] Letter of May 23, 1970.

[2] Mrs. Robert Axworthy, Letter of May 30, 1970.

leaves unexplained his great popularity among the many--both at Oklahoma City's First Christian Church and throughout the United States. Evidently his neglect of the study of books was counterbalanced by strengths which sustained his broad ministry. These strengths appear to have stemmed from another area of study in which the preacher excelled: the study of man. Beecher suggested the importance of this knowledge in his address to preaching students at Yale.

> I do not mean to disparage studying from books: all of it is good and necessary, and the more of it you can get the better; but it is not all that is necessary. You must besides know men and their ways. The parish is very different from the seminary, and you must suit yourself to it. Our blessed Saviour said to His disciples: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," and these words belong to you as to them. You are to be fishers of men, and therefore you must know all about men.[1]

This was Alexander's emphasis also. While he spent less and less time in his study, he did not cease to study. He studied men rather than books, because he preferred to work with men. His gregarious nature did not stifle his quick mind's powers of analysis; he simply focused his attention on people rather than pages. Alexander's ministerial style was well suited to Matthew Simpson's assessment of the preacher's needs for preparation.

> The families in which he visits, the social companies he attends, the men he encounters in business, and the children on the streets, furnish him matter for thought. He is God's messenger to benefit everyone of them. Hence he studies their habits of life, the progress in knowledge, their aptitudes, besetments, and controlling influences. He searches for a key that shall open the wards of their hearts, for knowledge which shall instruct them, and for consolation which shall alleviate their sorrow. His business is more with men than with books.[2]

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[1]Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art, p. 92.

[2]Matthew Simpson, Lectures of Preaching (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1879), p. 82. Quoted in Batsell Barrett Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 250.

While Alexander would heartily have endorsed such a view, probably Simpson (and other homiletic scholars) would have considered the Oklahoma City pastor's practice seriously out-of-balance, so heavily did it favor the study of man.

Especially would the Christian Church preacher have concurred with this view of a preaching contemporary. Batsell Barrett Baxter, author of The Heart of the Yale Lectures, says:

> To know men deeply the minister must live among them, observing every phase of human behavior. Only by living close to men can he learn the innermost workings of their minds, and only then does he know how to take aim with the message of God. Of the criticism leveled at the ministry, none is more serious than that which charges that the ministry is too exclusively concerned with books![1]

Alexander knew men widely and deeply. He thrived on contact with humanity; men admired the big rugged extrovert who could so easily sense their anxieties and aspirations while simultaneously composing and delivering a message which resolved their tensions and awakened their idealism.

Alexander did not schedule sufficient time to refresh and cultivate his considerable personal resources through isolated, concentrated study. Had he done so he would have retained more respect from some of the more discriminating in his audiences. Instead, he chose to spend more time reaching more people with his gospel of the happy Christian. His lack of study was considerably offset by his astute and continuous study of men. The way Alexander could relate in a personal way to the individuals who made up his many large audiences was extraordinary. As one of his fellow preachers said:

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[1]Baxter, Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 251.

> Bill could come into the pulpit and say, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star"; and, after services, a lady would likely shake his hand and say, "Reverend Alexander, that was the very breath of life!" He knew how to make people believe he was talking to each of them personally.[1]

This was the kind of study at which Alexander had spent his life; he proved to be a masterful student of man and, like a good physician, he examined their symptoms of distress, diagnosed their needs, then prescribed and administered the remedy with unusual spontaniety and a surprising number of successes.

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[1]Interview with J. Clyde Wheeler, March 31, 1970, Oklahoma City.

CHAPTER VI

PERSONAL ELEMENTS IN ALEXANDER'S PERSUASION

The importance of the personal element in persuasion has been stressed by rhetoricians of every age. Phillips Brooks' assessment is perhaps the most widely quoted maxim on the use of personality in preaching.

> Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching. The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth.[1]

The Boston pulpit prince said further:

> Truth through personality is our description of real preaching. The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his lips, not merely into his understanding and out through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come genuinely through him. I think that, granting equal intelligence and study, here is the great difference which we feel between two preachers of the Word.[2]

Other authorities on the art of preaching have reinforced Brooks' high estimate of the importance of the preacher's personality. David H. Greer, another participant in the famous Yale lectures on preaching, said: "The distinctive power of the pulpit is its personality. Not primarily what it says, though that, of course, is important, but who

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[1] Lectures on Preaching (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1898), p. 5.

[2] Ibid., p. 8.

says it; otherwise a phonograph or a telephone would do."[1]

A study of the speaking effectiveness of William H. Alexander confirms the importance of personality in persuasion. As the biographical section indicated, much of Alexander's power in persuasion was derived from his appealing personality. This portion of the study deals with the influence of Alexander's public image as a happy preacher, his use of ethos-building techniques, and negative elements which diminished the speaker's persuasive credibility.

The influence upon Alexander's ministry of Harry Emerson Fosdick's published sermons has already been mentioned; Fosdick's and Alexander's views on theological issues corresponded in many points of doctrine. Another correspondence is discovered in the area of personal proof. Roy McCall, in his study of Fosdick's effectiveness, reported:

> His personal magnetism can not be over rated. Whether his radiance was of the spirit, or a happy combination of physical features, good health, and unbounded energy--or both--can not be declared. Only those who have met him face to face know that friendliness which encompasses all those near him; only those who have heard him speak know the experience of being arrested and held by an intangible power.[2]

The precise language used above to describe Fosdick's "personal magnetism" could be applied with equal accuracy to William H. Alexander.

Perhaps the personal quality most frequently mentioned by all who knew Alexander was the preacher's generally happy attitude; this was probably his chief ethos-builder. Vera Stovell, his secretary for the

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[1] The Preacher and His Place (New York: Edwin S. Gorham, 1904), p. 79, as quoted in Batsell Barrett Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 22.

[2] "Harry Emerson Fosdick: A Study in Sources of Effectiveness," in American Public Address, ed. by Loren Reid, p. 69.

last five years of his ministry, said:

> Bill always spoke about--and personified--"a radiant personality." He used to say that Jesus was a radiant personality and when you saw Bill, you knew what he meant. You felt he had something that you wanted. He really was "the happy preacher." That was his reputation.[1]

Oswald Jacoby, famous authority on bridge playing, concurred. Jacoby became a close friend of the preacher through their mutual interest in the game; they saw each other many times during their fifteen year friendship. Jacoby recalled:

> There was never anyone like him. . . . He was a very religious man although not a saintly one. He always said that Christ was the most radiant of people and that his philosophy was love everyone and be happy. We are Catholics but I think Bill's concept of God was very, very close to that of the best Catholic liberal theologians and far from that of the hidebound conservatives, just as he was far from the hidebound Protestant ministers.[2]

Representatives of the various media highlighted this aspect of Alexander's personal appeal. Look carried a five-page feature story about Alexander's ministry, entitled, "The Happy Preacher in the Heart of the Bible Belt."[3] A Denton, Texas, newspaper reporter heard him speak to an assembly at the Texas State College for Women and reported in an article, "Happy Preacher Believes in Abundance on Earth":

> Whether he's tap dancing or humming "That Old Gang of Mine" in a soft mellow Mel Torme-ish way, the thirty-three year old minister is consistently living up to his radiant philosophy of Christianity--one of a kingdom on earth as well as in heaven.
>
> For twelve years "The Happy Preacher," had been an enemy of the "pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die" or "hell, fire and brimstone type of religion." He says, "Jesus said, "Thy Kingdom come on earth" and I believe He meant today, tomorrow, and the day after that."[4]

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[1] Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City, February 13, 1970.

[2] Letter of June 6, 1970.

[3] Gillenson, "The Happy Preacher," p. 49.

[4] Laverne Harrell, Denton Journal, October 19-27, 1948.

When Newsweek published an article about Alexander in its issue of December 13, 1954, the title used was "The Happy Pastor," further reinforcing the image of the optimist which was Alexander's hallmark.

The Oklahoma City minister consistently kept the theme of the happy life in Christ in both his sermons and his occasional speeches. He told his congregation:

> . . . Jesus had a lot to say about bad religion.
> . . . He said one time to His followers and to the people who were listening to him, many of whom were His enemies, "If the light that is within you be darkness, how great is that darkness?"
> If religion that is supposed to be the light of your life is darkness, then how great is that darkness? He was talking to people who were very religious people and who never missed church on the Sabbath day. They were always in the synagogue. He was talking to people who were very meticulous about keeping their religious laws and yet he knew that it lacked something and he said if the light that is within you be darkness, how great is that darkness? And then through several verses of scripture he goes on to point out, and it is true today, that Christianity and religion actually can be a depressing thing and in many lives it is. It is a depressing thing instead of an invigorating thing.
> Christianity that was supposed to make people live happy, radiant lives sometimes makes them depressed. They have a guilt complex. They are so worried about what they should not do that they can't live wholesome lives. Jesus came in contact with that very thing and some of the strict religionists of His day didn't like the idea of the disciples being so happy and they said to them and to Jesus, "Why are you so free-hearted and gay?" Jesus answered by saying, "Can the sons of the bride chamber mourn when the bridegroom is with them?" I love the way he could answer them. How could they be sorrowful when the bridegroom was with them?
> . . . The truth of the matter is, the happiest person in the world should be the person who possesses the Christianity of a happy Christ.[1]

Throughout his career, Alexander suffered many reversals and was the subject of heavy personal attacks--most of them unfair; yet through these severe trials, he sustained a characteristically happy view of man and

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[1]Typed manuscript of sermon delivered at First Christian Church, Oklahoma City, Undated: content indicates Spring, 1951, as time of delivery.

of life. This personal characteristic marked his ministry and strengthened his appeal as a persuader.

A speaker's personal prestige plays its part in conditioning his hearers; a well-known figure will command more attention than an unknown one. Alexander's personal prestige increased as he became more widely known as "The Happy Preacher," who was an innovative leader in the ministry as well as an overpowering speaker on the lecture circuit. His travels across the country increased his contacts with important people in nearly every field. On week might find him sharing the platform with Vice-President Elect Richard Nixon, the next at a banquet with Albert Einstein and Robert Hutchins, or on another occasion on a program with President Dwight Eisenhower. Alexander was not reticent about using these associations to build his ethos.

Some preachers meticulously abstain from intrinsic or compositional ethos-building, evidencing a purposeful self-effacement. For example, Orville Hitchcock's study of the Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards notes Edwards' attitude toward intrinsic personal proofs or references within a speech which impress the audience with the speaker's personal importance.

> The term ethical proof is used broadly to cover all attempts of the speaker to establish himself as man of good character and intellectual honesty, to set himself up as an authority on the subject of discussion, to secure the goodwill of the audience.
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> But there is a more obvious type of ethical proof, consisting of direct statements by the speaker in support of his own authority, character, and good will. Practically no ethical proof of this sort appears in Edwards' sermons. Personal references are seldom used.[1]

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[1]"Jonathan Edwards," in A History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed. by William Norwood Brigance (New York: Russell & Russell), p. 213.

Alexander's approach offered a clear contrast to the Puritan's practice. One member of his Oklahoma City congregation commented:

> He was a shameless name-dropper. He'd say, "I was in Washington last week and Dick Nixon said to me . . . " or, " . . . when I was speaking at Annapolis commencement last month. . . . " He hobnobbed with movie stars, captains of industry, and national political figures and he was never bashful about mentioning it, and there's no doubt about the fact that it did spice up his talks.[1]

These personal references which added to his prestige were common to Alexander's efforts at persuasion in all three of the genres of oratory in which he participated. Through out his speeches one finds such phrases as "I had the privilege of introducing Sir Alexander Fleming when he visited Oklahoma City last month"; "by the way, you don't know much about . . . what's happened to me up here the last few months unless you've been reading Time or Life, or something"; "I spent six weeks in London a year ago last summer"; "I went up to Boston last week and I spoke to the American Business Teachers Association"; "This is my fourteenth speech this week, and the doctor says that I have to take it easy, but I'm not going to do it"; "During the latter part of World War II, I was a war correspondent overseas, in Italy. . . . The German 88 shells were starting to get our range, so we went for a ditch."

Another channel Alexander used to enhance his personal prestige was the use of resumes provided to those who introduced him to his lecture audiences. For example when Frank Bettger, well-known sales motivator, introduced Alexander, he probably drew heavily on such a resume.

> Now--I saved one of the best speakers on this program for the windup. I heard him the first time at the FBI Convention in Chicago the forepart of October. When I saw that he was going to speak again

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[1]Letter of Mrs. Robert T. Axworthy, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, May 30, 1970.

> before the national sales executive group at Columbus, Ohio, Dell Bowlzer and I went down there because I wanted to hear him again. The two talks that I heard this gentleman make really inspired me and I figure that while this is a hard hitting team, they too needed some inspiration. This fellow that I am about to present to you is a little fellow. He is a former war correspondent. He served in that capacity in the European Theatre and he has had a variety of experiences. He was a former light heavy-weight boxing champion from Missouri. He is one of the most sought after speakers in America today. He turns people away from his church in Oklahoma City every Sunday and has one of the largest youth programs in the United States. He holds degrees from the University of Tulsa, the University of Chicago and Miami University. He was a Republican candidate for the United States Senate last year in Oklahoma and . . . received more Republican votes than were ever accorded to anyone in Oklahoma since statehood.
>
> Without further ado, I am tickled to death to be able to present to you Reverend, Doctor W. H. (and he likes to be called Bill) Alexander.[1]

Dr. Alexander capitalized upon such praise filled introductions by immediately depreciating his own importance in his response to the master-of-ceremonies' recitation. Here is one instance from a variety of his acknowledgements:

> Thank you, boys, very much and I appreciate that very kind introduction. I am frank to say that it makes me feel like that old mother cow when her little bull calf was running around frisking and playing and it ran closer and closer to the edge of a two thousand foot cliff--ran back and forth and up and around it and finally it ran over it and down it went to the rocks below--and the old mother cow continued standing there contentedly licking her big red lips with her big red tongue and said, "My, a little bull goes a long way."[2]

Through the use of such self-deflating recognition, the speaker received the maximum value in ethos-building by not appearing stuffy about his own importance.

Alexander's coupling of remarks of self-depreciation with references which tended to build his credibility as a communicator was most

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[1]Delivered at Convention of the New Idea Corporation at Van Orman Hotel, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on December 5, 1951.

[2]"Four Secrets to Success," p. 1.

likely calculated to keep listeners from concluding the speaker was egocentric. In almost every instance when a reference was made to an experience which would serve to build his prestige as an achiever, Alexander linked some corresponding observation which was humbling enough to banish any impression that he was feeding his own vanity. For example, when he mentioned his having won the Missouri light-heavyweight boxing championship, he simultaneously shared an anecdote about crashing an Italian wedding where he picked a fight with a fellow who knocked him down seventeen times, finally taking him to a doctor who repaired Alexander's broken nose. Alexander wrapped the story up by saying, "I wasn't even in the same class with that boy. Not even in the same class."[1] When he told sales organizations about his setting a national sales record for selling Delineator magazines door to door in 1932, Alexander focused, not on his success in outstripping all other competitors, but rather of how he made only 33¢ for two weeks of the hardest and most discouraging work he had ever encountered.

Alexander's illustration underscoring the responsibility of his listeners to forestall another war was built around an experience he had during World War II. By relating the adventure Alexander impressed his hearers that he was a man of wide experience and some courage; however, his skill in the telling kept him from sounding like a braggart or a boor. The following excerpt illustrates his technique of combining prestige builders with self-effacement.

> During the latter part of World War II, I was a war correspondent overseas, in Italy. I was going toward Bologna, which is in northern Italy, across the Po River. . . . I started walking along with this

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[1]"Four Secrets to Success," p. 14.

> kid from Maine, and he was one happy boy. The German 88 shells were starting to get our range, so we went for a ditch. You know, that's what a foxhole is, just the biggest ditch you ever saw. I was scared to death, because I had not been through much of that stuff. I sat there with my hands over my head, really hugging the ground. This kid had come all the way from Anzio and he had his hands in back of his head, sort of propped up, just as cool as a cucumber, and talking a blue streak. He talked and I trembled.[1]

Nothing in Alexander's life indicates that he would have been so fearful as he implied, but his admission was certain to disarm his listeners who otherwise might have thought the speaker was boasting about his war experience while making his point.

Alexander may have been justified in his conscious application of ethos-building techniques, however much he departed from the practices of other preachers, past and present. His credibility as a communicator had to be achieved and sustained in the face of virulent opposition to his expressed views and style of living. Few, if any preachers of national reputation, have ever sustained their credibility against so many and various onslaughts as William H. Alexander endured. Sometimes, as in the case of his draft status, Alexander appears to have been quite innocent of inducing such attacks; other times his behavior seems to have invited the virulent criticism he received. Sometimes he blithely ignored the injustices which were dealt him; more frequently he capitalized upon them, using his critics to enhance his ethos all the more.

Alexander seemed to attract criticism. Many people easily identified with the engaging and energetic preacher with the ready, wide grin. Alexander could hardly alienate these people no matter what he said or

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[1] "Our Moral Needs," p. 10. Delivered at the 55th Annual Congress of American Industry, sponsored by the National Association of Manufacturers, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City, Wednesday, December 6, 1950.

did. However, the combination of the audacious redhead's spirit of innovation with his artless, outspoken approach to controversial issues aroused a sizeable opposition among those whose values ran counter to those of the iconoclastic clergyman. Henryetta editor, J. Leland Gourley, remarked about the criticism which Alexander seemed to draw:

> I had to be in Oklahoma City over the past weekend and while I was there I had the privilege and honor and inspiration of attending church and again hearing Bill Alexander.
>
> As you all know, Bill Alexander has a lot of critics. Many of them are Oklahoma Citians in other churches; many are members of the Christian church out in the state (sad to say, Henryetta included); and the most prolific and damaging group: jealous ministers.
>
> Many are the accusations hurled at him: insincere, shallow, showman, headline hunter, doesn't stick to the gospel, sticks his nose in things where preachers have no business, allows dancing and pool playing in the church youth center.
>
> One thing about preacher Alexander's sincerity, which is attacked more often than ahything else: nearly all the preachers in Oklahoma City and a lot of other people have been digging like hell the past few years trying to "dig up something" on him. So far, they have not been able to uncover a single black mark on his character. I wonder how many of his accusers could stand an intensive background investigation.[1]

After rebuking Alexander's many critics for their unfairness, the editor then reflected that the criticism did not seem to diminish the ranks of the many who saw the controversial preacher through different lenses.

> Another thing, people will proclaim and laud success in every other field. Why do they criticise Bill Alexander for having a full house every Sunday? I had to sit on a folding chair last Sunday and lean my head against the back wall of the sanctuary.
>
> Next Sunday, he will be preaching in Oklahoma City's municipal auditorium. They will turn away 5,000 people because they cannot accomodate them.[2]

While Alexander was expert at adapting to the constellation of values held by most of his listeners, he was not willing to simply mirror

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[1]Newspaper Clipping, "From Me to You," c. 1948.

[2]Ibid.

values which he felt were erroneous and unjust. The Oklahoma City preacher frequently took the unpopular side of an issue, fully aware that the position taken would cost him a great deal of public support. His outspoken views on prohibition of liquor in traditionally dry Oklahoma, his broad and almost doctrine-free approach to theology in a heavily fundamentalist region, his attacks on racial inequity in a Jim Crow state, all testify to this refusal to compromise his convictions on what he saw as key issues. For example, when the preacher opened his senate campaign with a speech at Tulsa he chose to introduce an issue which was virtually certain to cost him votes. The story as carried by the Norman Transcript follows:

> "Alexander Flays Socialistic Trend, Asks Equal Rights for Negroes in Campaign Opener"
>
> Rev. William H. Alexander made his debut as a political speaker today with a blast at "the trend toward socialism" and a plug for equal rights for Negroes. The red-haired U.S. Senate candidate drew applause from a big audience at the Tulsa County Democratic Convention when he broke the rules of politics and said: "I'm sick and tired of being told they vote in blocks here and you have to buy the blocks."
>
> But his views on equal rights for Negroes was greeted by only a scattering of applause.
>
> "If we don't give the Negro equal rights here in Oklahoma, equal educational and medical opportunities and put him on an equal level, we are going to pay for it in the next ten years--you mark my words," he said.
>
> When the faint applause greeted these words, he shot back. "I don't care whether you like it or not. We are going to have to stop classing people beneath us because of the difference in the pigment of the skin."[1]

It is likely that his outspoken championing of the Negro's cause hindered his bid for votes from the White majority; nevertheless, Alexander continued to speak out against racial inequities.

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[1]Norman Transcript, January 23, 1950.

Negative Elements in Alexander's Ethos

Like most men who display qualities of greatness, Alexander allowed some strengths to run to excess, turning these sources of power into weaknesses. The great energy he generated and the aggressive drive forward to his goals seemed to have diminished his ethical appeal among some who loved the man dearly.

Alexander's Compulsive Travelling, Conflicting Interests, and Competitive Spirit

Several of his closest friends suggested Alexander's hurried pace, which he seemed to enjoy, created disadvantages offsetting his expanded influence secured through far-flung appearances. At his first pastorate at Stroud, the young preacher set his pace. The Christian Church there had all but shut down when Alexander came on July 4, 1935. By the time he left, the church membership was at about four hundred, people packed the building and even stood outside to listen to the service through the windows. Moreover, at Stroud he launched a radio program which, by standards of artistic production and listeners' response, was eminently successful. Nevertheless, several members of the assembly were disillusioned with their young preacher. The chief reason seemed to be his absenteeism. The elders and the membership were out of sympathy with their energetic preacher's habit of "going off rat-killing," i.e., leaving Stroud to preach or speak elsewhere.[1] One Sunday morning Alexander preached at the East Side Christian Church in Tulsa, leaving no one to take his place in the pulpit at Stroud. Consequently, there were no services that morning in Alexander's home church. This caused

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[1]Interview with Claude Smith, August 11, 1970 at Stroud, Oklahoma.

sufficient dissatisfaction that, when Alexander left the church to take over the pastorate at Bristow, many of the Stroud church members felt relief. As Claude Smith, longtime elder of Stroud's Christian Church said, "Bill built up the church considerably; it was nothing when he came, compared to what it was when he left . . . but we had a terrible time keeping him here. He was always off rat-killing somewhere."[1]

In discussing the negative elements of the subject's ethos, probably the one trait which was most troublesome to Alexander's career was this evident compulsion to be on the move. This characteristic was so pronounced and so resented by certain influential members of the congregation that, in 1958, it was the chief reason for his near removal as minister of Oklahoma City's First Christian Church.

The candid opinion expressed by one of the dissenting church leaders (who, during the closing years of Alexander's ministry, placed his membership elsewhere) delineates the main focal points of the critics who loved and worked with the energetic young preacher.

> Bill's brilliant mind was the cause of his decreasing value as a minister and pastor. Everything came too easily to him. He ceased (in my opinion) to grow. He gradually almost quit visiting his people in illness and distress; because there were other things which took up his time. Speeches mainly, but also his inordinate love of playing bridge. His effectiveness decreased, as the pastor of First Christian, in proportion to the lessening time he gave to that job.
>
> After coming to Oklahoma City he soon attained a great and wide influence not only in the city, but over the state and the nation. Like a tree, he flourished and became tall and strong. But the temptation to become a national political figure, to earn more money, to devote too much time to play--all of these things contributed, as I have indicated, to disillusionment on the part of many of his friends and admirers.
>
> He could have become truly great had he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the Christian ministry. He had everything that a Billy

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[1] Ibid.

> Graham has, and more. For this reason, his life represented something of a tragedy to me.
>
> He was indeed a fine friend--generous, completely unselfish--possessed of enormous energy--but he grew not more deep, but more shallow with the passing years.
>
> I hope that this is not too rough a picture of Bill Alexander.[1]

This respondent, whom I shall leave anonymous, to the question, "What did you like most about Bill?" replied, "His buoyant spirit, his very evident enjoyment of life, his wide range of interests."[2] When asked what he liked least about him, he said, "His mental laziness; he quit reading and quit studying."[3]

Others in the congregation, all of whom proclaimed their deep regard for the late pastor, commented about Alexander's neglect of methodical, contemplative study. A few said they had heard him repeat tired, old sermon outlines which were meagerly refurbished with different examples; they thought the minister was spreading himself too thin among his many activities. Moreover, all of Alexander's preaching colleagues interviewed mentioned this omission. Each felt Alexander would have improved his ministry had he rearranged his schedule and spent more time in the study and less time on the road.

While the preacher's absences on his cross-country flights disturbed many in his church, Alexander's heavy schedule of outside speaking elevated his personal appeal for many other members and friends of the church. C. R. Anthony, widely-known merchandiser, whose wife was a long-time member of First Christian Church, said:

> His outside speaking was in demand all over the U.S. He did a world of good speaking to schools, churches, large conventions in California, Chicago, New York, many of which I helped underwrite.

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[1] Letter of June 27, 1970. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

I've never seen his equal.[1]

The son of Tracy Silvester (the elder Silvester was minister of music during many of the Alexander years) said he was "proud of the national standing and notoriety attendant with (his) outside speaking."[2] Mrs. Jennie Dahlgren, who has served the church for many years, said in regard to Alexander's outside speaking, "We shared him with others to our loss. I am glad we did."[3]

The incidence of strength run to excess, a fault which seems related to all of the negative aspects of Alexander's ethos, also manifested itself in his inordinate drive to win a contest. The concern of one of the preacher's closest friends about the excessive love of card-playing and its detrimental effect upon Alexander's ministry has already been recorded. Other testimony may help to complete the picture of this side of Alexander's personality. Paul McBride felt this pronounced possession of this competitive spirit was quite important to an understanding of Alexander, both as a key to his drive toward achievement and as a clear idiosyncrasy.

> He was a fierce competitor. He was the pitcher and I was the catcher of a faculty ball team that played the students, leading high school athletes from all over the area, when we were in Conference. The losers were to be dunked in the swimming pool. Bill's desire to win and get to dunk the kids was as fierce as any I have ever seen. We won most of the time.
>
> He was an outstanding checker player. He met his match in Reverend Frank Pippin. I was referee in a final Championship match of Chinese checkers. After they had played to many stale-mates, the game lasted more than two hours as each move was weighed very, very carefully. I was to interpret the rules which were emphasized. "The first player who, in regular turn moves, gets all ten marbles to the opposing side of the board, wins."

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[1]Questionnaire postmarked May 20, 1970.

[2]Questionnaire, Tracy M. Silvester, postmarked May 27, 1970.

[3]Letter of June 6, 1970.

> The game was going at a precise clip and nearing completion when Bill Alexander jumped to his feet and declared that he had been cheated. He had only nine men on the board. His opponent claimed no knowledge of the missing marble and permitted us to search his person, his house, etc. The marble could not be found. By the rules Bill could not win although it was apparent that he had the jump on Pippin. After Bill's death I asked Pippin what went with the marble and his reply was, "I wasn't going to let that 'redhead' beat me and I swallowed it." He had waited to divulge this information to Bill at a later date, but the time never came.[1]

James Alvin Griffin, First Christian's sexton for many years, saw Alexander's drive to win of negative value. In an insightful letter, Griffin spoke generously of the late minister's benevolent interest in others' personal welfare, concluding with:

> Dr. Alexander played pool with me many times--he loved a challenge and would want to play until he won. I remember one particular time when I came back from service in Korea in 1953 when he also returned from a leave of absence from the church . . . we met again after being apart for two years, he challenged me to a game of pool in the presence of some of his very close friends. Being self conscious because I was the only Negro there, and wanting to show that what he had taught me I learned well, I did my best to win what he called "his game." After he broke the ball, he did not get another shot in that game, nor the next six games that we played. This embarrassed him and he challenged me to another game a few days later; this time he won fifteen games and insisted that I relate this fact to a group of two hundred and fifty people at a Wednesday night meeting.
>
> . . . He hated to lose whatever he decided to have or do. He had too strong a will to win.[2]

Alexander's weaknesses, like his strengths, were not commonplace. Their rare combination made him unforgettable. James Sowell, long time friend of the firebrand preacher said:

> His strength and his weakness were frequently in conflict. Yet there was a depth of mysticism about him; faith in the Divine purpose of Creation; a ceaseless longing to lift people's lives to the "High Road" leading from what they were to the High Calling of what they were capable of becoming.[3]

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[1]Letter of May 18, 1970. [2]Letter of July 28, 1970.

[3]Letter of January 21, 1971, Fort Worth, Texas.

For Sowell, and for most of those who knew Alexander well, his strengths of character decisively overshadowed his weaknesses. By all evidence, Alexander's audiences found much of the charm of his message in the unusual mixture of striking strengths and weaknesses which formed the personality of William H. Alexander.

CHAPTER VII

ALEXANDER'S USE OF SHOWMANSHIP

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines a showman as "one who exhibits or helps to exhibit a show; one who is adept at exhibiting things to advantage."[1] The American Heritage Dictionary says a showman is "a person having a flair for dramatic or visual effectiveness."[2] Bill Alexander's approach to oratory was that of a showman. While showmanship is a complex phenomenon, constituents of the showman's art include animation, the use of color, surprise or suspense, the dramatizing of events through mimicry, humor, the bizarre, and the use of the dramatic dialogue. Alexander employed all these techniques in his persuasive efforts.

Edward J. Hegarty, himself a veteran of the lecture platform, suggests as elements of showmanship: the anecdote, novelty, the stunt, dramatics, one's use of language, the demonstration, and the use of exhibits or speaking aids.[3] Hegarty asserts speakers, as listeners receive them, fall into four general categories:

> The speaker who says nothing and puts on no show.
> The speaker who says something and puts on no show.
> The speaker who says nothing and puts on a good show.
> The speaker who says something and puts on a good show.

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[1](Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1961).

[2](Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969).

[3]Showmanship in Public Speaking (New York: McGraw Hill, 1952), p. 9.

> These last two are the kinds listeners like. A speaker can say nothing, yet make a good talk if his show compensates for what he didn't say.[1]

A critic applying Hegarty's criteria to Bill Alexander's speeches would likely decide that most often the preacher said something and put on a good show, at times he said less and put on a good show--but he never failed to put on a good show.

Methodist preacher Charles Merrill Smith, in his humorous How To Be A Bishop Without Being Religious, stresses the entertainment aspect of preaching.

> Fundamentally, preaching at its best is one of the entertainment arts, and the successful pulpiteer will always think of himself first as an entertainer. His problem is much the same as Jack Benny's or Shelley Berman's or Mort Sahl's. He has to stand up and keep the customers interested in what he is saying or business will fall off at an alarming rate.[2]

Summing up "the techniques of pulpit entertainment," Smith says:

> The old pros of the pulpit know that they should always aim to do three things for and to the customers (congregation) in every sermon:
> 1. Make them laugh
> 2. Make them cry
> 3. Make them feel religious
>
> . . . This level of skill is attained by loading the sermon with funny stories.[3]

Alexander would probably share a good laugh with Smith over his tongue-in-cheek treatment of these "essentials" for pulpit success; he would agree that while he genuinely sought to bring people to a deeper commitment to God he had nonetheless used the techniques depicted in Smith's book. This section will examine Alexander's established reputation as a showbusiness figure, his techniques of showmanship, and the fusion of rhetoric and poetic in his persuasive efforts.

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[1] Ibid., p. vii. [2] (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1965), p. 9.

[3] Ibid., p. 10.

Alexander's Showman Reputation

Cleta Walker, as Executive Director of the Sales Executive Club of Tulsa, Oklahoma has heard most, if not all, of the top-seeded circuit speakers of recent times. Of Alexander's speaking abilities, she said, "Bill Alexander has more showmanship in his little finger than anyone else has in his entire body."[1] Miss Walker saw Alexander more as a temperamental stage performer than as a public speaker.

> He was the most temperamental fellow! He should have been an opera singer. When he spoke to our Sales Executive Meeting he was so late in getting to the hall that I had to frantically signal the preceding speaker, Dr. G. Herbert True, to stretch out his speech. Then when Bill arrived and saw someone else speaking, he was so disturbed about it that he muttered, "Somebody else is speaking on my time!" and he said he wouldn't speak. We finally persuaded him to go on and, of course, he was a big hit!
>
> What a closer he used that day! His little girl--she was about 5 years old then--was waiting out in the hall. Bill built his speech up to an emotional climax, then clapped his hands and stretched out his arms. The little girl--cute as she could be--ran down the aisle to her daddy who caught her up in his big arms. I tell you, there wasn't a dry eye in the house.[2]

Evidently, the Alexander of the pulpit was no less a showman than the Alexander of the lecture platform. One auditor, an airman who was stationed at Tinker Field near Oklahoma City, had this to say about his visit to First Christian:

> Bill Alexander was a breath of fresh air, and very soon came to be a sort of "folk hero" for me. I was astounded by his dramatic and theatrical presentation from the pulpit. I recall thinking on the first Sunday that his opening of the Worship Service was more akin to the introduction to a highly professional radio program. With a giant smile, clad in a white coat, he extended his arms and said, "Welcome to First Christian Church!" I reflected that he was not unlike a polished radio announcer. I had a brief background as a small-town radio announcer myself and I thought, "This guy is good!"[3]

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[1] Interview with Cleta Walker, January 15, 1970, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ben Hearn, Jr., Fort Dodge, Iowa, letter of June 4, 1970.

Alexander drew on his wealth of experience as a showman in all of his public speaking: pulpit, occasional, and political. By using his gifts of showmanship, he seized the attention of his hearers and impressed them with the import of his message, whatever his specific purpose. Dr. Grady Snuggs, who directed Alexander's liberal arts education at the University of Tulsa, in discussing his student's characteristics, remarked:

> There was also a sense of the dramatic, fascinating, and a natural reaction to enact the drama . . . I met Bill's father and he had the same "grab the center of the stage" personality Bill had, so I deem it a natural thing.[1]

Many studies, biographical and historical as well as rhetorical, have pointed up the correlation of dramatic ability and preaching effectiveness. George Whitefield was designated as a "pulpit dramatist" by C. Harold King.[2] Lionel Crocker's rhetorical biography of Henry Ward Beecher repeatedly alludes to that preacher's powers of dramatizing ideas,[3] and R. E. Davis referred to Billy Sunday as a "preacher-showman."[4]

Alexander thought showmanship had a vital place in the Christian ministry. A journalist quoted him as saying:

> The Apostle Paul was a great showman. He strode into the corrupt city of Athens and used showmanship to tell them about his God. I have never done anything which I would call sensational. We have dignity in our services. I use humor and showmanship and everything I can find. What, I ask you, deserves the very best

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[1]Letter of June 9, 1970.

[2]"George Whitefield: Dramatic Evangelist," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XIX (April, 1933), 165-175.

[3]Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art.

[4]"Billy Sunday: Preacher-Showman," Southern Speech Journal, XXXII (Winter, 1966), 87-97.

treatment more than the great truths of God?[1]

Alexander would have agreed with George Godwin, author of The Great Revivalists:

> It is the minister who is the primary actor in this greatest of drama. He has the greatest collection of drama ever written from which to choose his material--the Holy Bible. In it are letters, short stories, dramatic debates, ritualistic descriptions, prophecies, parables, personal narratives, and history.[2]

Alexander fulfilled such a role in his ministry. This love of dramatic preaching was exemplified in Alexander's delivery of his favorite sermon--one he was requested to preach over and over again--the story of Esther. Through gesture, subtle characterization, animation, appropriate timing, he dramatized the narrative, making it so vivid he seemed to recreate the mood and the action, much as the dramatic performance of a one-man show. Here Alexander may have approximated Hillbruner's observation, "It has sometimes been said that the addresses of William Pitt, the Elder, the Earl of Chatham, were happy blendings of public address and theatre."[3] The same could well be said of Alexander's characteristic oratory.

As previously noted, the similarities in the persuasive agencies of William H. Alexander and another preacher-showman, Henry Ward Beecher, are extraordinary in several ways. While no evidence has been located that Alexander was directly influenced by the rhetorical theories or practices of the great nineteenth century preacher, many identities present themselves. Beecher, of course, had a system of oratory, laid

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[1]J. Landis Fleming, North Star, Oklahoma City Newspaper, April 7, 1960.

[2](Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), p. 18.

[3]Anthony Hillbruner, Critical Dimensions, p. 163.

out and published, while Alexander's views must be inferred from his practices as revealed in speech artifacts and the observations of his auditors. Perhaps the point at which both converge most clearly is the commitment to the dramatic element in preaching. What was said of Beecher was equally true of Alexander. "In Mr. Beecher the stage suffered a great loss as the pulpit enjoyed a gain."[1] Both numbered theatrical people among their close friends.

Gerald Kennedy, Bishop of the Methodist Church, in his "While I'm On My Feet," declared, "The sermon falls flat when the preacher has no sense of the dramatic."[2] Kennedy spoke in this context of the excitement and intense feelings aroused by poetry, suggesting a link between the poetic and rhetoric. Furthermore, said Kennedy, "As a matter of fact, sincerity itself is dramatic. Timing is very important."[3] Alexander's performance in the various genre underscores such emphasis. His "sense of the dramatic" was instilled when he was a child, whetted to a keen edge in his brief career as an entertainer, and constantly polished throughout his career.

One newsman, Paul Hood, of The Daily Oklahoman, spoke of Alexander as a "fugitive from Hollywood--he turned down one film offer for $1,000 a week--the personality pastor hasn't forgotten the showman tricks."[4] Hood elaborated:

> He has put on a breakfast show for the church women a la Tom Breneman, occasionally breaks out a tap dance routine for the admiring youngsters and is not above challenging all comers in the

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[1]Lionel Crocker quoting Anna de Bremont, The Theatre, 1877, in Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art, p. 86.

[2]Gerald Kennedy, "While I'm On My Feet," p. 339.

[3]Ibid.

[4]October 1, 1950.

congregation to a wrestling match.

When cowboy film stars Roy Rogers and Dale Evans came to the Flying L ranch in Hereford Heaven to be married, Bill donned the costume of a frontier minister and flew down to perform the ceremony. He has produced and acted in a film here, too, dramatizing his career, climaxed by a start on his Edgemere Church of Tomorrow.[1]

The plan for the Hollywood film mentioned by Hood was featured by Louella Parsons' Hollywood news column.

Protestants who feel they have not had a fair break will be particularly interested to hear that the story of Oklahoma City's far-famed Reverend W. H. Alexander will be screened.

And guess, if you please, who bought it? Gale Storm, the Monogram actress, and her husband, Lee Bonnell.

If it seems odd that a movie star should buy the story of a minister for an independent production, it's probably because you haven't heard that Gale and her husband are very active in church circles in private life.

Far be it from me to say that the Reverend Alexander's story is a sort of Protestant's "Going My Way"--but it has the same wholesome appeal. Before Alexander entered the ministry he was a Golden Gloves champion. He believed that young people could be brought to religion if clean sports and social events could center around the church. His youth center now numbers 5,000 teen-agers.

The producing Bonnells would like to get Ronald Reagan to play Alexander.[2]

Alexander had an affinity for show business personalities. He numbered among his friends Rod Cameron, Joe E. Brown, Gale Storm, Lee Bonnell, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, and enjoyed trading jokes with comedian Red Skelton at a Bond Rally in World War II days at Oklahoma City.[3] On Bill's many visits to Crippled Children's Hospital in Oklahoma City he would take with him autographed pictures of Roy Rogers and his family or Roy on Trigger. In his preaching Alexander capitalized

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[1] Ibid.

[2] "Lee Bonnells to Film Story of Famed Oklahoma Minister," Los Angeles Examiner, September 24, 1947. (The film, delayed for various production reasons, was finally scrapped after the minister's marital break-up in 1952.)

[3] Interview with Vera Stovell, Oklahoma City, January 28, 1970.

on the people's love of the showbusiness celebrity. The Saturday, November 5, 1949 edition of the Daily Oklahoman carried an ad of impressive size and format. "WILL ROGERS: A Thrilling Experience Awaits You As We Pay Honor to Our Greatest Oklahoman." Carrying a picture of W. H. (Bill) Alexander and Will Rogers, Jr., the ad went on to announce that Bill would preach the sermon and Will, Jr. would be in the audience.

Alexander's Showman Techniques

To Alexander, showmanship was a useful agency for the delivery of the Christian message to an audience. Most of his auditors, when asked about Alexander's outstanding characteristics, allude to his powers as a showman, a dramatist and theatrical personality. One member of his congregation who felt showmanship was one of Alexander's strongest traits observed, "His showmanship to me was a means of presenting, getting interest and holding it to get his points across."[1] The minister of music said the same, "He was a showman, yes, but a most sincere speaker who only used showmanship to put across his ideas."[2]

It is not easy to identify in a precise way what marked Alexander as a master of pulpit drama. Hardly any one interviewed could explain what the preacher did that was so appealing. One simply said, "He was an artist. In whatever he did--a wedding, a baptism, or a sermon--he was an artist."[3] Others said the key to his effectiveness as a communicator was "his magnetic personality;" some said what set him apart was

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[1]Letter of Myron Buttram, Oklahoma City, June 7, 1970.

[2]Letter of Dubert Dennis, Oklahoma City, March 23, 1970.

[3]Interview with Dr. L. L. Clifton, Oklahoma City, April 2, 1970.

"his charisma"; still others asserted it was his sincerity.

Paul Hood, newspaper journalist covering Alexander's Senate campaign, had this to say:

> A favorite stunt of Reverend W. H. Bill Alexander is to climax a speech by climbing on a chair in the center of the platform, towering over his audience as he makes his final oratorical plea. It's his way of commanding the undivided attention of the audience. Usually dressed in a light suit, he stands out in the spotlight's glare, a strapping six feet plus and 200 pounds--it's as if he were using his superior physical powers to bring the listeners sight and hearing into focus on him.
>
> In many ways the act is typical of the red-haired preacher's career, from football field and boxing ring to the combined religious and political arena. He never blends with the back ground. By word and deed he is a cinch to attract attention--both sympathetic and unfavorable.[1]

Hood's thesis that the Oklahoma City preacher-candidate never blended with the background is indisputable. Nature's endowments had put the stamp of uniqueness upon him: his 6 feet 3½ inch height made him tall enough to be noticed in a crowd. His shock of thick red hair crowned his commanding height and, as he neared the age of forty, he began adding girth which, while it detracted from his athletic build, did make him all the more noticeable.

Showman that he was, Alexander capitalized upon his natural gifts by selecting apparel which heightened his conspicuousness. At First Christian Church the customary pulpit dress for all except the summer season was cutaway coat and wing collar. For summers, white suits were Alexander's selections, offering striking contrast to his ruddy complexion and red hair. For lecture occasions, Alexander often wore colorful dinner jackets which instantly caught the eye--such as his navy blue coat with burgundy lapels or the one which was solid maroon in rich

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[1]Daily Oklahoman, November 1, 1950.

brocade.

Alexander was nearly always late for his speaking engagements, using the showman's dramatic entrance to enhance his impressiveness from the time he arrived at a speech event. Often, it was a matter of his procrastination and last-minute-rush habits--practices which caused many a near-miss in catching a plane. Sometimes it led to tense moments for the principals involved. J. Clyde Wheeler, a fellow minister and close friend of Alexander, recalled a distressful incident which appeared to be the result of the red-head's time laggardness:

> One afternoon at about four o'clock I received a call from the secretary at First Christian Church: she said there was a wedding scheduled at four o'clock and Bill wasn't anywhere to be found--could I come over and perform the ceremony? I grabbed my robe and drove over as fast as I could.
>
> By the time I got there the organist had already played her entire repertoire more than once. Still no Bill. I got the names of the bride and groom, stalled around a little longer hoping Bill would show up. Finally, I decided I would have to leave the study, go into the sanctuary and perform the service.
>
> I had just started out the door when a big hand held me by the shoulder and a voice whispered in my ear, "What's the bride's name?" Alexander had slipped in the other door. Methodically running his comb through his hair, he said to me, "Well, I'm a little late--but I made it."[1]

Wheeler said such events were numerous and are now legendary. But invariably those most affected were not merely relieved at his appearance, but so excited they apparently forgot any dismay or disappointment.

There is much evidence that Alexander was "late" by design as well as by carelessness. F. L. Born, principal of Classen High School in Oklahoma City, recalled that on the day Alexander was slated to speak at their high school assembly, he was nowhere to be seen. The principal sent a messenger outside the building to see if he could find the guest.

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[1]Interview with J. Clyde Wheeler, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 31, 1970.

Alexander was located standing outside the school building but would not come in when bidden to by the student messenger. Born said:

> He simply stood outside, relaxed, taking a smoke and said to the boy, "Please let me know when it's time for me to speak. I'll come in then." So the other platform guests and the general audience waited in uncertainty about the arrival of the featured speaker. Then, with the preliminaries over--at the last minute, Alexander strode down the aisle, making quite a show with his big stride, cut-away coat trailing, half-running up to the platform. The audience was relieved and thrilled, and gave him quite a rousing welcome.[1]

There were other members of Alexander's audiences who thought of his late arrivals as a part of his showbusiness approach to public address. Attorney Joseph G. Werner of Madison, Wisconsin, felt that showmanship was a significant element in this speaker's appeal. Werner recalled the vivid impression Alexander made when he spoke at a Rotary District Convention banquet in April, 1959.

> Perhaps I should elaborate a little with respect to his "showmanship." When we had no word from him by late afternoon on the day of the banquet we were quite concerned that he would not arrive on time to give the address for the District Conference banquet. Shortly before the banquet we learned that he had arrived at the Madison airport and had gone to a hotel where he would rest for a time.
>
> Dr. Alexander sent us a message that we should proceed with dinner, and that he would be there in time to give his address. When we were near the end of the dinner, Dr. Alexander arrived at the Great Hall of the Memorial Union at the University of Wisconsin, where the banquet was held, in a beautiful brocaded red (or possibly maroon) dinner jacket. While today such dinner jackets are taken for granted, at that time it was considered quite spectacular (particularly for a man of the cloth).
>
> Those of us in charge of the banquet arrangements later concluded that his late entry at the banquet table in his colorful dinner jacket was all part of his plan to make an effective entrance before the group, which fell in the category of "good showmanship." I daresay that his delayed entrance did have the desired effect. . . . As I have said, my acquaintance with Dr. Alexander was a brief one but nonetheless a memorable and impressive one.[2]

Adolph Hitler, another master showman of the period (albeit a

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[1] Interview with F. L. Born, Oklahoma City, April 1, 1970.

[2] Letter of July 9, 1970.

despicable person), also exhibited a penchant for late arrivals when he was guest speaker. Fred Casmir described Hitler's purpose and the effect he obtained.

> He always came late, so that expectation had been aroused to the highest point and the feeling engendered that this man who carries all Germany on his shoulders and foregoes sleep, was really doing something wonderful in taking time to address the crowd.[1]

While Alexander did not carry the problems of a nation on his shoulders, he seemed to get similar results from his audiences and often used the technique of late arrival to good advantage.

Helen Clegg, long-time member of First Christian Church, reinforced the impression of the preacher as a theatrical figure when she wrote:

> Reverend Alexander surpassed any expectations I might have had concerning any minister. His sermons were most inspiring and challenging. He had such deep conviction and expressed it so logically and dramatically. One simply could not listen to him and remain indifferent. He was a superb showman and could command complete attention. Somehow he made us feel loved and needed and much better persons than we know ourselves to be. Consequently, we tried to live up to that. He used to say, "Be loyal to the royal that is within you."
>
> I believe he liked being called a Salesman. His answer was, "Why not? I'm selling the greatest product in the world."[2]

Mrs. Clegg alluded further to Alexander's theatrical flair in discussing his leadership in community affairs.

> Bill Alexander was a dynamic leader. First Christian Church made progress due to his leadership, not only in the church but in the community. Through programs he initiated the church became an important factor in community affairs. He was President of the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra. He was Campaign Chairman for two United Fund drives. He was largely responsible for the organization of the Oklahoma Association for Mental Health and its inclusion in the

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[1]"Hitler and His Audience," Central States Journal, XV (May, 1964), 133.

[2]Letter of June 23, 1970, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

United Fund. I was Assistant Director of the United Fund when he was Campaign Chairman. His salesmanship and showmanship were great assets. He seemed to bring a magic touch to any fund raising endeavors. These activities took a great deal of time and effort from a grueling schedule but he gave them so graciously. His willingness to serve influenced others. People liked to work with him. His youth and delightful sense of humor made even tough assignments easier to do. He liked to Indian wrestle and usually challenged someone at the early breakfast meetings during the United Fund drives. When it was time to paint the campaign thermometer down on the street, he climbed up and painted the Over The Top. It was usually painted by one of the firemen.[1]

Alexander as Poet and Orator

About the relationship of oratory and poetic, A. Craig Baird said:

> Donald Bryant, in his review of ancient Greek literature, concluded that the chief business of the poet is creation and the chief business of the orator is persuasion. This position did not deceive the ancient, who knew that the orator and the poet depend upon imaginative power in about the same way and use it for similar ends.[2]

Alexander was both poet and orator. As a youth, he began committing to memory the poetry of others; as he matured he wrote his own verse, sometimes for his own amusement, often to convey an idea he could express better in poetry than in prose.

August Staub, in discussing the "similarities between rhetoric and poetry, particularly poetic as drama," observed:

> The rhetor . . . is also a poet, not in the sense of one who turns a pretty phrase, but in the sense of a maker-of-plots. Herein may lie the answer to the most persistent question of all: why do people make and why do people listen to speeches? Is it really to communicate or be communicated to? Or, granting the importance of communication, is it not something deeper and more mysterious--the joy, on the one hand, of being a living playwright, and--on the other, of being actual dramatic agents, trapped for a short time within the order of a plot, forced, for the moment, to purify life of all but a single, intense judgment?[3]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Rhetoric: A Philosophical Inquiry, p. 185.

[3] "Rhetoric and Poetic: The Rhetor as Poet-Plot-Maker," Southern Speech Journal, XXVI (Summer, 1961), 288.

This observation seems directly related to the speaking career of Bill Alexander, preacher-playwright-actor. Furthermore, Staub states:

> How can we account for the enduring effect of great speeches--those that have outlived the audience for which they were intended? May I suggest that as an answer that no matter where the listener or reader finds himself in time, he is recreated in terms of the great speech, that he is thrown, to some extent, into a state of dramatic crisis, and that he is forced to make a decision and to come away with a new knowledge--the kind of knowledge that is gained by great dramatic characters who have also experienced a crisis and a decision.[1]

However, most of Alexander's speech manuscripts, like those of any prolific speaker, lack timeless appeal. Nevertheless, certain of his sermons and after-dinner speeches do have the effect Staub describes--that of recreating a sense of dramatic crisis which leads the listener or reader to make a decision. Moreover, evidence abounds that Alexander's sermons and lectures excelled in bringing about dramatic crises during their presentations, long-range effect notwithstanding. The extraordinary record of listeners' decisions to join First Christian Church--there were nearly always several every Sunday for over a decade--indicates the power he executed in bringing people to the point of choice. His show-stopping success on the lecture circuit as measured by the necessity to decline many engagements (this when increased level of honorariums could not sufficiently discourage invitations) and the frequency of standing ovations at the events he did schedule suggests his effect upon thousands of auditors.[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] "Relative to the response of audiences to Bill, I attended many of his speaking dates. Never did an audience fail to give him a standing ovation at the end of his talk. I heard him speak to a variety of groups --from a 4-H Convention to midshipmen at Annapolis to various types of sales and executive groups." Letter of John A. Churchman, June 10, 1970.

Alexander's use of the showmanship techniques of color and contrast, of the dramatic entrance and bizarre stunt, fusing rhetoric and poetic, do not satisfactorily explain his powerful impact as a dramatic speech personality. There is still that "something" which remains indefinable but is nonetheless real. Barbara Marinacci, in her search for the secret of great actresses' perennial appeal, called it "star quality," quoting Oscar Hammerstein.

> It belongs to that owner and to no one else. It is a kind of glow that emanates from only one, and communicates itself to all. It is just as unearthly as the glow of a heavenly star, and just as hard to explain--harder, perhaps.[1]

Alexander was such a star.

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[1] Leading Ladies (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1961), p. 290.

CHAPTER VIII

ALEXANDER'S USE OF EMOTIONAL APPEALS

Classical rhetoricians commonly spoke of three kinds of proof, generally designated as: ethos, that which existed in the character of the speaker; pathos, that which had to do with arousing the feelings; and logos, that based upon reasoning. Cicero spoke of the need to communicate appropriate emotions in order to achieve motivation; among these non-intellectual constituents he included hatred, love, desire, anger, grief, joy, hope and fear.[1] Aristotle discussed seven basic emotions in his examination of this form of proof. These were anger, love, fear, shame, benevolence, pity and emulation.[2] Modern rhetoricians and communication theorists have discussed pathos in terms of structuring "extra-logical" appeals,[3] "motivation through reduction of homeostatic imbalance,"[4] and using devices which "short-circuit . . . conscious thought

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[1]Cicero, De Oratore II, xiii, trans, and ed. by J. S. Waston (London: George Bell, 1876).

[2]Aristotle, The Rhetoric, trans. by Lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), pp. 93-130.

[3]Arthur Kruger, "The Ethics of Persuasion: A Re-Examination," Speech Teacher, XVI (1967), 296.

[4]C. William Colburn, "Fear-Arousing Appeals," in Speech Communication: Analysis and Readings, ed. by Howard Martin and Kenneth Anderson (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1968), p. 215.

processes."[1]

While there have been evident differences in terminology, both ancients and moderns have generally agreed that until the listener feels as the speaker feels about his cause, persuasion has not been effected. Joseph Blau suggested that, while too much attention given to emotional appeals could result in demagoguery, the speaker who would persuade his listeners must concern himself with both the intellectual and emotive components of rhetoric.[2] Accordingly, Lionel Crocker stated:

> Public speakers must know the emotions, the motives, the yearnings of mankind. They must mingle intimately with all groups of people. Hospitals, prisons, reformatories, schools, colleges, dormitories, churches--all should be visited by the public speaker. Phillips Brooks was observed one day standing in the slums of Boston, mingling in the misery of its inhabitants; the following Sunday he gave a powerful sermon on helping the poor. Wendell Wilkie taught school, Albert J. Beveridge sold books during his vacations. Great speakers have been great-souled individuals.[3]

From his experience in show business and sales, Alexander came to the ministry with first hand knowledge of the power of the affections in human relationships. He knew that what men feel may be more important than what men think. Therefore, he sought to elevate men to a higher level of experience through appeals to their strong feelings.

Alexander employed compositional techniques in appealing to the sentiments, fears, and motives of his listeners by building into his speeches and sermons stories rich with pathos. In addition, he employed

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[1]Franklyn S. Haiman, "Democratic Ethics and the Hidden Persuaders," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLVI (December, 1958), 385.

[2]Joseph Blau, "Public Address as Intellectual Revelation," in Essays on Rhetorical Criticism, ed. by Thomas Nilsen (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 19.

[3]Public Speaking for College Students (New York: American Book Company, 1941), p. 305.

delivery techniques both visually and audibly enhancing the effect of the already emotionally stimulating content. In this he was in harmony with the theory laid down by Wayne Minnick in The Art of Persuasion: "Though men may use assertion, arguments, statistics, testimony, and other common means of support to excite the emotions, the commonest tactic is the use of vivid description and narration to depict actual emotion producing situations.[1] Observers who witnessed Alexander at work commented on his deft handling of appeals to his listeners' emotions. A reporter for Time, covering the minister's senatorial campaign, wrote:

> The Rev. William H. Alexander bounced springily around Oklahoma last week. His mellow voice swung low to squeeze a tear, lifted lightly to pick off a laugh, soared high with holy indignation. "In this crusade," cried Bill Alexander, as background music from a choir swelled behind him, "I see the magnificent march of the living God and I hear the thunder of His feet." He meant that he was running for the Senate against the Democrats' quiet, able Congressman Mike Monroney. Democrats watched Alexander's skillful showmanship in exasperated frustration. Big (6 ft. 3 in.), handsome and young (35), Bill Alexander already commanded a devoted following for his dynamic sermons. In his church, dressed in a cutaway, he prowls back and forth on the platform, crouching like a boxer (he was once an excellent amateur), leaping forward to his full height, gesticulating expressively, sweeping his listeners along. Sometimes he interrupts to point out his mother, "Stand up, Mama, and let the folks see you. There's my Mom," he cries, as the congregation applauds. And then he tugs at heartstrings: "You all remember little redheaded Oliver Crockett who used to sit right down and sing so loud every Sunday. Well, you will be shocked as I was when they called me last night to say he died fighting in Korea.[2]

The reporter was perceptive indeed. Two of the favorite appeals in Alexander's reportory were his use of the hearer's love for his own mother and for motherhood in general, and the appeal to pity and grief associated with the losses in the conflicts of war.

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[1] (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 228.

[2] "Thunder of His Feet," Time, LVI (October 23, 1950), 24.

Frequently Alexander would refer to his own mother in ways which would easily identify with those in the audience who held their mothers in high regard. To a ladies group he confided, "My Mother was the greatest Christian I have ever known. If I think of my Mother enough I won't get very far away."[1] Tulsa Tribune reporter Bob Foresman recorded the responses of a political campaign crowd to a story Alexander often told to church and after dinner audiences.

> There were few dry eyes as he told about his mother, left motherless at 13, who raised a family of six younger children, then lent her efforts to raise money for an orphanage in danger of closing its doors for lack of funds.
>
> "Do you know where my dad first saw my mom?" Alexander asked. "She was talking to an audience about this orphanage and men and women were rolling gold pieces down the aisle."[2]

Alexander also made use of parent-child attachments by appealing to the love for children. On January 12, 1947, Columbia Broadcasting System's "Church of the Air" originated in Oklahoma City's Radio Station KOMA, with the service conducted by William H. Alexander of First Christian Church, Oklahoma City. The feature, broadcast nation-wide, moved over 12,000 listeners to write and request copies of the program; respondents included two United States Senators and six governors. The broadcast was particularly rich in pathetic appeal: Alexander read the touching classic, "A Father's Confession to His Son," while the church choir, under the direction of Tracy Silvester, sang "When Children Pray." Few works of literature would evoke the intense emotional response of this narrative of a remorseful father at his little son's bedside, atoning for his unrealistic expectations which had not diminished the little boy's touching love for his dad. Even in print the story moves one to

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[1] "Faith and Freedom," p. 12.

[2] "Alexander Stirs Huge Tulsa Rally," March 30, 1950.

tears; with Alexander's professional interpretation by radio (the preacher at this time had two young sons with whom he closely identified) the work would be powerful indeed. Little wonder the church was deluged with requests for broadcast reprints.

But this was only the beginning of the program. The closing portion was also rich in emotional appeal as he combined his appeal to his listeners' love for children with a narrative he frequently used to stir people's grief and pity for humanity's suffering from war. Alexander spoke of his experience in northern Italy during the closing months of World War II, less than two years prior to the time of the broadcast. He spoke of his conversation with a nineteen-year-old soldier who had just been converted to Christ that day; already the new convert had led nineteen others to declare their faith to the Chaplain, who baptized the twenty young men in a shallow creek just behind the lines. The minister told his coast-to-coast audience:

> I walked along with this young fellow until some German 88s began to get our range and then we went for a ditch--that's what a foxhole is--just the biggest ditch you can dig in the smallest amount of time. . . . He was talking a blue streak . . . "You know," he said, "I can hardly wait until we stop tonight because I want to write my Mom a letter and tell her about what I did today--she has wanted me to become a Christian for five years and I never would. It's funny you have to come to a place like this in order to find out that Christianity works seven days a week. I always thought it was stuff for Sunday, but it works anytime anywhere. I'm gonna write and tell Mom--it will sure make her happy."
>
> Two hours later I held that boy's head as he died. I had a word of prayer with him, then he said two things to me, First, "Be sure to write and tell Mom." I did and received the most wonderful letter I have ever received in my life. By the way, I think she is listening to this broadcast this morning. And then he said, "Don't let this happen again."--he meant the war.
>
> I sometimes wake up at three or four o'clock in the morning and hear that boy saying--"Don't let this happen again." Friends, I know it's going to happen again unless we make a place for the Christ as the secretary of human relationships at the peace table and as the Unseen Guest in the individual lives of common, ordinary people like

> you and me, who want to build the kind of world in which our children and children's children might live.[1]

The fusion of these appeals to the strong feelings of love of children and aversion for war contributed heavily to the unusually heavy response to the broadcast.

Alexander employed appeals to the people's fear of the destructive forces of war in many of his sermons, lectures, and political speeches. Frequently he would use the same stories and employ his customarily evocative powers of description, simply adapting the story to a particular audience by modifying the transitions leading in and out of the emotion-arousing material. One such story was this one, from a state-wide radio broadcast of September 11, 1950:

> Let's face facts. All the specific proposals of my platform which will mean a better tomorrow for every Oklahoman and every American amount to nothing unless we also learn how to live together. We must avoid the sequel of all being cremated equal. We have developed an atomic, a bacteriological and a hydrogen warfare that can blast us off the face of the earth. I was in Chicago not long ago, speaking before a meeting of College administrators. On one side sat Dr. Albert Einstein and on the other side sat Dr. Hutchins of the University of Chicago. I spoke on the subject "Spiritual Foundations." When I finished, Dr. Einstein said, "Young man, either that philosophy wins or we'll have no world 25 years from now." He should know.[2]

Alexander used strong appeals to feelings of pity to move his hearers to share his concern for suffering humanity. With no evidence of reticence, he could speak to sophisticated society women or tough-minded businessmen about situations steeped in pathos, often moving them to open crying. Again the closeness to Beecher's rhetorical theory is seen, although Alexander would not likely have agreed with the reservation

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[1]"'The Church of Tomorrow' Broadcast Reprint," January 12, 1947, pp. 5-6.

[2]"It's A Clear-Cut Issue," p. 6.

stated by the preacher of Plymouth Church.

> Experience ought to have shown . . . that there is a class of hearers in every intelligent community that will never be led except through their reason. . . . Yet, if you shape your preaching, as often literary men in the pulpit are accustomed to do, to the distinctively intellectual men in the community you will very soon fill them full and starve the rest of your congregation; because, right alongside of them, there are natures just as noble as theirs, but not accustomed to receive their food through the mouth of reason, except in an incidental and indirect way. . . . there are a great many persons who want the truth presented in emotive forms.
>
> The hard reasoner says: "No tears for me; don't colour your preaching; I want it pure as the beams of light . . . the calmer and more inexorably logical its propositions, and the more mathematical its proof, the better I like it. But there are in any community probably six to one who will watch for the emotional and impassioned part of the sermon, saying: "That is the preaching I want, I can understand what I feel." They are fed by their hearts. They have as much right to be fed by their hearts as the others have to be fed by their reason."[1]

If Bill Alexander recognized a special group of intellectual people who preferred to receive their messages in non-pathetic form, he showed no indication of catering to them. Constant throughout his oratory, whether of pulpit, political, or lecture genre, is the strain of emotional appeal. Moreover, from all accounts there was no adaptation needed. To the Chicago Executives' Club Alexander shared a story which others might have withheld because of its thoroughly sentimental nature.

> Let me tell you just one thing and I'll close. The time was December 23rd, 1949. I was sitting in my study at the First Christian Church in Oklahoma City when a knock came on the door. I went to the door, and there stood a guy about my size and about my age, and he was pretty seedy and awfully tough looking. I said, "I'm Bill Alexander." He said, "Yeah, I know. I'm Ralph So-and-So." I won't tell you his last name. I said, "You're not the Ralph that I used to know down in St. Louis, Missouri, are you? You're not the guy who walked into the waters of baptism ten years ago with me, when my Dad baptized us, are you?" He said he was. I said, "Come on in, Ralph." He said, "No, I just came here for one thing--to make a touch." I said, "Okay. What do you want?" He said, "Twenty bucks." I said, "All right," and gave him the twenty bucks. I asked him to sit down. I

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[1]Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art, pp. 116-17.

said, "Tell me about yourself." He poured out a tale of moral degradation the like of which I had never heard before. He had just finished three years in San Quentin. We talked, and I couldn't get under his skin to save my life.

I gave up at last and was showing him to the door when I said, before he left, "Let's have a word of prayer." He said, "Okay, if you think it will do any good." We had a word of prayer but it didn't get above the top of his head. He got to the door . . . I had failed miserably.

I said, "One more thing, Ralph. Tell me, what about your family? He told me he had a couple of five-year old twins, and I asked him where they were. He said they were in Washington, Missouri. I asked him if he were going up there, and he said, "Hell, no. They got along without me for three years; they can keep it up." I said, "Don't you want to see them?" "No."

I said to him, "Look. This is December 23rd. What are you going to send them for Christmas?" He said, "Nothing." I said, "Ralph, come on back in a minute, will you?" and I went over to the phone. I called Sears Roebuck, and got a friend down there and told him about the five-year-old twins in Washington, Missouri. I said, "I want you to start the stuff out to them now so they can have a real Christmas and on the card just put one word, 'Daddy.'" He said, "Okay" and I hung up the phone.

Never in my entire life have I seen a guy shaken with such convulsive sobs as Ralph when I had finished that phone conversation. It took him five minutes to get hold of himself. When he did I said, "What's the matter, Ralph?" He said, "I made up my mind when I came in here that you weren't going to get next to me. When you told him to put 'Daddy' on that card, I thought they were a lot better off without me." I said, "No, they're not, Ralph. They need you up there. And listen, here's some more money. I want you to head back to Washington, Missouri." That was December 23rd.

Just before I left Oklahoma City on the way out to the airport, I read a letter from Washington, Missouri, from a girl I had never seen, the wife of this guy Ralph. Do you know how she ended it? She said, "I don't believe that there is any problem facing Ralph and me and the children that we are not equal to." And I don't either--not a one.[1]

The preacher from Oklahoma City then quickly closed his speech; he had to rush on to another speaking appointment. When he concluded, the audience arose and applauded.[2]

Alexander may have had listeners whose preference for rational proofs and well-developed arguments was left unsatisfied. If he knew of

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[1] Executives' Club News, 1950, pp. 9-10.

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

this dissatisfaction, there is no indication that he was perturbed by it. Instead, as demonstrated in the narrative above, he moved people to see themselves in practical situations acting out the Christian life of reverence to God and benevolence to man. In this he was well supported by respected homileticians. John A. Broadus argued, "We often belabor men with arguments and appeals, when they are much more in need of practical and simple explanations, as regard what to do, and how to do it.[1] Biblical scholar Charles Reynolds Brown defended an emotional rhetoric for preachers.

> The men who wrote the Bible wrote with their pens and with their minds up to a certain point, but when they would have us see visions and dream dreams they wrote with their hearts. "Out of the heart are the issues of life," because men and women do mainly those things which they feel like doing. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness"--he cannot achieve that high and in any other way. Therefore anyone who ignores sentiment or makes light of feeling in order to leave more room for the chilly dictates of a coldly calculated expediency makes a sorry trade.[2]

Brown said further that the minister's task is not to explain everything nor to prove everything.

> Jesus never stopped to prove anything. He spoke about God, and about duty, about prayer, and about redemption, about the kingdom of Heaven and the future life, as great valid certainties. He was so sure of them that he made others sure of them. He did not argue; he proclaimed.[3]

This was the way of Alexander; typically he proclaimed without bothering to prove. He appealed to his listener's hopes and fears, desires and aspirations and let the hearer find his own reasons for believing. Speaking to cadets at a Missouri Military Academy commencement he combined

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[1] A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), p. 153. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 266.

[2] The Art of Preaching (New York: Macmillan, 1922), p. 173. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 268.

[3] Ibid.

these appeals in this way:

> "The youth of today have it in their power to go forth and make God's dream of peace and brotherhood come true," Rev. W. H. "Bill" Alexander of Oklahoma City told Wentworth Military Academy cadets at the 74th annual commencement exercises here.
>
> He pointed out that there is but one weapon to counteract the terrible weapons of destruction being made in our secret laboratories, and that is the Gospel.
>
> "In this great atomic age in which we live," the speaker declared, "We are all being brought up on the philosophy of how we can die together rather than how we can live together. There is a life, an abundant life for all if we simply followed the dictates of the Gospel.[1]

Alexander employed pathetic appeal through narration to move people to act on immediate, practical matters as well as to lift people to higher visions of a glorious future. When the members of his congregation were giving less than was needed to promote the church program, the pastor appealed to them in this manner.

> . . . many of us are falling down on the job. I think it's about time that we realized that there is going to have to be more sacrifice than we have ever made heretofore before the church of tomorrow is going to be what it should be. Some people say, "I wish the minister wouldn't talk about money from the pulpit," but my dear friends as long as it takes money to do the work for the building of the kingdom of God there is no place where it should be talked about more freely than right from this pulpit.
>
> . . . Numerically we are the sixth largest Protestant denomination in America; from a giving standpoint we are forty-seventh. I like that story of the laboring man who went out on the all church budget. And he went to the wealthiest man in town--the banker. After he was shown in by the butler, the churchworker said, "I'm sorry to bother you but we're trying to raise the budget and we want some increases because we have a greater program this coming year." The man stormed around and said, "Money, money, money! That's all I hear. Money, money, money, I've been giving two dollars and a half a month for ten years and I plan to continue." The churchworker said, "All right. But before I go, sir, I want you to remember that 'a dead face draws no checks.'"
>
> The banker said, "What does that mean?" "Well, sir, I worked for you when I first came to this town and we didn't think we could afford to have a little baby but a little baby came along. Well, we sacrificed and when it came to going to school my wife took in washing and

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[1] "Cadet Seniors Hear Alexander," Daily Oklahoman, June 1, 1954.

> then later on when it was high school, he worked after school in a filling station. But we got our boy through and then he went to Annapolis and at Annapolis he led his class and we went up for the graduation. Then he came back home but later was called into the service of his country. And you remember a year and a half ago we received a telegram, 'Regret to inform you that your son was killed in action.' Mister, I just want you to know, that since we got that telegram that boy hasn't cost us a penny. Not anything. 'A dead face draws no checks.'" And he walked out.[1]

The preacher went on to say that a vital, alive church program demanded money; yet many people had not yet paid their pledges. While Alexander was not the kind of pastor which maintains a kind of constant harassment about giving, nevertheless he knew his ability to handle a moving story and felt no compunctions about putting to work strong emotional stirrings to obtain support for the church's progress.

Often in Alexander's speech manuscripts and electronically recorded sermons one finds appeals to nostalgia, to manly courage, to patriotism, to self-preservation, to indignation at unjust practices, to visionary hopes for the future, to strong compassion for the suffering. Indeed one might say that a preponderance of Alexander's appeals were of an essentially extra-logical nature. This was, perhaps, after all, the poet in the preacher. Gordon Bigelow said of Longinus that for him, "the typical method of poetry was an imaginative realization of the most significant facts, which it combines or focuses or suggests in a flash.[2] One might paraphrase this and say that this was Alexander's typical method of rhetoric. He presented the most significant ideas in ways which appealed to the intuition of his hearers and, while often logical processes

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[1]Sermon of January 8, 1956, p. 3.

[2]"Distinguishing Rhetoric from Poetic Discourse," Southern Speech Journal, XIX (December, 1953), 92.

were short-circuited, the conclusions were in harmony with the best interests of his hearers. Bigelow said further:

> John Stuart Mill also found the method of poetry to be alogical, dependent upon emotions rather than on reason. "What constitutes the poet," he said, "is not the imagery, nor the thoughts, nor even the feelings, but the law according to which they are called up. He is a poet, not because he has ideas of any particular kind, but because the succession of his ideas is subordinate to the course of his emotions."[1]

This was the case with the Oklahoma City preacher. Alexander's heavy dependence upon emotional appeals likely stemmed from his poetic soul. He fused poetic with rhetoric in his career as persuader.

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[1] Ibid., p. 93.

CHAPTER IX

ALEXANDER'S LEADING IDEAS

A man is what he believes. Alexander had several recurrent themes which revealed the substance of his belief. His speeches served as the medium by which he communicated these basic beliefs to his audiences. These basic concepts, to be examined here, include his belief in: the power of ideas, the goodness of man, the worth of the individual, the free enterprise system, and a broadened theology.

Belief in the Power of Ideas

Perhaps the most common theme found in the late preacher's speeches is the speaker's strong belief that ideas can transform human lives. In his speech to the Piedmont Sales Conference, Alexander, after his customary ice-breaker anecdotes and quips, detailed a mournful picture of the world of 1950 with its political and technological threats, then he posed the question:

> . . . some of you say, "Well, did he come all the way over here and down here with a discouraging message like that?" The answer is "No." I don't come with a discouraging message because I believe in something. I don't come with a discouraging message because there's one thing more powerful than anything that has been discovered in the laboratory of modern science. What is that? It's something within the heart and mind of an individual, which when tied to an eternal truth results in all of humanity being lifted to a new level.[1]

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[1]"Four Secrets to Success," pp. 6-7.

Alexander then developed his theme by induction, alluding to young Lincoln being taken by the idea of freedom for slaves, of Louis Pasteur lifting mankind toward a new level of health, of Alexander Fleming being used of God to bestow penicillin to suffering humanity. The preacher-salesman then concluded:

> Oh, I could pick out a dozen illustrations here, or a hundred, if I knew you people well enough, but men, I'm not giving you a sales talk, I'm pointing out facts. The most powerful thing in the world is an idea whose time has come, and people who will give themselves all together to that idea, regardless of themselves, so that all of humanity has a better chance. That's the most powerful thing in the world.[1]

To a nationwide Church of the Air audience, the pastor spoke of the power of people committed to a cause, using contemporary intellectual perspectives to drive his point home.

> The two most powerful ideologies in the world during the last 10 years have been Nazism and Communism. Their source of power stemmed from, moved forward in, and had its consummation in one thing--an almost fanatic allegiance to an idea. The people of Russia and Germany commanded the awed attention of the world during the war, not because of the worth of their various ideas, but because of the fact that they were peoples captured in the clutch of a great conviction. Any idea, be it good or bad, immediately takes on tre mendous proportions and far-reaching results when large groups of people give themselves together to that idea. How else can we explain the first Century A.D. when a few men turned a world upside down.[2]

Alexander challenged twentieth century Christians to rise to the level of their spiritual forebears as he derided the current preoccupation with trivia.

> While Russian peasants by the millions threw themselves headlong into the sacrifice of self upon the altar of an idea called communism and sang triumphantly all the while, "We're changing the world," and while green clad legions shouted lustily and proved

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[1] Ibid., p. 7.

[2] "'Church of Tomorrow' Broadcast Reprint," January 12, 1947, p. 4.

> their sincerity with their blood, "We'll live or die with Hitler," we modern Christians erroneously claiming the sacrificing spirit of Christ have built over 200 denominational back fences, spent our time arguing over theological questions of which Jesus never even heard; and have tackled such mighty problems as whether or not the popular song, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" was irreligious, or whether or not the President of the United States should receive an honorary doctor's degree because he played poker.[1]

In his address to the Chicago Executives' Club, the Oklahoma City preacher acknowledged the source of this favorite phrase of his as he sought to stimulate his hearers' interest in spiritual considerations.

> Victor Hugo said, "The most powerful thing in the world is an idea whose time has come." And gentlemen, believe, the time has come when our best brains must go over into the spiritual foundations that will result in our being able to keep our world.[2]

This belief in the latent power of ideas as they move the people caught up by them and committed to their implementation, was the basis for his other key concepts.

Belief in the Goodness of Man

A speaker's estimate of man's basic nature subsumes much of what he says and what he hopes to accomplish with his audiences. T. R. Jessop observed:

> A theory of human nature, irrespective of whether it be true or false, is never merely a concept or an image, but it is an active force, shaping, reshaping or misshaping the mind that holds it. A man's life contracts or widens as his belief about himself and others becomes narrow or large.[3]

Alexander's view of man was large indeed. Few people who knew men (all kinds of them: saintly churchwomen, war heroes, juvenile

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[1] Ibid. [2] Executives' Club News, 1950, p. 17.

[3] The Freedom of the Individual in Society (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1948), p. 31. Quoted in "The Interpretative Function of the Critic," in Essays on Rhetorical Criticism, ed. by Thomas R. Nilsen (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 87.

delinquents, convicted murderers, movie stars and important political leaders) held man in such high regard. In this he was in accord with other important ministerial figures past and present. English preacher James Stalker, in speaking of the preacher's need of a large view of man, declared:

> No one will ever win men who does not believe in them. The true minister must be able to see in the meanest man and woman a revelation of the whole of human nature; and in the peasant in the field, and even the infant in the cradle, connections which reach forth high as heaven and far as eternity.[1]

This generous trust in one's fellowman was considered a prerequisite to leadership by pulpit sage Francis Greenwood Peabody, who said:

> The first condition of all effective leadership is faith in those who are to be led. Many a parent forfeits, by the habit of distrust, his right to guide his child; many a leader finds his followers fail him because they are driven, not led. The good shepherd goes before, and need not turn his head to see if the sheep are following. They know his voice, and follow because he is sure they will. His faith in them kindles their loyalty to him.[2]

Alexander saw the possibilities for good in the people to whom he ministered, whether they were profit-minded industrialists, sacrificial missionaries, or young toughs paroled to Alexander's custody. The "Happy Preacher" had a poet's vision of the possible and he often borrowed the poet's art as he shared his views of man's inherent capacity for good. Speaking to his congregation on January 8, 1956, Alexander suggested whatever each person needed to serve God better and to further the church's program, was already supplied within himself. The preacher

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[1] The Preacher and His Models (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891), pp. 171-72. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, pp. 118-119.

[2] Jesus Christ and the Christian Character (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 91. Quoted in Baxter, p. 119.

announced:

> . . . I agree with Edwin Markham, who said this:
>
> We men of earth, have here the stuff of Paradise.
> We have enough. We need no other stones to build a stair into
> the unfulfilled.
> No other ivory for the doors, no other marble for the floors.
> No other cedar for the beam and dome of man's immortal dream.
> Here on the paths of everyday, here on the common human way,
> is all the gods would take to build a heaven,
> To mould and make New Eden, hours that pass sublime, to
> build eternity in time.[1]

Alexander went on to reinforce his view of the sufficiency of man by saying:

> Listen people, you will find no Utopia, you will find no happiness, no matter what you do, that doesn't begin with you. That's where your happiness must lie. And you have enough, you have enough to finish the doors, marble the floors, and cover the ceiling. You can build a paradise, you can achieve your true nature, which is the highest that you can become. You can achieve that this year.[2]

This view of man's essential nobility is foremost in his sermons and other messages; Alexander was convinced that virtually every man--saint and sinner--was sincere and earnestly wanted the good and the true. Once he said to his church, while making his customary appeal for a radiant religion:

> . . . two-thirds of the people in Oklahoma City today are not in anyone's church. Don't forget that. And why not? Do you blame it on the people? You say they are bad people. No, they are not bad. Ninety-five percent of the people want to do the right thing.[3]

Alexander believed in people, even in those who had established no reputation for credibility. This made the easygoing preacher an "easy touch" for many down-and-outers; his open faith in all men rendered him vulnerable to well-meaning and ill-meaning friends and associates who sometimes

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[1] Sermon manuscript, p. 3.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Sermon delivered c. April, 1951, p. 2.

took advantage of him. Through many experiences of difficulty, however, the minister kept his faith in his fellow man. Those who worked against Alexander in community and church affairs found their adversary magnanimously forgiving when events revealed their own unfairness. Most often, Alexander seemed not to notice antagonism and ill-will; when he could not overlook it, he must have merely considered such people in that unfortunate five per cent who did not want to do the right thing.

There are no appreciable differences in the chief ideas extant in Alexander's sermon manuscripts and those found in texts of his after-dinner addresses. The clergyman's belief in his fellow man was as conspicuous in his speech to the Iowa State Pharmaceutical Association as it was in his Oklahoma City sermons.

> . . . to love one's fellowman sincerely . . . you can't do that without believing in them. Take all the cynics, all they have done, put it into one bundle. They have never lifted humanity. Who has lifted humanity? Those that believe . . . You don't walk up to an alligator, slap him and say, "Be a man," because you know he can't be. He must be an alligator. But I wonder how many of you men in your drug stores have gone up to some guy that was drinking too much or some guy that was playing it crooked, and you patted him and said, "Be a man, old chap." Why? Because you knew that deep down within there was that divine spark, that something that called you a man. You know it is there, and I believe in that. I believe in it, and that is the way that Jesus turned a world upside down.

Views on Race

Alexander's benevolent views of man were unrestricted as to race. Although the generally "Southern" attitude favoring strict segregation of the races prevailed throughout Missouri and Oklahoma during nearly all of Alexander's career, he frequently spoke out against bigotry and inequities which revealed an underevaluation of the Negro by people in and out of the church.

In his first pastorate at Stroud, Alexander attempted to bridge the gap between blacks and whites through a program of song. The Stroud Democrat of August 11, 1939 announced:

> GOSPEL SINGER IN RECITAL AT CHRISTIAN CHURCH
> Mme. Naomi Dozier, a colored singer of note, will present a recital of gospel spirituals for the Stroud people. . . . Mme. Dozier is an educated colored woman of a high order of Christian personality.

The last sentence of the publicity release (probably prepared by Alexander) seems designed to reassure prospective listeners of the worthy character of the singer, possibly an indication of racial attitudes of that day and place. While no problems developed from the appearance of Mme. Dozier at the church in Stroud, a recital appearance of a Negro tenor at Oklahoma City's First Christian Church some twelve years later brought about a serious difference of opinion between the preacher and a member of the congregation. Alexander used the incident in many of his speeches of that period to demonstrate his abiding loyalty to men--all men.

Belief in Youth

Nowhere is Alexander's belief in the essential goodness of humanity more evident than in his championing the cause of young people. His ministry from the time of his experience at the Ozark Mountains Young People's Conference to the day of his untimely death is marked by a keen desire to serve the youth, to defend their basic goodness, and to captivate them with his gospel of happiness. Speaking to the National Association of Manufacturers, he expressed his unreserved faith in young men and women.

> Next to my church in Oklahoma City, we have a youth center with the best bowling alleys in town and pool tables and ping-pong tables, a

> beautiful lounge upstairs where the young people dance. We are now in the midst of a three million dollar youth project, with swimming pools and tennis courts--not just for the boys whose folks are wealthy enough to belong to the country club, but for all of them. And listen to this: In over eight years, I have never seen one unwholesome thing take place in that youth center. You parents who are here today, if you could do only one thing for your children, believe in them and let them know that you believe in them. It is the greatest living power in the world.[1]

The youthful minister went on to assail the narrow-gauged attitude of many Christians whose religion had become a damper to the young, concentrating as it did on the negatives of life and condemning the new generation without understanding or appreciating the idealism and honesty it typified.

> I say to you--and I have spoken to more young people on our college campuses than anyone else in America in the last ten years--that our young people today are basically clean, our young people are basically moral, our young people are basically honest, but they will not be captivated by the kind of prejudiced thinking which we in the Church have too often been guilty of. . . .
>
> You know, the dirtiest, filthiest piece of literature I think I ever read in my life--and I think I have been around--was written by a minister in Shawnee, Oklahoma, against dancing. I know young people pretty well and I'm telling you that the average young person isn't even capable of getting his mind as low as that guy's was. He shouldn't dance. He really shouldn't. [LAUGHTER] It is not a matter of dancing or not dancing; it is a matter of prejudiced thinking.[2]

There is some evidence that many of the young people the idealistic pastor defended in such unqualified language were significantly less noble in their behavior than Alexander believed. One person interviewed was active as a youth in the program at the recreation building at Tenth and Robinson during some of the Alexander years. This individual, now a minister in the Disciples church, saw things which evidently escaped Alexander's notice. According to this interviewee, there was a noticeable

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[1] "Our Moral Needs," p. 9. [2] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

amount of consumption of alcoholic beverages on and around the premises, with whiskey bottles often in evidence in the halls and courtyard.[1] Another person interviewed, formerly an employee of a funeral home adjacent to the church property, said that illicit sex behavior took place in a number of the cars parked near the church building. According to this observor, now an active layman in his church at Norman, Oklahoma, behavior of some of the young epople at the First Christian Church Youth Center was sufficiently scandalous to have caused real concern among the employees of the mortuary.[2]

Why then would Alexander say "In over eight years, I have never seen one unwholesome thing take place in that youth center"? Probably his great faith in the inherent virtue of all people--especially young people--affected his vision and prejudiced his thinking in their favor. Furthermore, had he been aware of such failings on the part of the young, knowledge of their errors would have made no difference in his basic belief. As he told an Iowa audience:

> Whatever else you do with your kids, believe in them.
> And when they let you down, go on believing in them.
> And when they let you down again, believe in them.
> And never let them have one doubt in the world about it.[3]

By all the evidence, Bill's faith in man, young and old, was unshakable. A journalist saw this faith of Alexander's as the source of impressive fruits in the way of youth reform. Laverne Harvell of Texas State College for Women, said, " . . . because he has a deep-seated belief in youth he

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[1]Interview at Sapulpa, Oklahoma, December 20, 1969.

[2]Interview at Norman, Oklahoma, April 9, 1968.

[3]Speech to Iowa State Pharmaceutical Association, February, 1948, p. 17.

has seventeen delinquents paroled to him; in the past four years he has led 103 boys to a new life without a single 'kickback.'"[1] It is difficult to imagine that anyone could have proved himself so lacking in virtue as to discourage Alexander's faith; he sought out even seemingly incorrigible people and demonstrated his belief in them. Margaret Roso, Alexander's secretary in the 1940's, recalled the minister going to death row at Oklahoma State Prison to visit convicted slayer Billy Cook, notorious for the unmerciful murder of a family of five which had befriended him.[2] Newspaper reports tell of Alexander pleading before the pardon and parole board for clemency toward Harlen Broyles, convicted of slaying a deputy sheriff on a Seminole, Oklahoma street.[3] Alexander seemed to feel that no one was beyond the reach of those who believed in the basic goodness of mankind.

Belief in Himself

Some who knew the preacher closely saw Alexander's belief in man as stemming from, or being closely identified with, a firm belief in himself as an instrument of God. Donald Sheridan, Alexander's associate minister at First Christian for thirteen years, said on the occasion of Alexander's funeral, "Few of us dare to walk in the splendor of our own integrity"; he then stated that this was not true of Bill Alexander who believed in himself and spoke "from the terms of his own person." Sheridan added, "Much of the power of his ministry was in the unaffected

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[1]"Happy Preacher Believes in Abundance on Earth," Texas State College for Women, Denton, Texas, October 19-21, 1948.

[2]Interview, April 10, 1970 at Oklahoma City.

[3]Tulsa Daily World, January 19, 1947.

life that spoke the ministry to us all."[1]

Without doubt, the audacious minister's belief in himself strengthened his appeal to others. That this self-confidence was tempered by a sense of his own shortcomings probably enhanced his general effectiveness. John Churchman spoke of his friend's dual view of his own humanity.

> I recall one evening in Chicago--I had met Bill at the airport and we were downtown in his hotel room. I said, "Bill, you are a great man." His reply was, "Could have been, John, could have been." He had a certain egotism but he had a genuine humility.[2]

This was in keeping with Alexander's emphasis upon the potential of man rather than his actual realization of this capacity. Alexander, like his fellow man whom he constantly defended, testified to the gap between what he could have been and what he knew that he was. Perhaps he was less fair to himself than he was to others; he always saw others as being in the process of becoming and made allowances for their present states of development. Churchman's testimony indicates he saw himself, at least on this occasion, as one who had become much less than his own potential had dictated. While this would, as Churchman perceived, contribute a healthy humility to a gifted personality, it evidently did not significantly hinder his fundamental belief in the basic virtue of man.

Belief That Free Enterprise Favored the Dignity of the Individual

Alexander's generous view of man's potential was indissolubly tied to his belief in the value of the individual personality and his

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[1]Daily Oklahoman, April 8, 1960.

[2]Letter of John Churchman, June 10, 1970.

appreciation of the American system of government which he felt offered a maximum of personal freedom in which the individual could realize his fullest potential. Alexander's view of man as not a cog in a state machine but a free individual made in the image of God, demanded a political system which would encourage the maximum individual expression. He felt the American form of democracy furnished such a framework. To the General Federation of Women's Clubs, he said:

> We will never have a world fit to live in politically unless we learn what this American democracy of ours is based upon. Let me put it this way: in every form of totalitarianism whether Fascism, Communism, Socialism or Nazism, whether there is a dictator on top or a bureau or a politburo, it doesn't matter, in every form of totalitarianism one thing is always true: the individual is subservient; the State of the dictator is supreme, while in every form of democracy (ture democracy), the individual is always supreme. He is the most precious thing.[1]

Alexander's inheritance of a liberal theological viewpoint, consistent in many ways with social gospel exponents Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, never overshadowed his conviction that man's chief source of happiness lay, not in fitting into a tightly structured social system engineered by an intelligentsia, but rather in a social setting which allowed for the fullest expression of the individual personality. Alexander himself was willing to take the risks of personal failure if he could enjoy the satisfaction of personal achievement on his own strengths. He felt others should experience and enjoy the same adventurous spirit as that which propelled him to his own unusual accomplishments. A consistent motif in his sermons, lectures and campaign speeches was the exaltation of the work ethic. This dedication to the value of hard work permeated his message to youth; he was afraid this emphasis

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[1]"Faith and Freedom," p. 9.

would be lost in a socialistic society.

> The future belongs to these young people. I am so sick and tired of hearing that our young people are going to hell. Well, if they have, we have posted the way pretty well for them! The truth of the matter is that they are all right. The only thing I am worried about in our young people today is not their morals . . . we have too many parents who during the war were molding bullets when they should have been molding character; too many parents who are saying, "My child won't have to do what I did in the way of work."
>
> Listen, People! Work is an honorable thing. If you are going to keep faith with your generation, then teach these young people to love their work and not be afraid to tackle the tough job and to say, "You may be tough, but I'm a little tougher."[1]

Alexander then shared one of his favorite anecdotes about his own youth.

> I learned one of the biggest lessons I ever learned when I was in high school. We were having dinner. My dad was sitting at the head of the table. I was at his left. I waited until a propitious moment and I said, "Dad, I dropped physics today."
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> "You what?"
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> "Well, I was failing anyhow and this way I will not get an F on my report card."
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> Dad said, "Bill, that's the first time I've been ashamed to call you Son." We talked a little bit more about it and the next morning I started taking physics again. People, I say this to you: I played four years of football, I had the lead in the class play, I was president of my senior class, but the greatest thrill I ever got in high school was at the end of that semester when I came home with an A in physics on my report card. My dad looked at the report card and he looked at me and he looked at the report card and he looked at me and said, "Hi, Son!"
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> People, let's not rob our children of one of the greatest satisfactions in life, which is to tackle a tough job. America was made great by that. When you say you want to save your young child from certain hardships or learning the value of work, you are not doing them a favor.
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> . . . . . .
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> You will excuse me if I go to the realm of politics for my illustration, will you? I say to you it is wishful thinking to suppose that you can rob a man of that which makes a man a man and then have a man left. In my opinion the greatest harm that has been done to America economically and morally speaking, during the last twenty-five years, is the fact that we have brought up a segment of the people in this country to believe that if they won't work the government will take care of them and it is a damnable philosophy.
>
> [HEARTY APPLAUSE]

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[1] Ibid., p. 385.

> People, if we ever lose the spirit that brought our forefathers across this very territory in covered wagons we will lose that which has made this country the greatest country in the world.[1]

Alexander assailed both socialism and communism from the pulpit, from the speaker's platform, and from the political stump. While he was reform-minded enough to risk the loss of popularity in order to point out inequities operating in the American system--such as racial discrimination and political graft--he was committed to the idea that nowhere on earth was there a political structure which so favored the development of the individual. In one of his humorous stories, Alexander reinforced this concept:

> My little girl is five years of age and every time I see her with my two boys fourteen and fifteen, they have taught her some thing new. The other day, just as proud as a little peacock she stood up in front of me and said, "I pledge allegiance to the flag and to the republic for which it stands, one naked individual with liberty and justice for all," and I laughed, too, and then, people, I got to thinking, "By George! She's got something there." Listen to me. One naked individual not having to be a waiter or valet because your father or grandfather was a waiter or a valet. One naked individual, under this free enterprise system and yes, there have been mistakes and excesses and I'm for the eradication of those excesses and abuses of the free enterprise system but in Heaven's name let's not throw the baby out with the bath water! It is the free enterprise system that has raised us to the highest standard of living that the world has ever known. It is this free enterprise system that enables your son and my daughter to face the future unafraid. . . . One naked individual, able to grow under democracy to be as tall as God meant him to be when He thought of him first.[2]

In his political campaign speeches delivered in the 1950 race for a seat in the United States Senate, Alexander's dedication to the preservation of the American free enterprise system was made clearer than ever before. To an Oklahoma City audience, he declared:

> I believe that the British novelist, Somerset Maugham, has pointed out just what happens when nations sell their freedom. This man,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 395-386.

[2] Ibid., pp. 390-91.

> whose country has gone the way of Socialism, with America paying for the experiment, said: "If a nation values ANYTHING more than Freedom, it will lose its freedom; and the irony of it is, that if it is comfort or money that it values more, IT WILL LOSE THAT, TOO." . . . When the charge of "Socialism" is leveled against certain legislative measures considered in Congress, a great many people think of it as just "partisan politics." But when the top advisor of our late President Franklin D. Roosevelt, former Supreme Court Justice James F. Byrnes, speaks out in forceful language to warn against permitting our country to continue its reckless joy-ride down the Red road to "security" and disaster, it is high time for alert citizens to bestir themselves. . . . He, Byrnes, also declared: "We are threatened with the concentration in Washington of the powers of local government, including police powers, and with the imposition of creeping, but ever-advancing socialistic progress."[1]

The preacher-candidate went on to cite nations of the past which experimented with various forms of collectivism, paternalism and government planning, concluding:

> The tragic irony of it all is that after spending $400 billion and sacrificing the lives of 300,000 of our best youth to defeat the Fascist and Nazi powers, and now spending around $20 billion to combat Communism, we are pursuing a domestic policy that will inevitably lead to some form of totalitarianism. So with red lights flashing and fog horns blaring, the American people must be heedful for the danger signals that the many chapters in world history grimly and soberly remind us are warnings of the treacherous reefs upon which have been wrecked so many so-called "liberal" governments down through the ages.
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> "Thus runs the law and the law shall run
> Till the earth in its course is still
> That whoso eateth another's bread
> Shall do that other's will."[2]

Alexander insisted man must earn his own bread through constructive work in a competitive system of free enterprise. Alexander so thoroughly believed in the American system of competitive freedom that this ideal merged with his religious faith into a unified whole. A month after his defeat in the Senate race he told an audience of American

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[1] "Campaign Address," July 9, 1950, p. 5.

[2] Ibid.

industrialists:

> I say to you that the fundamental basis of democracy is a matter primarily of the same fundamental basis as Christianity itself. The two are inextricably woven together. The two will survive or the two will go down. I know that Jesus is the person who said first to the world, in glowing terms, "A man is a man for all that and all that and all that," and I am still old-fashioned enough to believe in the free enterprise system.
>
> You cannot rob a man of that which makes a man a man, and then have a man left. I am speaking on a moral base when I say to you that we are selling our freedom down the river, and that the greatest need in our world today is for people who will not succumb to the wishful thinking that we can get something for nothing, who will not succumb to the wishful thinking that somehow, God is in his heaven and all is right with the world and everything is going to come out all right . . . I say to you that things are not going to come out all right unless we recapture that devotion . . . to this old idea of freedom that made America possible in the first place.[1]

The Oklahoma City minister saw the American system as offering a framework in which the Christian could exercise his freedom with fewest strictures from the state. The attendant risks of failure were willingly assumed by the rugged spokesman. Always an exponent of individual responsibility and personal freedom, Alexander moved farther and farther away from the idealism of a socialist state which was common to so many liberal theologians. He spoke of this alienation in a speech to the Iowa Retail Hardware Association in March of 1950. Alluding to his current candidacy in the senate race in Oklahoma, Alexander said,

> One reason I decided to run is that the socialistic trend threatens to engulf us and somebody better say something.
>
> I think the greatest harm that has come to our country in the last 30 years is to bring up a segment of the people to believe if they won't work--the government will care for them.
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> I was once broad-minded toward socialism, but now I am against it because of what it does to people and to individuals. How long can we go against thrift, which is honesty in action, and spend 5 billion dollars more than we take in in a prosperous year?
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> We never will get rid of this wishful thinking until we get rid of the Santa Claus complex and I can prove it isn't Santa Claus.

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[1] "Our Moral Needs," p. 13.

> The government robs man of his ability to do.
> We are selling out personal liberty after personal liberty. When we sell our personal liberties to any overhead--I don't care what it is--you begin the toboggan slide that ends by the overhead saying: "Little man, you go this far and no farther."[1]

This latter was what the freedom-loving preacher could never abide--limitations imposed upon people from sources outside of themselves. He felt stifled by such strictures and he thought that others, too, would be hampered in reaching for high goals if a political system set the ceilings.

Alexander's Theology

Alexander's love of personal freedom is reflected in his religious theory; throughout his ministry he championed a liberated approach to Christian theology. In 1948 Alexander outlined his views on religion in a guest editorial written for The Oklahoma Daily, student publication of the University of Oklahoma. Speaking of what he had learned conducting religious emphasis weeks on college campuses, Alexander suggested four items upon which he and the college youth agreed upon relevant to religion. These were: (1) religion must not be based upon a fear psychology, (2) religion should not be emphasized as being an "other-worldly" ideology, (3) religion should not be associated with prejudiced, wishful, or static thinking, and (4) religion should not be negative and condemnatory.[2] Summing up his views on practical religion, Alexander declared of Jesus Christ:

> His gospel is not primarily a creed, a theology, a liturgy, a form or an ecclesiasticism. It primarily is "a way of life." It is

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[1] Iowa Newspaper clipping dated March 23, 1950.

[2] "W. H. Alexander Explains Practical Program of Religion for Moderns," The Advertiser, December 23, 1948.

> also my sincere conviction that His way of life is the only basis for individual happiness, economic prosperity and international peace.[1]

It is not an easy task to set forth in clear detail the theological perspectives of Bill Alexander. Many of his statements on religious doctrine are vague and quite general. There is some contradictory evidence about his beliefs on certain fundamental points. However, this may not be of crucial importance since, while Alexander was well-schooled and possessed a brilliant intellect, theological discourse and debate was not the thrust of his efforts as a spokesman. He played it down, evidently seeing himself in this area, as in the area of persuasion, as a popularizer rather than a theoretician.

Theological Evolution

As mentioned earlier, there is some evidence that Alexander's theological holdings underwent some significant change throughout the years of his ministry. At least, it is apparent that his public appeals changed their emphasis as time went on. It may be that he personally held to his earlier views but simply broadened his scene after his first few years in the ministry. During the period of 1940-1941 he advertised his radio program broadcast from "Oklahoma's Little Church Around the Corner" as "Friendly--Forceful--Fundamental."[2] Having an image of "fundamentalism" was likely an advantage in the rural Oklahoma of three decades past and probably would be still. But what did "fundamental" mean to Alexander and to his audience? Probably not what the word meant

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[1] Ibid.

[2] "The Unique Story of 'Oklahoma's Little Church Around the Corner,'" Brochure for mailing c. 1940, p. 1.

to most folks of a "fundamental" Christian persuasion. Indeed, Alexander was known throughout his denomination--and beyond--for his liberalism in theology.

Contemporary preacher Billy Graham delineated the major tenets of fundamentalism in a way which is helpful for our analysis. When asked whether he was a fundamentalist or a liberal, he replied:

> There are so many shades of fundamentalism and so many shades of liberalism that it is extremely difficult to point to a man and say he is a "liberal" or he is a "fundamentalist" without qualifying explanations. If by fundamentalist you mean "narrow," "bigoted," "prejudiced," "extremist," "emotional," "snake handler," "without social conscience,"--then I am definitely not a fundamentalist. However, if by fundamentalist you mean a person who accepts the authority of the Scriptures, the virgin birth of Christ, the atoning death of Christ, His bodily resurrection, His second coming and personal salvation by grace through faith, then I am a fundamentalist."[1]

Alexander, as opposed to Graham, might forswear both of the contrasting views of fundamentalism given above. Certainly, one does not find in Alexander's sermons (as one does with Graham's) studies of the inspiration of the Scriptures, arguments advancing the significance of the virgin birth, discourses on sin and the necessity of a sin-offering or vicarious atonement, the case for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, or mention of the visible, audible return of the Christ.

Alexander's view of the Scriptures was disconcerting to some people. The iconoclastic clergyman consistently avoided direct conflict with those who were deeply committed to the concept of a word by word divinely inspired revelation. However, sometimes he was unable to sidestep the issue. When Alexander's son, Ralph, was eight or nine years old, the boy came to his mother, saying "I've been reading the story of

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[1]Stanley High, Billy Graham (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), p. 56.

Jonah being swallowed by the whale and, Mother, I just can't believe it." His mother replied, "Well, why not? . . . God can do anything. Why couldn't He do that?" The boy replied, "Yes, I know God could do anything, but I just don't think God would do things that way." Mrs. Alexander then suggested her son speak about his doubts to his preacher-father, supposing Bill, with his training and commitment, would settle the question and at the same time reinforce the lad's faith in the veracity of the Bible account. After Ralph discussed the matter with his da, Mrs. Alexander asked him if he was satisfied. Ralph said, "Yes, Dad told me that a person must take the Bible with a grain of salt." Mrs. Alexander looked up in surprise, "Did he really say that?" Evidently the answer which met the expectations of the boy very well was disturbing to his mother.[1] Alexander's awareness of the possible agitation which might be generated by an expression of his point of view probably deterred him from pressing the issue either in his family circle or beyond. Perhaps he felt more harm than good would come from the wide publication of his approach to the Bible.

Miss Vera Stovell, who has served as secretary of First Christian Church since the last four years of Alexander's leadership, believes the general membership there to have been basically fundamental in their beliefs of Bible doctrine. Miss Stovell said:

> I would say the majority of this congregation believe that the Scriptures are inspired, believe in the virgin birth of Christ, His second coming, bodily resurrection, and so forth. I know that three or four years ago, a youth director here preached against those things and he was in trouble right off.
>
> If Bill didn't accept these doctrines, he didn't tell it. I think he did believe those things. . . . And I believe the people

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[1]Interview with Ralph Alexander, August 13, 1970.

> of First Christian believe them. Right now, if you polled the congregation, the big majority would say they believed in such teaching.[1]

While Alexander's sermons and speeches do not reveal the allegiance to these doctrines which Miss Stovell infers, it is possible (though the probability seems small) that the popular pastor's faith did accomodate these fundamental ideas. He simply chose not to include them in his public message.

Greater understanding of the enigmatic quality of Alexander's personal beliefs may be gained through the consideration of another discussion the minister had with his elder son. This time Ralph, home from his studies at Texas Christian University, where his own beliefs had been challenged and re-assessed, asked:

> Dad, you don't believe in the virgin birth, do you?
> I don't know, son.
> Well, how can you believe in it?
> Oh, I don't know. Actually, Ralph, it just doesn't make any difference. Some of the most wonderful Christians I know think the idea is absurd. And, some of the most wonderful Christians I know believe it is very important. That's why I never preach about it.[2]

Interestingly, Alexander's unwillingness to preach about such issues as the virgin birth of Christ did not consign discussion of his views on the idea to limbo. Members of his church insisted the controversial pastor believed strongly in this and other fundamental dectrines. Critics of Alexander vigorously attacked him for not adhering to such doctrines. Neither side was able to produce convincing evidence to support their strong opinions. An incident which took place in 1952 demonstrates the strength of opposition which was sometimes directed toward

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[1] Interview, August 12, 1970.

[2] Interview of August 13, 1970.

the popular Oklahoma City spokesman as well as the characteristic sidestepping technique used by the liberal pastor. When twelve Baptist pastors (ten from Muskogee and two from Fort Smith, Arkansas) learned that Alexander was being considered for a youth leadership appointment in the soon to be formed Eisenhower administration, the ministers signed a resolution urging that "No one be appointed as a youth leader who denies the historic faith of our fathers, the inspiration of the Bible, and the virgin birth of Christ."[1]

Alexander's published response is almost a study in evasion. He said he could not understand why the ministers would "just jump on me for no reason at all." Furthermore, Alexander disclaimed any knowledge of an impending appointment, adding "I'm not after anything, so why would they go out of their way to run me down?" Casting about for some explanation of the clergymen's opposition, he decided it may "have come from a dispute over his ideas on a positive program for Muskogee young people." The newspaper article closed Alexander's comments in this way: "As an afterthought Mr. Alexander added, 'I love them. They're all sincere Christian gentlemen.'"[2] About the resolution's central idea--Alexander's view of "The historic faith of our fathers, the inspiration of the Bible and the virgin birth of Christ"--the pastor in controversy said not a word. Probably, he did not think it important enough for comment or controversy.

The liberality of Alexander's approach to Christian theology is further seen in his speaking about the relation of doctrine and

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[1]"Bill Alexander 'Loves' His 10 Baptist Critics," Tulsa Tribune, December 27, 1952.

[2]Ibid.

denomination. Speaking to the National Association of Manufacturers, Alexander asked:

> What are we separated over today? We are separated over little theological questions about which Jesus never even heard. He wouldn't even know what we were talking about if we discussed which one of the 88 different theories of the Atonement was correct--and there are 88--or what form of baptism should be used. He wouldn't know what we were talking about.[1]

Alexander often spoke of Christ and the Cross but his emphasis was upon the nobility of a man's response to a crisis experience, not upon the theological question of propitiation of Divine wrath toward sin. Alexander immersed hundreds and hundreds of people during his ministry, but in his doing so he stressed the value of a new beginning and a public profession of faith, leaving the discussion of baptism as a scriptural form of gospel obedience to other voices.

Part of Alexander's popular appeal as a speaker was his ability to simplify concepts which were difficult to grasp. Especially was this true in his handling of abstract theological issues. In spite of his thorough training, Alexander seemed to have little interest in and almost no patience with such philosophical considerations. Fine points of doctrine receive no space in any of his speech manuscripts. In his move away from doctrinal disputation, the showman-pastor not only de-emphasized tenets which were points at issue among the multivarious divisions of Christendom but, on occasion, he ascribed less significance to Jesus Christ Himself. In the earlier period of his ministry in a radio message promoting Christian unity, the young minister said:

> . . . There is one thing about which I feel that I can make a dogmatic assertion and that is this: "a divided church will never save

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[1] "Our Moral Needs," p. 9.

> the world." We Christian people talk a lot about unity, but we do very little about it. To me, unity means that I must put my right arm around my Presbyterian minister friend, my left arm around my Methodist friend and look my Baptist minister friend in the face and say, "You love Christ and therefore, I love you."[1]

Here, in his early ministry, Alexander's references are all within the boundaries of Christendom. Later in his career, Alexander, in his advancing the same theme, used the same illustration but changed it in a way which was theologically significant. Speaking to a convention audience at Fort Wayne, Indiana, the minister said: "Unity to me means that I am going to put my right arm around my Rabbi friend and my left arm around my Catholic friend and I'm going to say, 'You love my God and I love you.'"[2] Alexander's drive toward religious unity had progressed, then, beyond the borders of believers in Christ as Saviour.

Alexander's ever-broadening approach to religion ultimately resembled something beyond historical Christianity, a faith which some called "The American Religion." Theologian Schoolmaster discussed this phenomenon.

> Now it is the thesis of many today that both Judaism and Christianity have been reduced in America to the point where they are merely a means of a people locating themselves in a society that demands that if you are going to be a real American you will be a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew. You cannot be just nothing. You have to have one of these three labels on your dog tag. For a good treatment of this thesis I recommend that you read Will Herbert's Protestant, Catholic and Jew. It is like a circus tent with three rings in it. You can be in any one of these rings just as long as you are under the Big Top. And the Big Top is what some see as an emerging fourth religion, The American Religion, which says that these three are all really the same thing and that religion is the important thing, not any particular religion.[3]

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[1] "Churches--Let's Join Hands," Radio Sermonette Reprint, Bristow, Oklahoma, 1941, p. 2.

[2] "Faith and Freedom," p. 382.

[3] Richard H. Schoolmaster," Christianity and the Business Man," in

In a dialogue on the supremacy of Christ, Alexander would likely have taken exception to such easy impartiality with its implied slight of Christianity's unique plea. Nevertheless, as his ministry lengthened in duration and broadened in scope, Alexander's message to the American public came to sound more and more like a promulgation of the above thesis.

Alexander's use of sentimentally nationalistic poetry such as "A Letter to St. Peter" lent more substance to the idea of an "American religion." To the Iowa Pharmaceutical Association, Alexander said in closing:

> You are wonderful. I want to give you a poem, the best to come out of the war . . . This is something you can take home with you, and I think it speaks the spirit of our age. It was written by a woman, Alma Dean . . . and she dedicated it to the boys who gave their lives in service. . . .
>
> Let them in, St. Peter, they are very tired;
> Give them the couches where the angels sleep;
> Let them wake whole again to new dawns fired
> With sun, not war, and may their peace be deep.
> Remember where the broken bodies lie
> And give them things they like;
> Let them make noise--God knows how young
> They were to have to die.
>
> Give swing bands, not gold harps, to these our boys,
> Let them love, Peter,--they have had no time--
> Girls, sweet as meadow wind, with flowering hair,
> They should have trees and bird songs, hills to climb,
> The taste of summer in a ripened pear.
> Tell them how they are missed. Say not to fear,
> It is going to be all right
> With us down here.[1]

Theologians less liberal than Alexander would see in his use of such poetry a "Big Top" religion which offered admission, not on the basis of

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Business Policy and Its Environment, ed. by Thomas Moranian, Donald Grunewald, and Richard C. Reidenbach (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), p. 90.

[1]Speech manuscript, pp. 21-22.

belief, acquiescence to doctrine, or religious commitment, but on sacrifice for one's country--in essence, a "works salvation."

The late pastor's speech manuscripts suggest a theological viewpoint with its tent stakes set far broader than that of a denomination and broader even than the "American Religion" perspective. The preacher with the poetic flair often quoted William Herbert Carruth's Each In His Own Tongue, especially when officiating at funerals.

EACH IN HIS OWN TONGUE

A fire-mist and a planet,
A crystal and a cell,
A jelly-fish and a saurian,
And caves where the cave-men dwell:
Then a sense of law and beauty
And a face turned from the clod,--
Some call it Evolution
And others call it God.

A haze on the far horizon,
The infinite, tender sky,
The ripe, rich tint of the cornfields,
And the wild geese sailing high;
And all over upland and lowland
The charm of the golden-rod,--
Some of us call it Autumn
And others call it God.

Like tides on a crescent sea-beach,
When the moon is new and thin,
Into our hearts high yearnings
Come welling and surging in:
Come from the mystic ocean
Whose rim no foot has trod,--
Some of us call it Longing,
And others call it God.

A picket frozen on duty,
A mother starved for her brood,
Socrates drinking the hemlock,
And Jesus on the rood;
And millions who, humble and nameless,
The straight, hard pathway plod,--
Some call it Consecration,
And others call it God.

The "Big Top" for Alexander came to include all men, whether they saw God revealed in Christ, in abstract philosophy, in mystic musings, or in the book of nature. Once Alexander did refine the nebulousness of Carruth's view of Deity by writing an additional stanza, telling the bereaved believers:

> There are some who say our loved one
> Will be placed beneath the sod,
> But we who know a Risen Saviour, know better
> We know he has gone to God.

By composing his own final verse for this occasion the preacher of a happy Christianity upheld the superiority of a religion built on the Risen Christ. However, that this was not an essential, a core truth in Alexander's mature ministry, may be seen in his general practice. Sometimes Alexander added no such qualifications, letting his favorite verse range free--free of any distinctive Christian flavor, revealing the universality of the minister's theology.

> At the Meuzzins call to prayer
> Kneeling thousands thronged the square:
> And from Quascars's lofty height
> A dark priest chanted Brahama's might--
> There 'mongst the monastery's weeds
> An old Franciscan told his beads:
> And to the market place there came
> A Jew to praise Jehovah's name.
> The one great God looked down and smiled
> And counted each His loving child.
> For Brahmin, Priest, and Monk and Jew
> Had reached Him through the God they knew.

This broad view suited Alexander very well. Thus unfettered by doctrine, creed, or dogma, the spirit of Alexander the man was free. This freedom, so essential to his nature, was at the core of his leading ideas.

CHAPTER X

THE STRUCTURE OF ALEXANDER'S DISCOURSE

Russell H. Wagner in speaking of the disposition of materials within a speech, designates the classical rhetorical canon as concerned with "The functional selection and use of materials for a particular purpose."[1] A. Craig Baird sees dispositio as embracing three elements: "The selection of materials, arrangement, and proportion."[2] Baird suggests the speaker selects ideas, arguments, and principles which appear to help him develop and communicate his views effectively to his audience. The rhetor also utilizes a pattern of order to advance his discourse while attempting to strike a happy balance in his positioning of the components of his message.

Speakers, ecclesiastical and secular, vary considerably in their adherence to principles of disposition. Some, like Ralph W. Sockman, exhibit impressive strengths in the structuring of their message. Critic Fred J. Barton, in detailing this contemporary minister's rhetorical theory and practice, said:

> A speech teacher wrote in 1955: 'Dr. Sockman . . . is a speech professor's dream in clarity of organization.' That statement

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[1]"The Meaning of Dispositio," in Studies in Speech and Drama in Honor of Alexander Drummond, e. by Herbert A. Wichelns (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1944), pp. 285-94.

[2]Rhetoric, A Philosophical Inquiry, p. 171.

> is hardly an exaggeration. Sockman believes that 'there are always enough people in your congregation who want to see the sermon structure' to justify careful attention to it.[1]

Conversely, preacher-lecturer Ralph Waldo Emerson's rhetorical structure was so shambling in the eyes of his contemporary preacher, Theodore Parker, that the latter remarked:

> Emerson lacks the power of orderly arrangement to a remarkable degree. Not only is there no obvious logical order, but there is no subtle psychological method by which the several parts of an essay are joined together; his deep sayings are jewels strung wholly at random. This often confuses the reader; this want appears the greatest defect of his mind.[2]

The chief elements characteristic to Alexander's speaking were looseness in organization, brief introductions in his sermonic efforts, extended introductory remarks in his occasional speaking, use of opening humor, use of three or four main points in his speeches, and his conclusions which typically were poetic expressions of hope.

Loose Structure Characteristic of Alexander's Speaking

In the consideration of speech structure, the correlation between Alexander and the nineteenth century pulpit artist, Henry Ward Beecher, again becomes apparent. Beecher gave scant attention to any predetermined organization of his materials in historical, spatial, definitional, logical or classificational order. Moreover, his preoccupation with adaptation of his ideas by improvisational technique precluded giving attention

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[1]"Ralph Washington Sockman: Twentieth Century Circuit Rider," in American Public Address: Studies in Honor of Albert Craig Baird, ed. by Loren D. Reid (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1961), p. 87.

[2]Roy C. McCall, "Theodore Parker," in A History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed. by William Norwood Brigance (New York: Russell and Russell, 1943), p. 251.

during delivery to clarity of form which would meet the standards of critics of published discourse. Said Beecher:

> The greatest number of men, particularly uncultured people, receive their truth by facts placed in juxtaposition rather than in philosophical sequence. Thus a line of facts or a series of parables will be better adapted to most audiences than a regular unfolding of a train of thought from the germinal point to the fruitful end.[1]

Another homiletician known for his association with the Yale Lectureship, William H. P. Faunce, was encouraged by a trend away from a rigidly structured exposition back to the looser, more audience-centered treatment of New Testament times.

> . . . The former doctrinal sermon, in which logical coherence and demonstration were in the forefront, has now given way to a more human and direct approach in which the speaker closely grapples with the congregation, according to O'Connell's saying, 'A great speech is a great thing; but after all the verdict is the thing.' And this is a return to the earliest methods of the Christian Church. The logical method was never employed by the semitic mind. We are often puzzled because the sayings of our Lord are gnomic, epigrammatic, pictorial, startling us like a flashlight in a dark room, when our Western intellect propositions, major and minor premise, and irrefutable conclusion. We are troubled and baffled because Christ seems interested in people rather than discourses, and persists in lighting up the recesses of human hearts instead of helping us in the formation of our creeds and theologies. But he was wiser than we are.[2]

Alexander felt, with O'Connell, that the art of oratory was an admirable accomplishment but "after all the verdict is the thing." As a matter of fact the minister used the same expression in his advice to a young preaching associate, urging him to "Always drive for a verdict!"[3]

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[1] Yale Lectures (1st ser.), p. 219. Quoted in Lionel Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art, p. 37.

[2] The Educational Ideal in the Ministry (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), pp. 171-72. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, pp. 169-70.

[3] Interview with Fred A. Miller, April 2, 1970 at Norman, Oklahoma.

The unorthodox spokesman's speech and sermon manuscripts are by no means models of rhetorical structure. Alexander, in his drive for a verdict, concentrated on feeling the mood of his audience and adapting his discourse to the vagaries of their thoughts and feelings, often sacrificing methodical exposition in the process. While clarity of structure and proportionate balance were not hallmarks of Alexander's rhetorical efforts, his speeches and sermons do reveal adherence to some guiding principles. One device Alexander shared with ancients and contemporaries was the use of introductory remarks calculated to establish rapport with his hearers. Homiletician John A. Broadus endorsed the use of introductory remarks which conditioned the audience for what would follow.

> It can scarcely be necessary to argue at length to the effect that sermons ought generally to have an introduction. Men have a natural aversion to abruptness, and delight in a somewhat gradual approach.[1]

Alexander's practice indicates he favored such an approach. The three basic structural components of a speech -- introduction, body, and conclusion -- are clearly discernable in Alexander's speeches and sermons.

Introductions to Sermons Usually Brief

There is, however, a marked contrast in the length of the introductions of his sermons as compared to his more secular messages. Sometimes, repeating his sermon on Queen Esther to his home congregation Sunday morning, July 2, 1951, the introductory remarks fill a brief paragraph. Again, in his "Every Man is a Gambler" sermon of January 13,

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[1] A Treatise on The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons (Rev. ed. New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), p. 266. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, pp. 170-71.

1952, the introductory remarks were brief; only three sentences separated the minister's reading of the test and his launching into the development of supports for his statement of position. Such brief introductions are typical of the minister's sermons at First Christian Church.

One sermon, however, does reveal a lengthier development which was a departure from Alexander's usual pulpit practice. This message, preached on February 12, 1956, unfolds quite gradually, beginning with a quote from Abraham Lincoln, moving into a discussion of universal and inexorable spiritual laws demonstrated in chemistry, astronomy, gravity and agriculture. Only after this thorough and indirect introduction which comprised one-fourth of his sermon content does Alexander speak of the blessings of Christian stewardship, the theme of his exhortation to tithe to the Lord's work at First Christian Church. Other sermons on money matters manifest the same tendency of the preacher to approach this sometimes sensitive issue with careful indirection. Ordinarily, however, Alexander spent little time introducing the thesis of his pulpit messages.

Introductions More Developed in Occasional Speeches

In his outside speaking, when he would be addressing many people unacquainted with his ideas, to allay any apprehension that the guest lecturer, a man of the cloth, might be a stuffy, officious declaimer impressed with his own mission, Alexander spent a considerable portion of his time finding common groud with his hearers, helping them to get relaxed and enjoy themselves with a fellow who, though he was a religious spokesman, was really a very earthy fellow after all. Alexander knew what all successful showmen know: that listeners must identify with one another and with the performer if the goal of thorough identification is

attained. Made up of separate individuals, a group will remain fragmented until some common experience pulls the disparate personalities together, welding them into a psychological oneness. The showman works toward this identification by getting his listeners to respond together, acting upon one another, thus merging the characteristics of the individuals with that of the group. If he can get his hearers singing, laughing, applauding, standing, raising their hands, that is, behaving together in some way, he has rendered his audience more suggestible, improving his chances of success at persuation.

When Alexander found his listeners had already sat through several preliminary events, he would tell some funny stories, kid his hearers into a playful mood and then cajole them into group singing. His experience as a church meeting song leader, as well as his background as a night club entertainer, was put to use as he unified the audience with a "community-sing" approach. Speaking to a large gathering of salesmen, Alexander said in his introduction:

> Well, I'll tell you what. You've been sitting for quite a while. I think you need a little excercise. Therefore--I wasn't going to do this, but--I think I'll teach you a little song. Anyone who doesn't join in and do all the words and actions will have to sing a solo . . . . All together--I'll do it first--it goes like this:
>
> The grand old Duke of York,
> He had a thousend men.
> He took them up a hill one day
> And brought them down again.
>
> Now when you're up, you're up
> And when you're down, you're down
> And when you're only half-way up,
> You're neither up nor down.
>
> [The above was accompanied by body movements appropriate to the words.]

> You ready, kiddies: I wouldn't do this if you were a Rotary Club, but you young people, you won't mind. . . . Let's make this good, shall we? 'The Grand Old Duke of York,' Come on, everyone, and give it that good old Piedmont Sales spirit. By the way, this head table is going to lead you, I forgot to tell you.
>
> [The audience sang, standing, sitting, crouching as instructed.]
>
> Wonderful! Wonderful! You know, the truth of the matter is that you have no idea how silly you all looked.[1]

By such techniques Alexander gave the listeners an opportunity to move around and loosen up preparatory to a forty to sixty minute talk he was about to deliver. Furthermore, the listeners, by getting up and down together, singing together, and laughing together were merging themselves into a psychological unit which would be more persuasible.

Humor in Introductions

Alexander's chief tool in bringing about audience-speaker identification during the introductory portion was his use of humor. The introductory portions in Alexander's lecture manuscripts contain as many as eleven separate jokes, all strung together with simple transitions. The humor is abundant with puns wrapped in brief, light-hearted anecdotes with punch lines delivered with Alexander's deft mastery of show-business timing.

The humorous anecdotes built into Alexander's introduction further served his purpose of identification by content elements which told the audience the pastor was a man of a more liberal viewpoint than many Bible Belt preachers. The introductions contain references to the speaker's expertise at card-playing, the inclusion of some "damn's" (changed to "darn's"

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[1]"Four Secrets to Success," pp. 3-4.

before women's groups), and stories with plays on words such as "bitch." All would serve to relieve any false impression that Bill Alexander, the preacher, was also a Puritan. A few instances reveal this technique while demonstrating Alexander's references to members of the audience in his humorous ice-breakers -- another device he used to enhance his identification. To the General Federation of Women's Clubs Alexander said:

> Actually the first time I ever met Mr. Anderson--and I shouldn't tell this but it's a true story. Most of my stories aren't true but this is a very true story. He was sitting in the coffee shop of the Skirvin Hotel in Oklahoma City when he dropped a fork and that was bad luck. He's a very superstitious individual so to counteract the bad luck that he was sure would follow his dropping of the fork he took the salt shaker and threw some salt over his left shoulder. Just at that moment a young lady was going by with a very low-backed evening dress on and the salt went down her dress and I'll never forget what happened next. She slapped Mr. Anderson as hard as she could and said, "You can't catch me that way!"[1]

To the Iowa Pharmaceutical Association the red-haired minister said:

> I should tell you something about this man Eisentraut. He came to visit Oklahoma one day at my first pastorate. I came out of the post office and here was a guy trying to get his car started; he pushed, he cranked, he pulled, and everything else. . . . Well, I came out of the post office and this guy couldn't get his car started, and he started cussing, believe me, he knew the words and the music, too. I stood listening to him and then it was that President Eisentraut came up. He said, "My good man, you shouldn't curse, you should get down on your knees and pray." "Listen, Buddy, I will try anything. Oh, Lord, help this car to start. Amen." He got up, got into the car, stepped on the starter, it started right off, and he drove on down the road. President Eisenkraut stood there in amazement and said, "I'll be damned"... . .
>
> Before this banquet started tonight I was standing back there between Governor Blue and Bill Beardsley, and they told me I was in very august company and they thought I was embarrassed. I wasn't at all. The truth is, when I die I would like to have Governor Blue on one side and Bill Beardsley on the other, I really would,

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[1]"Faith and Freedom," pp. 375-76.

my Lord died between two thieves, and I would just as soon not.[1]

In loosening up a sales group, Alexander used this piece of identifying humor:

> I also know that Charlie Dews is here, and I knew him before, and I'll never forgive him! He came to my church one time and went to sleep right in the middle of my sermon and it sure made me redheaded! It wasn't because the sermon was dull--it was because he had stayed up too late the night before playing gin rummy. By the way, if I have time tonight, I'd like to give him a few of the finer points of the game! You can take it off your income tax, because I give my winnings to the Sunbeam Home, it's an Orphan's Home. You may be able to beat me, but you can't beat me and the Lord both! You know? I say this modestly, "I'm good." But it sure burned me up when Charlie Dews went to sleep in the middle of my sermon, so I turned around right in the middle of my sermon and I said, "Charlie Dews, will you lead in prayer?" He just snoozed on. Someone nudged him. I said, "Charlie, will you lead?" And he came to and said, "Lead, hell, I just dealt!"[2]

Except for his radio addresses, Alexander employed the same basic introductory format in his political oratory. Because of the time demands of broadcasting, the preacher candidate cut his introductory remarks to one brief humorous story, and as the campaign came to an end he launched directly into his serious political polemic.

However, on the stump Alexander stayed with his habit of generous introductions larded with quips and anecdotes. Tulsa Tribune Capital Correspondent Joseph E. Howell reported on the campaigner's format:

> Alexander is a popular speaker of the Josh Lee type. He holds the interest of the crowd with stories for perhaps fifteen minutes and then gets down to the serious message he wants to deliver.[3]

Alexander's use of humorous material was not limited to the introductory portions of his speeches. In the body of his occasional speeches,

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[1]"Building Our Kind of World," pp. 6-7.

[2]"Four Secrets of Success," p. 3.

[3]Tulsa Tribune, January 12, 1950.

the lecturer-humorist sprinkled brief shafts of wit to change the pace and revive flagging interest. Some speeches contain a half-dozen of these quick breaks in the discourse. Sermons also reveal the same technique, though with significant restraint; often one anecdote suffices to relieve the seriousness of the message.

Limited Number of Main Points in a Speech

Although Alexander's penchant for improvisation manifests itself in the loose structure of the written and electronically recorded remains of his speeches, there is nonetheless a basic pattern running through most of the sermons and lectures. While he varied the content, often composing the speech as he delivered it, Alexander characteristically structured his messages around three or four main points, making the outline easy to perceive and remember. For example, the manuscript of a sermon Alexander preached to his church in the 1950's advances three chief ideas: absolute genuineness with ourselves, absolute goodwill with others, and absolute trust with God.[1] The funeral message he so often delivered was also developed around three ideas: Alexander pointed out that the occasion of sadness was not altogether one of sorrow since: during his lifetime the loved one shared the beauty of God's world; he also shared the love of God's people; and finally, he shared the knowledge of God's Son.[2]

"Atomic Religion," a sermon preached and later published by Alexander contains "three great facts" which demonstrate the similarity of the release of atomic energy and the release of atomic religion. These facts,

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[1]Undated sermon manuscript, c. 1952-60.

[2]Funeral Service manuscript used during the 1950's.

serving as the main points of the sermon, were: (1) the scientist made his greatest discovery when dealing with the smallest element known to man . . . the atom, (2) there is nothing half way about the functioning and effect of an atomic bomb, and (3) an atomic bomb leaves a strange after-effect which is great and powerful.[1] Alexander pointed out that man viewing himself in God's vast universe feels he is small and insignificant yet if he wholeheartedly releases the spiritual energy within his own being, he will have a lasting effect over all the world.

The sermon Alexander preached on January 1, 1956 focused on the idea that every man is a gambler, that no one knows what a new year might bring. The adventurous pastor amplified his thesis with three suggestions: (1) we do not really want to know what is ahead of us . . . such a life would be unbearable; (2) religious faith, which should be the whole of life, demands hazards and risks . . . such as the Apostle Paul experienced; and (3) through faith in Christ, God's greatest gambler, one can enjoy the greatest assurances even in the midst of the greatest uncertainties.[2]

Alexander's after-dinner speech manuscripts along with the speeches on tapes and discs show the same preference for three and four main heads as a structural basis. Speaking to the New Idea Corporation, the minister described the world faced with enormous problems, then announced:

> What can I do? I'm just a little guy. Well, I'll just say three words. First of all, I am absolutely positive that if we are going to build the kind of world we want our children and our children's children to live in we must open our windows to Athens--representing intelligent thinking.
> . . . . . .

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[1]Undated sermon manuscript, c. late 1940's.

[2]New Year's Sermon, 1956.

> Not only must we open our windows toward Athens but we must also keep our windows open toward Jerusalem--representing spiritual principles.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> We must also open our windows toward Damascus--representing repentence.

The preacher's writings, scant though they are, reveal the same choice of the three-point (sometimes four-point) format. In an article entitled "You Are Important," written for the Christian Evangelist, Alexander referred to Jesus's reference to His people as the salt of the earth; then the pastor advised:

> People, if you want to keep the salt in your living, if you want to keep the savor in life, if you want to avoid being insipid, then first of all you must realize that as a potential son or daughter of God, you are important.
>
> You will never keep the salt and the savor in living unless, not only by feeling yourself important, but secondly unless you are liberated as a personality by something that truly frees you.
>
> Last of all, if you are going to keep the salt of living, you must have interior resources of strength that will see you through the difficulties.[2]

To a group of top executives Alexander said:

> First of all, if we're going to build the kind of a world order, even of a world 25 years from now, I want to ask you four questions. You answer them.
>
> Do you have a wholesome attitude toward life?
>
> My second question in life's quiz program in this: Do you have a self fit to live with?
>
> Third--Do you have a world fit to live in?
>
> . . . my last and most important question . . . men of the Chicago Executives' Club:

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[1] "Faith and Freedom," pp. 11, 14, 15.

Do you have a philosophy fit to live by?[1]

Examples abound of this simple, useful structural characteristic of Alexander's speeches and sermons, but these few serve to illustrate the pastor-lecturer's practice.

Although it cannot be established that the popular Oklahoma City preacher was indebted to New York City's Harry Emerson Fosdick for this method of speech order it is nonetheless interesting to note the correspondence of the practice of the two contemporaries. Roy McCall's study of the Riverside Church pastor says:

> When asked why neally all his sermons contained three ideas subordinate to the main theme, Fosdick replied that audiences cannot grasp more than three at one sitting; four, perhaps if the speaker exercises special care in keeping the outline constantly before them. 'I preached a sermon at Montclair once with six points,' he said. 'It came out like a broom, in a multitude of small straws.'[2]

Even though Fosdick and Alexander were polar opposites in their general habits of preparation (Alexander seldom wrote out any part of a sermon while Fosdick wrote and re-wrote every word), in this, as in their liberal approach to theology, they were almost identical.

Conclusions Used by Alexander

Alexander employed various techniques for concluding his message. Although he favored indirection, when the occasion demanded Alexander would make direct appeals for action. One such occasion was his appeal for amendments to the state constitution thich would promote better

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[1]"Speech to the Chicago Executives Club," 1950.

[2]McCall, "Harry Emerson Fosdick," p. 66.

schools in a state which was not known for its generosity toward education. This fifteen-minute speech, sponsored by the Oklahoma Congress of Parents and Teachers, and the Oklahoma Education Association, was broadcast over WKY at 8 p.m. Thursday, October 17, 1946. After explaining in detail the meaning of the bills and stressing the serious need for their passage, the civic-minded pastor closed his remarks with a plea which, in its aim of direct action, was not characteristic of his closing technique.

> Be sure that you vote for the Better Schools amendments when you go to the polls on November 5th, and urge your neighbor to vote for them.
>
> Just a word in closing--friends:
>
> It's a sad commentary on our American way of life when a man who thinks up the idea of fashioning a squirrel tail to put on bicycle wheels--makes two million dollars on the idea in one year and the teachers who mold and train our children for more hours a day than we parents do--should receive an average of $125 a month.
>
> As a minister I receive many calls to speak for various drives and campaigns, but never have I had the opportunity of representing a cause which will mean more to the future of Oklahoma.
>
> If you believe in Oklahoma Youth and their right to have the best possible educational training that we can provide--if you believe that the teachers of Oklahoma who hold in their hands a large part of the molding and training of your boy and girl, are worthy of better than starvation wages--if you believe this--then appoint yourself a committee of one to ask at least five of your friends to vote for the four amendments which mean better educated and finer Oklahoma children and therefore a greater Oklahoma. In this cause I hear the magnificent march of the living spirit of truth and I hear the thunder of his feet.
>
> Give it your best--November 5.
>
> Will you become a part of that magnificent march November 5th? I knew you would. Thanks a lot.[1]

Another occasion when the inspirational spokesman spelled out the course of action he wished his auditors to take was the preaching of a

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[1]"Plea for Better Education," p. 4.

sermon on stewardship, February 12, 1956. In December of that year the congregation would move to its new futuristic sanctuary, a move which represented a great investment. Alexander preached on tithing, quoting scripture and adding his personal testimony, alternately provoking and praising his parishioners for their habits of supporting the church's program. Warming to his theme, the energetic pulpit master said:

> I think the old preacher is right, who said me, a long time ago, he said, "You know, if it were as hard to be immersed as it is to tithe, the Christian church would have found out a long time ago that baptism wasn't necessary." What do you say? What do you say to a great, grand congregation like this, who has probably put as many stars in its crown during the last fifteen years because of the tremendous growth of your program. I wasn't going to tell you this, and I think there are some elders that don't think I should tell you, but I'm going to. I was going back, you won't believe this but sometimes I go back over old sermons. You didn't know that, did you? Here is a sermon that was written by me in 1943. You want to hear something? This is on stewardship Sunday in 1943, standing in this pulpit I said, "Someone may say, I admit that God has a share coming, I do admit that the church and the principles of Christ are the most important, and do deserve first allegiance, but I can't possibly take care of very much of it, even if I tithe. No, said I, I realize that, and that is the most beautiful part of this entire effort. No one can do it alone. And yet we can all have a share by doing what we can. We believe that it will take thirty-six thousand dollars for this church to measure to her part of the great task which lies ahead during 1943." Thirty-six thousand dollars was the budget. You heard Mr. Burns tell you that our budget for this coming year is one hundred fifty-five thousand dollars. May I say this to you? And I believe it with all my heart; I don't believe that there is anything to which you can give of your material means that will mean more to world peace, to economic justice, to political truths, but most important of all, to the raising of individuals into thier kinship which they deserve as sons and daughters of God, than the money that you give to the church of Jesus Christ.[1]

Alexander let up a little, inserting a humorous phrase or two, then moved into a conclusion which, while it was not common to his practice, he

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[1]"Sermon on Stewardship," p. 4.

willingly adopted under pressing circumstances. Turning to the organist he said:

> . . . Jerry, I'm going to ask that you play the organ to ease the pain of parting. For sixty seconds you will have the opportunity of signing a pledge card. I don't care how much, but if we could say to the finance committee, that has worked months, I tell you they have worked solidly, if we could say to them fifteen hundred people believe in the church enough to sign a pledge, if it is a nickel a week, some of you kiddies, if you get twenty cents a week don't be afraid to save two cents a week for the church. It's not how much you give, it's how much you share. And therefore, now, for sixty seconds you may sign your pledge cards. The officers will come forward, then they will allow you to place that pledge card in the offering plate, and this is the only Sunday of the year that we will do this. This is your privilege, your opportunity, because you love and believe in your church. There are some here who can double their pledge, there are some here who may have to cut a little, and bless your sweet hearts, if you do you know this is between you and your God. Therefore, prayerfully, look within, make God your witness, and sign your card. If you tithe you may not know how much. You don't have to put so much a week. Just write "tithe". Then whatever it is that will be fine. God love you, as you have this chance to work with God.[1]

Direct appeals for action -- rarely used -- typically brought postive response.

More characteristic was the minister's sermon of the week before when he spoke on more abstract levels of his basic theme, "The Power to Become." Alexander's object was to move his hearers to exercise more intensive influence on others, to show their friends and loved ones that Christ offered true fulfillment of life's dreams, to bring others to Christ and to First Christian. After making direct suggestions in the body of his message, Alexander closed with the use of an indirect appeal for personal surrender, cast in poetic form.

> . . . where will you go from here?
> You and I who He died to restore!

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[1] ibid., p. 5.

He is our refuge, our strength, our guide forevermore.
His it is to command the stars--His alone!
His it is to determine wars, His it is to command you and me!
The greatest of wisdom is to bend the knee
And confess that He alone can change and make our lives
His praises sing.
Sing of the One whose life is the sun.
Sing! He gave you the power to become.[1]

This poetic form is seen in the conclusion of "Atomic Religion." Speaking of the long-lasting effects derived from dynamic, power-filled Christian living, the preacher said:

> . . . I want to close this message by reminding you that there is a great and unseen power in atomic religion which compares with this post-radio activity.
>
> 2000 years ago the founder and first possessor of atomic religion climbed a hill called Calvery with a cross upon his back. That cross became the symbol of atomic religion and today, 2000 years later, the post-radio activity of that one solitary life has influenced the thinking of the world's multitudes more than all of the conquerors, kings, presidents, potentates and philosophers who ever lived. And the cross, that symbol of atomic religion, stands alone today, casting a healing shadow over all the world.
>
> Does the after-glow of your spiritual life radiate the power of the living Christ? I thrill to the opening lines of Invictus:
>
> "Out of the night that covers me,
> Black as a pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever God's may be,
> For my unconquerable soul."
>
> But I thrill more to the triumphant pass-word of atomic religion which says:
>
> "Out of the light that dazzles me,
> Bright as the sun from pole to pole,
> I thank the God I know to be,
> For Christ, the conqueror of my soul."[2]

This hope-filled, positive closing clothed in the language of the poet was typical of Alexander's conclusions, whether the occasion required

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[1]"The Power to Become," p. 3. [2]"Atomic Religion," p. 4.

an inspirational sermon, a humorous after-dinner speech, or a hard-hitting political polemic. These closing words delivered to the Milwaukee Advertising Club on February 28, 1950 best illustrate the Alexander mode:

> This is the most discouraging era mankind has ever known. But let me close this way . . . this is a different speech, I think a different approach than I've ever made before in my life, and I don't know why. Sometimes you get discouraged, maybe it's about your job. Maybe it's about your body or girl. You had such high dreams and they didn't come out. Sometimes I get discouraged too, and I wonder whether or not its worth the candle.
>
> Listen, people, a poet felt that way one time, and he said this. He said,
> "But God, it won't come right. It won't come right.
> I've worked it over 'til my brain is numb. The first flash came so bright.
> Then more ideas after it, plenty. I thought it would come to constellation men would wonder at.
> Perhaps it's just a fireworks flash, this darker darkness, scorched pasteboard, sour smoke.
> But, God, the thought was great, the scheme, the dreams.
> Why, 'til the first charm broke, the thing just built itself,
> While I lay flat and admired it.
> And then it struck, half-done, the lesser half, worse luck,
> You see, it's dead, as yet.
> Oh, it's got a frame, a body, but the heart, the soul, the fiery, vital part to give it life,
> Is what I cannot get.
> Oh, I tried, God, You know it, tried to snatch live fire,
> But I just pawed cold ashes.
> I'd drop the thing entirely, only I can't, because I love my job.
> You, Who ride the thunder, God, up yonder or here, wherever You are.
> You, Who ride the thunder, do You know what it is to dream and drudge and throb, I wonder.
> Did it come at you with a rush, your dream, your plan?
> If so, I know how you began.
> Yes, with rapt face and sparkling eyes,
> Swinging in hot glow out between the diving skies,
> Marking the new scenes with their new beachlines,
> Sketching in sun and moon, the lightning and the rain,
> Sowing the hills with pine, and wreathing a rim of purple round the flame.
> Oh, I know You laughed then, as You caught and wrought the first, swift, rapturous outlines of your thought.
> And then came Your greatest Idea--Man. Man.
> Oh, I see it now.

God, forgive my pettish role. I see Your job.
And while ages crawl, Your lips take laboring lines,
Your eyes are satellites for man, the fire, flower,
and center of it all.
Man won't come right.
After Your patient centuries, recastings, tired Gethsemanes,
and tense Golgothas,
He, Your central theme, is just a jangling echo of your dream.
Grand as the rest may be, he ruins it.
Oh God, why don't You quit, crumble it all?
And dream again? But no, flaw after flaw, You work it out.
Revise, refine, beyond each brutality, war and woe.
The sot, the fool, the tyrant of the mob,
Oh, God, how You must love Your job."

So help me, I love mine. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much, you've been a wonderful audience.[1]

Abraham Lincoln wisely counselled, "Always preach hope, never dispair." Alexander personified this mood in an unusually constant and radiant way. In the body of his speeches he dwelt on somber themes of war, totalitarian government, on widows and orphans and the beleaguered poor. But he always ended on a note of hope. To an Oklahoma-wide radio audience, Alexander, as candidate for the United States Senate, declared in climactic fashio that in spite of all the awesome problems of the day there could indeed be a better world ahead.

> Science has far outstripped the diplomat and the statesman in his quest for peace. The A-Bomb and the projected H-Bomb are evidence of this. We must heed, "The Voice of Christ Once More, Heard in the Pause of the Cannon's Roar."
>
> The trite statement that "politics and religion do not mix" is basically false. Fooled by the power of the slogan, many people confuse the American principle of the separation of Church and State with the occupancy of a Senate seat by a religious man. Nothing is so false and few things are so un-American. For such an attitude discriminates against a large and valuable portion of our American citizenry. Religious men have made the greatest contributions to American democracy and to the progress of our country.

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[1] "Building Our Kind of World," pp. 62-63.

> I do not think I am worthy of wearing the mantle of the great religious statesmen who built this country on the foundation of trust in God and the personal freedom of every man who lives under the torch of liberty; but with God's help, I <u>can</u> honestly and conscientiously speak with your voice in the place where the decisions that shape the destiny of our world will be made. In that place I could stand against corruption; there I could cry out against the stifling of civil liberties, and more important, there I could help translate the lofty ideals of the brotherhood of man into the mind-shaking reality of a peaceful world. There I could stand for an unyielding allegiance to the infinite worth of every human personality. For these are the basic principles of the Christ to whom I dedicated my life fifteen years ago. I do not apologize for being a Christian minister and I am convinced that the religious precepts which I have taught for fifteen years are realistic, not idealistic; that they can be demonstrated, not merely declared; that they can be possessed, not merely professed; that today they alone will solve the momentous problems facing our great country in government, economics and international affairs.
>
> For too long, Christians have held back timidly while Communists shouted proudly--"We are Communists and we are changing the world." We who bear his name must be willing to say rpoudly anywhere and everywhere--yes, even on the floor of the United States Senate--"I am a Christian, and with God's help we can make this a Christian world."[1]

Although Alexander never spoke from the floor of the Senate, he went on to the day of his death declaring in every place he went, "I am a Christian, and with God's help we can make this a better world." Especially did his concluding remarks reinforce such a viewpoint.

CHAPTER XI

ALEXANDER'S STYLE

The speaker's style, or his selection and combination of words, is an important element of his means of persuasion. Indeed, these symbols of meaning are the very tools with which the spokesman forges his career as a persuader. The extant works of Alexander's efforts at persuasion furnish evidence that the colorful pastor brought forth a fairly effective style, drawing on the resources of language in a way which satisfied the intellectual and emotional needs of the speech situations which he encountered.

Charles Reynolds Brown, in his discussion of the constituents of style, recommended three criteria to the Yale divinity students: "You will recall the familiar word of Augustine, 'Veritas pateat, veritas placeat, veritas moveat.' 'Make the truth plain! Make the truth pleasing! Make the truth moving!'"[1] With some minor modification, these are three useful guides in the examination of Alexander's use of language since clarity, appropriateness and energetic vividness are the chief characteristics of the late clergyman's style. Moreover, these have been considered the basic constituents of effective speech since ancient times. In her

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[1]Charles Reynolds Brown, The Art of Preaching, pp. 4-5. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 131.

comprehensive study of this rhetorical canon, Jane Blankenship asserts: "Since Aristotle every speaker has been obliged to ask himself three questions about each word he uses: Is it clear? Is it appropriate to the audience and to the occasion? Is it vivid?"[1]

Alexander's Simplicity of Style

Alexander's practice echoed the long-held view that clarity is the first requisite of effective communication. In his efforts to make his ideas readily understandable, the Oklahoma City minister put to work simple words familiar to the commonest individual in his audience. In this, as in so many areas of persuasion, he stands with Beecher, who told Yale seminarians:

> I have known a great many most admirable preachers who lost almost all real sympathetic hold upon their congregations because they were too literary, too periphrastic, and too scholastic in their diction. They always preferred to use large language, rather than good Saxon English. But let me tell you, there is a subtle charm in the use of plain language that pleases people, they scarcely know why. It gives bell-notes which ring out suggestions to the popular heart. There are words that men have heard when boys at home, around the hearth and the table, words that are full of father and of mother, and full of common and domestic life. Those are the words that afterward, when brought into your discourse, will produce a strong influence on your auditors, giving an element of success; words which will have an effect that your hearers themselves cannot understand. For, after all, simple language is loaded down and stained through with the best testimonies and memories of life.[2]

Alexander's pragmatic cast of mind (paradoxically balanced by a soaring imagination) demonstrated itself in his determination to use concrete language, to "make sense." He would have agreed with Gerald Kennedy's

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[1] A Sense of Style (Wadsworth, California: Belmont Publishing Company, 1968), p. 43.

[2] Yale Lectures on Preaching, I (New York: Fords, Howard and Hulbert, 1892), p. 131. Quoted in Baxter, Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 159.

maxim about dramatic preaching: "The heart of drama is concreteness. Abstract preaching is always poor preaching."[1] The preacher-showman of Oklahoma employed down-to-earth language as he sought to bring the blessings of an abstract heavenly paradise to a level within the reach of humanity.

On one occasion, the Oklahoma City favorite told his congregation about Christianity's need for simple, sensible language:

> May I say to you that the greatest need of the church of Christ today is to rediscover Jesus. . . . I'm worried about the fact that in so many of our churches you find so few businessmen and a businessman said to me no later than yesterday. He said to me on the train, 'I didn't know you were a preacher when I sat down here. I didn't know who you were, but I heard you speak two years ago in San Francisco and I said to my wife "If I could hear that kind of message I would go to church every Sunday."' He didn't say that because my speech was so good. He only said that . . . because . . . what I said made sense to him as a businessman. And there is too much being said in high tone theological, ecclesiastical, liturgical language within the church today that does not make sense. Sixty-five per cent of the businessmen in Oklahoma City right this moment are not attending any one church. And why not? Well, I'm afraid that we must take some of the blame, because we have gotten so far away from the simple Master that He was. He taught in parables. He never used language that they didn't understand. He was simplicity itself.[2]

Theological nomenclature was anathema to the pragmatic preacher. Alexander told his church members he cared nothing for their learning about "vicarious sacrifice," but he was deeply concerned that they demonstrate the love of Jesus in the way they engaged in competitive sports and in the way they treated the widow next door: ". . . it has to come down where you live," said Alexander as he translated doctrinal terms

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[1]"While I'm on My Feet," p. 136.

[2]"Rediscovering Jesus," undated sermon, pp. 5-6.

into concrete language which was anchored in the every day experience of his listeners.[1]

Alexander's style could not be called obscure; his sentences are clear enough that people of moderate intelligence would not find it necessary to give them a second reading. His use of concrete, commonplace words contributed to such a style. However, the speeches and sermons (most of them preserved by dictating machine or tape recorder and later transcribed) show a spoken style rather than a written one. Characteristics common to oral speech such as fragmentary sentences, frequent contractions, redundancy, vehemence, copiousness, the use of personal pronouns and slang, prevade the minister's rhetoric. Interpolations such as "People, I say this to you," "I tell you this," "People, I swear to you," "I say to you," dot his speech manuscripts. Perhaps he felt such prefixes were useful in recapturing attention which was beginning to fall off; certainly they lent a directness to his style; in written form, however, they seem merely excessive.

Alexander's Adaptive Approach to Style

Alexander evidently saw persuasion as an adaptive art. He spoke in language which met the level of his hearers, rather than the level of his own training. Since his audiences, by and large, were comprised of people who knew little of theology, he couched practically nothing in the language of the seminary. He spoke to lay audiences in lay language, employing common examples and well-known instances which were instantly intelligible to the people who came to hear him.

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[1]Sermon of January 8, 1956, p. 4.

Moreover, when Alexander spoke to special groups, as he often did when addressing conventions of automobile dealers, pharmacists, naval personnel, cattlemen, educators, or bankers, he frequently put to work figures of speech which were keyed to their particular interests. Alexander's practice indicates he had learned the art of identification as set forth in Kenneth Burke's counsel: "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his."[1]

Alexander's keen interest in his fellow men impelled him to learn about their vocational and recreative activities. His facile mind, sensitized to these interests, recorded and filed the shoptalk terms of farm implement dealers, naval commanders, men of medicine, plumbers, and bankers, making it easy for him to ingratiate himself with them through the judicious use of words familiar to their life styles.

This process of stylistic identification was in clear evidence in the preacher-candidate's campaign speech broadcast on May 1, 1950. Addressing himself to the important agricultural segment of the electorate, Alexander's use of rhythmic and colorful language, adaptive analogy, flavored with dirision illustrate his application of propriety in word usage.

> The Brannan Plan being promoted by Mr. Truman was not created by the farmer. It was designed by paper and pencil theorists who didn't know how to grub a stump, milk a cow, chop a row of cotton or plow a row of corn--who didn't know the difference between a Georgia stock and an autogyro; who didn't know the difference between a double shovel and a streetcar; who didn't know the difference between a Tandem disc and a flying saucer.
> . . . . . .

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[1] A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 31.

> I propose to give the farmer abundance instead of scarcity; freedom instead of red tape regulation. Under natural conditions, the farmer's production is limited by the insect and the parasite --such as the greenbug, the corn borer, the grasshopper, wheat rust, etc. And under this un-natural law, known as the Brannan Farm Plan, he is also the victim of the national planner insect, the bureaucratic parasite and all the worms and bugs of federal control.
>
> The farmer uses an insecticide to get rid of the cattle tick and the boll weevil, the grasshopper and the greenbug, and he can use his ballot as an insecticide to get rid of the bureaucractic pests that are destroying his entire economy with unnecessary regulation, red tape, and control.[1]

Alexander employed such adaptation in all his communication efforts, choosing to speak as nearly as he could the language of the people he sought to persuade.

Alexander's Use of Vivid Language

In his desire to help his listeners see themselves, not as they were in fact, but as they could be in Christ, Alexander employed language which moved the imagination. The minister's style was often rich in imagery as he sought to bring heaven down to earth for his less imaginative hearers. Alexander's practice exemplified precepts set forth by Charles Reynolds Brown, who saw imaginative language as indespensable to the preacher's art:

> By that wholesome use of the imagination which enables him to see the Unseen and to hear the Unuttered, the preacher can give such genuine and living substance to those "hoped-for things" as to cause them to exercise their pull and lift upon the hearts and wills of all those to whom he speaks. He makes the absent present. He takes that which is historic and causes it to live and move and transact spiritual business there in those lives before him. He takes those things which are as yet only ideally possible and causes people to behold them as actually capable of being wrought out in terms of solid achievement.[2]

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[1] Campaign Address, May 1, 1950, pp. 5-6.

[2] The Art of Preaching, pp. 143-144. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 79.

R. W. Dale, another advocate of imaginative preaching, urged young preachers to cultivate and put to work the power of their minds.

> . . . imagination is a most legitimate instrument of persuasion. It is an indispensable instrument. The minds of men are sometimes so sluggish that we cannot get them to listen to us unless our case is stated with a warmth and a vigour which the imagination alone can supply. There are many, again, who are not accessible to abstract argument, but who recognize truth at once when it assumes that concrete form with which imagination may invest it; they cannot follow the successive steps of your demonstration, but they admit the truth of your proposition the moment you show them your diagram. Then, again, there are some truths--and these among the greatest--which rest, not upon abstract reasoning, but upon facts. Imagination must make the facts vivid and real.[1]

Alexander's Dream Metaphor

In his efforts to change spiritual concepts into concrete realities, Alexander used the metaphor of the dream; it is one of the most quickly identifiable characteristics of the man's imaginative style. The visionary shoman-pastor's practice identifies strongly, from both content and style perspectives, with Richard Weaver's maxim that ". . . rhetoric at its truest seeks to perfect men by showing them better versions of themselves, links in that chain extending up toward the ideal . . ."[2] Alexander found the language of the dream instrumental in building a moving peroration for his sermon delivered Christmas Day, 1955. The vivacious pastor urged his hearers toward a fuller life with Christ with these words:

> This actually happened. It's a mystical experience, and I'm not a very mystical person but I had a dream one time, and it was around Christmas time, shortly before Christmas. Most realistic thing I ever had in my life. I dreamed that I was sent to the

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[1] R. W. Dale, Nine Lectures on Preaching (Lordos: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), p. 48. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 79.

[2] Quoted in Wil A. Linkugel, et. al., Contemporary American Speeches (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1969), p. 137.

court of the Emperor of all the world. And that I was told before hand, that when I got there, I would be able to ask any favor. To express a desire of the Emperor of all the world. And in my dream, I stood there, before his throne. It was shortly after I came back from overseas where I served as war correspondent the latter part of World War II, and I'd seen a lot of sorrow. I had seen hundreds of bodies eaten, thrown in lye, at Buchenwald. I had seen little boys, scores and hundreds of them, who'd meet the boat as you came into Italy with the filthiest expressions you can imagine, and who would do anything in the world for a cigarette. Just one cigarette. I've seen families living on boiled leaves. I had seen that most of this world was going to bed hungry every night. When I was allowed to go to the court of the Emperor of all the world, and ask one boon, I immediately asked that Christmas might be all over the world. And the Emperor granted my request. And I stood on the corner of the Universe, and I looked down the avenues of time and of the world, and I saw on every street corner, beautiful Christmas trees, I heard Angel Choirs singing, there wasn't a person who didn't have a loaded basket. Everything, everything was joy! And because of my request, it was Christmas all over the world! And I looked at the Emperor, and I said, "Thank you, this is good." And he said, "My Son, look again and tell me, is it good?" And I looked down there. Could my eyes be deceiving me? Or was that man tearing a branch off that Christmas tree to strike his neighbor? Was that well-to-do person calling that Negro a dirty coon? Were the Christmas lights out because of a strike in which both labor and capital were guilty of tyrannical methods? Was it true that this, that before had been Christmas all over the world and so beautiful, was now hate and war once again ravishing the earth? And I looked back to the temple to the Emperor, tears were streaming down my cheeks, and I said, "What's the matter? What happened? You granted my request." And he said, "Yes, my Son but you made the wrong request. You asked that there be Christmas all over the world. What you really wanted was that my Christ would be in every heart, and even I with all my power, cannot do that." And then I woke up from my dream, but it was still with me. And I wrote this:

"Emperor of all men:
Help me to help others and myself to see,
That Christmas depends on the likes of me.
That it isn't far to Bethlehem town,
That it's anywhere that Christ comes down;
That charters of freedom and bills of rights
Are merely the symbols of some great lights
That men accepted through ages past
When they found that truth alone would last.
Help us, O God, like these shepherd men
To follow the star that shines again

On a hungry, embitterd and tired world,
To carry the banner bravely unfurled
Of justice and brotherhood, love and peace,
Of kindly compassion that never will cease.
And most of all, O God, show us the light
Which came to save us one holy night."

> People, I'm not asking you to say to a theological creed, I'm not asking you to accept a set of liturgical doctrines, I'm not asking you to take a set of rules. I'm not asking you to say, "I know what I have believed." I'm asking you to say, "I know in whom I have believed." I'm asking you to take the Jesus a prophetic fact, a profoundly moving fact upon history, but most important the one who has the answer for you and me. And if you accept him, if you give him a chance, then you shall call his name counsellor, the Mighty Prince, the one altogether lovely, the lily of the valley, the bright and morning star, the most important of all your life, you will call him the King of Kings.

Alexander's close identification with the imagery of the dreamer might have caused some of his listeners to think of him as an impractical person bent on quixotic, unreachable ideals. That Alexander was not satisfied to dwell in a merely verbal dream world is, however, easily established. The pastor who could make people dream of possibilities beyond the present realities also had a way of seeing dreams brought to fruition. The colorful clergyman was chief among those who dreamed about a new church site which would enable First Christian Church to minister to more souls -- especially youthful ones. Richard C. Ratliff, special correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor, examined the 40-acre project when only the outdoor amphitheatre was completed. A large spread in the Monitor featuring the story concluded "A short film entitled 'Preview of Heaven,' has been made which tells of his boyhood dream of a youth center to offset juvenile delinquency, and how he clung to his dream through the years until it is now being realized."[1] Alexander was an effective

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[1]"Pastor Builds New Center," The Christian Science Monitor, February 9, 1948.

organizer who saw many of the dreams repainted so well in words become fulfilled in fact. Bess Withers, speaking ofAlexander's penchant for dreaming said it well: "He was 'a beautiful dreamer' and carved out his dreams with God's help."[1] These dreams, many of which were fulfilled in his lifetime, others which were achieved after his death, and still others which never came into being, thoroughly flavored the pastor's thought and expression.

Alexander's Poetry

The Oklahoma City minister's preference for the poetic form of thought was hardly singular. Many ministerial spokesmen rely on verse for their expression; among Alexander's contemporaries whose sermons manifest a considerable reliance on poetry are Harry Emerson Fosdick, Leslie Weatherhead and Clovis Chappel. All of these, like Alexander, were fond of casting their ideas in the poet's framework. However, Alexander not only drew on poets' works to add vivid force to his expression; the red-haired former boxing champion also wrote much of the poetry he used in his speeches. His stanzas are found in tributes he paid to public figures, in funeral messages, in dedicatory addresses, and in marriage ceremonies in addition to his sermons and lectures. Here is a piece the prankish preacher dashed off and read at a wedding ceremony he performed.

FRUSTRATION

Prophets have said in days gone past
That whatever happens, love will last;
Poets have sung in dreamy strain:
Always we'll have Love's Old Refrain;
Even preachers have had their word to say:
"Love is of God and rules for aye."

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[1]Letter of May 12, 1970.

If prophet and poet and preacher speak true,
Love's door will open and we'll go through
To laugh and love and sing a song
That earthy people deemed quite wrong
When long ago in the early morn
Ruth and Robert and love were born.

And wouldn't it be everlasting damnation
If all that they had was infatuation!

Not all of the preacher-poet's verse was of this off-hand nature. As we have seen earlier, some of the poetry he wrote was rich in substance of thought and most attractive in texture of expression; probably he spent time writing and revising some of the more polished work such as "It Was Just a Dream" and "The Power to Become." Most of the busy circuit-speaker's poetic output, however, was written in off-moments on airplanes or in lonely hotel rooms or in between flights at airport terminals. Probably this was the origin of the following poem written to adorn a speech to an agrarian youth group; breezy and simple, the message is not great poetry, but it probably served the occasion by being well-adapted to such an audience:

I have to live with myself and so
I want to be fit for myself to know;
I want to be able as days go by
To always look myself in the eye.
I don't want to stand with the setting sun
And hate myself for the things I've done.

I want to go out with my head erect,
I have to deserve all men's respect;
But here in the struggle for fame and self,
I want to be able to like myself.
I don't want to look at myself and know
That I'm bluster, bluff and empty show.

I can never hide myself from me,
I can see what others may never see;
I know what others may never know,
I can never fool myself--and so

Whatever happens I want to be
Self-respecting and conscience-free.[1]

In other speeches, Alexander used the charm of the poet's art to advance his goal of a broader outreach in Christian fellowship and a more adventurous search for truth. To a General Federation of Women's Clubs Convention audience, he recited some of his verse adapted for the occasion.

I'm tired of sailing my little bark
Far inside the harbor bar
I want to be out where the big ships float,
I want to be out where the great ships are,
And if my light craft should prove too frail
For the storms that sweep the billows o'er
I'd rather go down in the stirring fight,
Than drowse to death on some sheltered shore.[2]

Again and again, as we have already seen, Alexander demonstrated a fondness for the poet's craft.

Other Figures of Speech

Alexander's use of imaginative expression is in ready evidence both within and without the bounds of the more strictly poetic genre. In his efforts to impress his message on the minds of his listeners, Alexander employed striking metaphor, alliteration, antithesis, rhetorical questions, personification, and historical and literary allusions.

Through the use of striking metaphor, the popular lecturer developed a technique which helped seize the attention of his listeners and impress them with the seriousness of world conditions as viewed by the speaker. Here is a favorite of his which he used in political speeches as well as lectures. This instance is from an address to the National

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[1]The 4-H Club News, Ames, Iowa, June 24, 1954, p. 1.

[2]"Faith and Freedom," p. 392.

Association of Manufacturers Annual Congress:

We are on a train, and the name of that train is the United States of America. We are going ninety miles an hour, downhill. The brakes are gone. The train is loaded with dynamite, and there is a cliff just ahead. There are other trains behind us--Europe and Asia--but they won't go over the cliff unless we do. Up in the cab of the engine we have a few fellows fooling around first with this throttle and then with another, hoping that they will hit the right one, but the windows are so dirty that they can't see out and the train goes madly on its way. The fireman is stoking coal just as fast as he can go. We don't know why, but he keeps her burning hot, and most of what he is throwing in is money, because he thinks that that is the answer to all of our problems. But the train just goes faster and faster toward destruction.

You go back to the government cars, and a few officials are sorting out packages. Every once in a while, when they think nobody is looking, they will take a specially valuable one and slip it under their coat and think they are getting by with it, in a grand manner.

You go back to the laboring car, and they are having a meeting, a rather noisy meeting. They are saying, "We'll fix them back in that club car! We'll throw them out"--not realizing that if they blow it up, the whole train is lost because it is loaded with dynamite.

You go back to the club car and there are a few boys back there, possibly some of them members of the National Association of Manufacturers, sipping highballs and smoking big black cigars, and they are saying, "We'll fix them up in that laboring car. We'll starve them out,"--not realizing that if they starve them out, the whole train is lost.

You go back to the coaches and the kiddies are running up and down the aisles, throwing orange peelings. And then it is that--perhaps it is Claude Wampler, your President, or perhaps it is my friend, the Admiral, here, or perhaps it is Mr. Boyd, or perhaps it is a scientist or a preacher, but somebody comes in and says, "People, be careful. I've been up front, and I know what's happening. This train is going ninety miles an hour, downhill, the brakes are gone, the train is loaded with dynamite, and there is a cliff just ahead. For heaven's sake, let's pull together. Let's lean out the windows and put golf-sticks or anything else between the wheels and the brake drums and maybe we can bring this thing to a stop." But they don't even hear him because they are too busy listening to soap operas on somebody's portable radio, or they are too busy learning that "Duz does everything." They are too busy reading pulp magazines. The train goes madly on its way.

The only one who does hear is a waiter, and he goes into the dining car and puts on a clean white jacket and goes and stands on the observation car platform, with his hands in his

> pockets, looking at the stars, and wondering how soon the end will come. And that is not too dark a picture of our world today.[1]

Alexander put his metaphorical style to work in his U. S. Senate campaign speech, "Birds of a Feather," broadcast on November 2, 1950. The artful use of the dominating figure of speech provided cohesion and imagery to a hard-hitting speech closing the preacher's only race for political office. Here is how he introduced the message:

> Good evening, my fellow-citizens of Oklahoma: This is Bill Alexander speaking to you over a statewide radio network. I am going to talk to you about birds of a feather. I am going to talk to you about eagles and sparrows and I am in no mood for humor.[2]

For a dozen paragraphs, the candidate linked his opponent, Mike Monroney (U. S. Representative at the time), to a big-spending, class-exploiting, welfare-state Washington, D. C. Administration, saying "Birds of a feather flock together -- they do so on the Potomac even as on the Canadian, the Cimarron and the Blue." [3] Alexander spent his remaining broadcast time contrasting his own and his opponent's postures on the election issues as he saw them. Returning to his thematic metaphor, he concluded his speech in a way which employed vivid contrast, visual and kinesthetic imagery, while conveying a sense of finality to his message:

> Fellow-Americans, Democrats and Republicans alike, in the day when this country was born, our forefathers were not primarily concerned with small, sparrow-like interpretations. America was made the greatest country in the world by big men--eagle-like men, who were not afraid to soar in the skies of freedom for a

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[1] "Our Moral Needs," delivered December 6, 1950, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City, pp. 3-5.

[2] "Birds of a Feather," p. 1.

[3] Ibid., p. 2.

> cause they knew to be right.
>
> I plead that you pioneering Oklahomans choose the soaring flight of the eagle, rather than the short, low flights of the sparrow. America did not become the land of the free and the home of the brave by rubber-stamps and "vote-'er-straight" methods. America became great because great men made her great.
>
> Birds of a feather flock together--and all the denials of all the professional politicians in the world, will not alter that fact.[1]

The Oklahoma City preacher's use of alliteration was fairly frequent, although he never seemed so enchanted with the rhythmic figure as Peter Marshall and other men of the cloth.[2] One of Alexander's favorite expressions was man's nobility when he was "captured in the clutch of a great convention." Sometimes he combined alliteration with antithesis, saying "it's Christ or Cremation." Alexander closed a radio sermon with an expression fusing alliteration and personification with rich visual and auditory imagery.

> Dreams are they all--but shall we despise them, God's dreams? No, we can build that world and in this magnificent march I hear the thunder of God's feet--it's like the restless rattling of drums in the dark--I hear music of bugles--that's the Church of Tomorrow --it's coming closer, ever closer, and 'Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.'[3]

This climactic conclusion was the cue for the First Christian Church Choir's rousing rendition of The Battle Hymn of the Republic, the theme

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[1] Ibid., p. 13.

[2] Marshall's phrase (during his early ministry):
"So much of our modern preaching consists of platitudes . . .
polite and perfumed philosophies . . .
pacifistic palaver . . .
puerile palpitations . . .
paltry paraphrases . . .
in which a great deal is spoken and nothing said" must have set some kind of a record for pulpit alliteration. Catherine Marshall, A Man Called Peter (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), p. 45.

[3] "The Church of Tomorrow" originating in station KOMA, Oklahoma City, broadcast over CBS radio January 12, 1947, reprint, p. 6.

song of the congregation.

The colorful minister's speech texts show his liking for antithesis which added force and vividness to his expression:

> Christianity makes its greatest impression not by that which is said at the mourner's bench on Sunday morning, but rather by that which is done at the worker's bench through the week.
> . . . we must present Christianity not primarily as a theology, but rather as a way of life.
> . . . Christians must see to it that the rule of gold is replaced with the golden rule.
> . . . we must go deep in our convictions but be broad in our sympathies . . .
> . . . attend the church of your choice and remember the church is not a museum for the exhibition of perfect Christians but a hospital for the making of better ones.[1]

> . . . My friends, we can't successfully combat Communism all over the world with one hand on a gun and the other in the political pork barrel![2]

The preacher-entertainer often made use of rhetorical questions in his efforts to prod his hearers to think and react to the ideas Alexander was presenting; he also used them as transitional devices, tying his loosely structured speeches together with questions which would help keep interest high. Toward the close of a speech to salesmen of southern region, he framed questions as he personified--or deified--some people's philosophical commitments:

> You can just forget I'm a preacher for about three minutes and let me ask you one question. What do you believe? You see, the day of polytheism is not over. I don't say, "What do you believe", and mean by that, "what do you say, give accent to as creed?" I don't mean that. I mean, a man's God is that which he verily believes in. What do you believe? For instance, do you think the God of Mammon (that's money) do you think the God of Mammon is dead? Well, there are plenty of people worshiping it every Sunday, right here. Do you know that? Plenty of 'em. Do you think the God of Mars, the God

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[1] Ibid., pp. 2, 4-6.

[2] "Birds of a Feather," p. 5.

> of War, is dead? Do you think that the God of Venus, pleasure, do you think that God is dead? No, she's still alive. Do you think the God of Mercury, slick, crafty connivance, do you think that God is dead? No. We call ourselves monotheists but, we're not, we're not.
>
> I close by asking you, "What do you believe? What's your philosophy of life, call it what you will? Do you agree with Theodore Dreiser?" He says that man is just a parapathetic chemical laboratory driven about driven about by a sex impulse. He says that we're just spiders from the basement of the universe, spinning webs that will soon be brushed down and entirely forgotten. That's great, isn't it? Something to live by.[1]

Earlier, Alexander had used a series of rhetorical questions to provoke his hearers into a reconsideration of the benefits of America's free enterprise system -- a favorite theme of the rugged, individualistic preacher.

> We better get back to sound principles. If we keep on, the socialistic trend in which we find ourselves today, and five years from now, you're going to find that your American liberties are gone, people. Gone, once and for all.
>
> I spent six weeks in London a year ago last summer. The day I left London, three different accounts in the London Times, of three different men who had been tossed out of their jobs - Why? Because they had made one more tool than they were supposed to have made that day. Maybe you want that for your boys, but I don't for mine. I'm sick and tired of the Amer--this isn't political party, this is way above that--I'm sick and tired of the kind of Americans who are continually apologizing for the free enterprise system. What are you apologizing for, may I ask? Are you apologizing for the fact that you have five times as many telephones as all the rest of the world put together? Are you apologizing for the fact that the least of the negro kids in this town has a better chance to get a high school education than the other 20% in any other country in the world? Is that what you're apologizing for? Listen, people! We'd better realize that this country was made great in the first place by some people who tackled a tough job, and say, "You may be tough, but I'm a little tougher."[2]

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[1]"Four Secrets to Success," pp. 15-16.

[2]Ibid., p. 14.

Alexander's preference for the intimacy of the dialogue and a conversational manner may be seen in his frequent use of this figure of speech. One of his most popular speeches was built around four rhetorical questions:

> I have four questions:
> Do you have a wholesome attitude toward life?
> Dc you have a world fit to live in?
> Do you have a self that is fit to live with?
> Do you have a philosophy fit to live by?[1]

The energetic spokesman for reform causes preferred concrete words to abstract ones; he characteristically linked his ideas with concrete realities common to the listeners' experiences. Personification was one technique he used to bring actuality and liveliness to his appeals. In his radio plea for sweeping advancement in education, Alexander personified a common enemy of democratic reform. After explaining the benefits of the constitutional amendments needed to improve Oklahoma's educational system, the civic leader warned:

> But there's a villain in the scene, and that's a careless, indolent, ignorant old fellow whom we call "Ol' Sleepy." "Ol' Sleepy represents the lethal silent vote which threatens the welfare of your child and mine, for with these questions submitted on the general election ballot, each amendment must have a majority of ALL VOTES CAST if it is to become law. That means that every "Ol' Sleepy" who goes to the polls on November 5th and neglects to vote <u>for</u> the Better Schools amendments automatically will be counted as voting <u>against</u> the welfare of our public schools. So it is that I appeal to you, the fathers and mothers of Oklahoma school children:
>
> Beware of "Ol' Sleepy" the silent vote. Be sure that you vote for the Better Schools amendments when you go to the polls on November 5th, and urge your neighbor to vote for them.[2]

The preacher-candidate again employed the figure in his "Birds of

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[1] "Faith and Freedom," p. 381.

[2] "Plea for Better Education," pp. 6-7.

a Feather" speech of November 2, 1950, asking the Oklahoma electorate:

> Would you stand by in silence and let helpless old folks, widows and orphans be robbed of their savings? The robber is that sly, creeping thief of all values--INFLATION--caused by reckless spending.[1]

Villanous concepts in Alexander's discourse lost much of their nebulousness through his application of personification.

Alexander's general use of a plain style did not prevent him from the use of literary and historical allusions which probably ingratiated him with the more literary of his listeners. Alexander's challenge to a convention audience of druggists employed this technique of keying one's ideas to an often latent referent in the hearer's mind.

> You say, What can I do? I am just a little bit of a person? What difference does it make--tidal waves are sweeping the world--what difference does little me make? You are the answer. Two thousand years ago the world was falling down; the Roman Empire, the most powerful in history, was crumbling into dust. Ichabod was written all over it. And at that time there were not many men mighty and noble, there were a few called ignorant and unlearned fishermen. But read history, that's all, they turned a world upside down because they believed in some basic principles. "And the winds came and the storm blew and beat against that house, but it did not fall because it was on a solid foundation."[2]

Reinforcing the great American traditions, like praising the virtues of Christian faith, came easily to the sentimental and patriotic Alexander. Telling his salesmen audience that he made no apologies for trying to sell <u>them</u> something, the former door-to-door salesman said:

> You know, this "freedom of man," you know what it is, people? I wasn't going to say this, but I went up to Boston last week and I spoke to the American Business Teachers Association. I had never been to Boston before, and Dr. Fred Guilder, Superintendent of Schools, met me at the airport and we were driving in, and got into

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[1]"Birds of a Feather," pp. 9-10.

[2]"Speech to the Iowa State Pharmaceutical Association," February, 1948, p. 10

> town and he said, "Do you see that building?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "That's Fanuiel Hall, the Cradle of Liberty." I had heard about Fanuiel Hall. I said, "I wish I could see it." Just then a truck pulled out and we pulled in there and ran in to see it. He said it would just take a couple of minutes. Two hours and a half later, I came out of there with one of the greatest inspirations I've ever had in my life. You know, it was there that Daniel Webster stood up and talked for two hours and forty-five minutes for the freedom of man and for liberty. It was there that Wendell Phillips stood up and talked to his audiences. It was there that they came after Britain had put the tax on tea and they decided that they didn't want any foreign tax, in spite of the fact that tea cost less after the British put the tax on than it did before. But, they belived in something, a little word which we take for granted, a little word called "Liberty." Then it was that they dressed up as Indians and went and tossed into Boston Harbor. You remember? I sat in an autombile over Boston Common. There's a big hill there, where General Gage, in seventeen-hundred-and-something--he was the British General, he wanted his troops to drill in the middle of town so that everyone would see them--and he was afraid, you know, but he ruined the best sleigh-riding in Boston. About three hundred Bostonian kids got together and what did they do but form a committee of forty, and these kids walked right up to the General and they said, "We know you have to drill your soldiers, but couldn't you do it some place else? You've ruined the best sleigh ride in Boston." And, he kicked them out of there and turned to one of his colleagues and said, "How can you expect to get anywhere with the elders when the children suck Liberty from their mothers' breasts the first day they're born?" It's tough, people. This hasn't been a short fight. This began way back yonder when a guiding Moses said to a tyrant, "Let my people go." It came on up through the Magna Carta. And we'd better be willing to work for this thing we call Liberty. We'd better be willing to perspire for the basic way of life in which we believe, or we're going to find out that we've sold something very precious, very cheap, and we can't get it back.[1]

In a speech to the New Idea Corporation Alexander made references to people and places famous in history and literature as he illustrated the rich heritage of truth and freedom woven into the tapesty of humanity. Brief mention of such historical times and figures were probably calculated to capitalize upon the hearers' cherished ideals through allusion's indirection. The below instance illustrated his use of this stylistic technique.

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[1]"Four Secrets to Success," p. 15.

> . . . there is one thing that is more powerful than anything that has been discovered, is being discovered, or will be discovered in the laboratory. It is that something in the mind of an individual which, tied to eternal truth, results in all humanity being lifted. Like the humble French doctor living in a little village in France, paralyzed and the neighbors picked up rocks and yelled, "Get out, you are a useless mouth to feed." And with the blood and tears mingling, he tells his wife, "They want me to leave town because I am useless, but I am going to stay because I have something to give France." When they chose the most important man to France, they didn't choose Napoleon, They chose Louis Pasteur and today modern medicine rests more and more on his titanic work because in his sphere of influence he allowed himself to be captivated by an idea to which the future belonged.[1]

Moving to a native scene, Alexander's love for American history was apparent as he spoke of the need for men to give themselves over to the great ideas, saying:

> It may be a fifteen-year-old boy down at the dock in New Orleans--and fifty years later he may be sitting in the White House signing the Emancipation Proclamation because one guy gave himself to the feeling it was bigger than he was and therefore in another terrific generation he became part of the answer instead of part of the problem.[2]

Alexander later compared the sacrificial spirit of the early American Republicans to the apathy of modern citizens.

> Standing in snow, some of them with rags wrapped around their feet, some of them barefooted, they hold a lantern and Tom Paine with a drum between his legs and a parchment on the drum, writing that speech: "These are the times that try men's souls, the sunshine patriot, and the summer soldier will fall by the wayside."
> We are today summer soldiers, when 50% of the people in the last election didn't even take the trouble to vote and then they say we are free of communism from without. I am not nearly so afraid of communism from without as this apathy and indifference to not even give up one single thing for it. Communism hasn't a chance in the world if we will give democracy one-half the allengiance that the Communists give to their ideals.[3] [Applause]

By only touching on these points, the minister seemed not to risk blatancy

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[1] "Faith and Freedom," p. 9.

[2] Ibid., p. 10

[3] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

or ponderousness. Rather, by the artful use of allusion, Alexander identified with his hearers' deeply held values without belaboring the association.

Alexander's style, like his choice of ideas, organization, and manner of delivery, was a reflection of his personality. His use of language epitomized his pragmatic habits of thought, his easy identification with the common people, and his rich and vibrant imagination. While Alexander's choice of words was, in the main, effective, there were times when the style was not particularly vivid. Sometimes hackneyed expressions crept into his speeches to mar the over-all freshness of his communications; occasionally insertions of spontaneous thought were compounded into prolixity.

If the bulk of Alexander's sermons and lectures are not models of stylistic excellence, invested with balanced sentences and polished periods, it is of little consequence. Only a few of the most diligent practitioners' works meet such standards. The Oklahoma City persuader would have probably defended his generally imaginative but often unpolished preaching and speaking with words like those of Scherer who counselled young spokesmen of the gospel in this manner:

> I mean to make everything subservient to one purpose, and that purpose not the writing of a great sermon or the elaboration of some mighty and puissant theme, but the ministering to human souls of the redemptive power of God . . . . You are preaching not to make clear what good preaching is or ought to be; you are preaching to lay hold desperately on life, broken life, hurt life, soiled life, staggering life, helpless life, hard, cynical, indifferent, willful life, to lay on it with both hands in the high name of the Lord Christ and to lift it toward his dream.[1]

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[1] Paul Scherer, For We Have This Treasure. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), p. 181. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 238.

Most of those who heard Alexander--tens of thousands of people across the nation--would probably have agreed that the preacher with the language of the dream had given them such a lift.

CHAPTER XII

ALEXANDER'S DELIVERY

Cicero's estimate of the importance of delivery to the orator, extensive though it is, may not exactly representative of the opinions of the ancients, but similar views were held by Demosthenes and Quintillian among others. Cicero declared:

> Delivery, I say, has the sole and supreme power in oratory; without it a speaker of the highest mental capacity can be held in no esteem; while one of moderate abilities, with this qualification, may surpass even those of the highest talent.[1]

Although some rhetorical critics might take issue with Cicero's "sole and supreme" argument, few minds, modern or venerable, have significantly altered the pre-eminence in which delivery skills are held.

Alexander's great effectiveness as a persuader was closely related to his cultivation of an attention-arresting delivery. In the consideration of his presentation techniques, I will examine his direct and spontaneous manner, use of vocal elements, bodily movement, and the supportive influence of his personality in delivery.

An Alexander Hallmark: Spontaneity in Delivery

In the delivery of his sermon and lecture ideas, the showman-preacher sought to establish a direct and intimate relationship with his

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[1]DeOratore III, lvi, in On Oratory and Orators, transl. by J. S. Watson (London: H. G. Bohn, 1855).

hearers. Alexander's efforts to achieve this closeness may be seen in his choice of the extemporaneous mode of delivery, his continuous eye contact, and his influence in the design of "The Church of Tomorrow."

As has been noted earlier, Alexander characteristically spoke without notes of any kind; only in radio and television addresses did he allow his desire for freedom in speaking to be curbed by an adherence to written material. His use of the extemporaneous style aided his sensitivity to others and added directness to his communications. According to A. Craig Baird:

> The extempore speaker, especially sensitive to the audience, and the effort at circular (two way) response centers on his ideas rather than on words. The language develops spontaneously. If he is a seasoned speaker, he will adequately clothe his purposes and content with effective vocabulary.[1]

Beecher cast his advocacy of noteless preaching in his customarily vivid way, saying, "A written sermon is apt to reach out to people like a gloved hand. An unwritten sermon reaches out the warm and glowing palm, bared to the touch."[2]

Contemporary Methodist preacher Gerald Kennedy insists that freedome from notes is an inestimable asset for a preacher who looks at his task from the viewpoint of the pew.

> Speaking with neither manuscript nor notes doubles the pleasure of the preacher and increases it tenfold for the congregation. When I read some fellow's article in a ministerial magazine arguing for the reading of sermons, I wonder if he has ever talked with his laymen. He may convince a few scholarly brothers who would rather be caught undressed than split an infinitive, but I never met a layman who would agree with him. Even an elementary understanding of communication will dispose of his arguments. I tried in vain to open an important pulpit for a sermon-reader, and the committee would not even

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[1] Rhetoric: A Philosophical Inquiry, p. 206.

[2] Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art, p. 196.

> take the time to go and hear him preach. A man may stubbornly hold to his custom of reading his sermons, but let him never decieve himself to the extent of believing that the people like it.[1]

Alexander's alertness to his listeners' responses was undoubtedly a key factor in his unswerving commitment to a spontaneous presentation. Kenneth R. White who, as church officer, worked closely with Alexander for many years, said, "He had the finest sense of feel for his audience of anyone I have ever known."[2] Many others remarked about the pastor-entertainer's keen sensitivity to his hearers' needs and moods. Ralph Alexander saw this characteristic as an important one which may have been innate but was likely cultivated during his stint as professional entertainer. In describing this ability of his father, Ralph said:

> . . . he was very sensitive to people. He felt whatever the feeling was in a group and he was sensitive whether he was speaking to a large group or whether he was counselling with someone or if he was visiting a sick person in a hospital. It didn't matter. I think undoubtedly a lot of it goes back to this early experience of working in night clubs.[3]

Richard Murphy, in his discourse on speech as a literary form, speaks of a widely held audience preference for "the illusion of spontaneity" in speech-making. Asserting that this misconception was a detriment to the full appreciation of speech as an art form, Murphy nevertheless acknowledged that "In popular view, 'rising to the occasion' is glorified above all else."[4] Alexander with his "feel for an audience" would not have missed this widespread preference.

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[1] "While I'm on My Feet," p. 136.

[2] Letter of May 20, 1970.

[3] Interview, January 29, 1970 at Lawton, Oklahoma.

[4] "Speech as Literary Genre," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIV (April, 1958), 121.

Directness and Intimacy with Audience

Speaking about this art of projecting his message to individual listeners in an intimate manner, Phil Burns, long-time member of First Christian Church, said:

> He had the ability to make anyone in his audience feel that he was talking to him individually, specifically, Ninety-nine per cent of them went out of that auditorium every Sunday morning feeling like that--that Bill had been talking to them.[1]

The freedom of eye and body movement stemming from an independence from written material helped the pastor strengthen the directness of his appeal. Never remote in any human situation, Alexander sought to create a feeling of intimacy with every listener--even those in distant recesses of crowded auditoriums. One of his chief means of overcoming speaker-audience alienation was his continuous monitoring of all those in the audience, pausing frequently to lock his gaze with individual hearers. Ralph Alexander recalls his father's habitual and direct use of eye contact in this way.

> I remember a favorite poem of Dad's about the perfect church; I've seen him do it. There is one line in it about the preacher: " . . . his eye skipped from pew to pew nor passed a sinner by." I used to think that he was trying to live up to that. He was watching people all the time. I think he made eye contact constantly with people throughout the congregation. When he was down at the old church I can remember seeing him one time when he was looking straight at me when I was sitting in the balcony. I was pretty far away. He could not see that far away at that time; his eyes were always bad but he was always looking at people and making eye contact wherever he could. I think a lot of times people felt like, even though there were maybe 1500 people there, that he was talking to them personally.[2]

In achieving this personal intimacy Alexander sometimes became directly involved with individuals in his audiences. One of the members of the Oklahoma City church found this technique vivid in her memory.

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[1] Interview, April 1, 1970.

[2] Interview January 29, 1970, Lawton, Oklahoma.

> He was such a professional! He could boom at you and make the rafter shake, or he could have you teetering on the edge of you seat trying to catch everything he whispered. He could quote poetry as if it were music. And he remembered volumes of it. One of his favorite little "tricks," when he felt his audience slipping, was to pretend he'd forgotten something--a quotation or a piece of scripture. And he'd get people in the audience to help him remember. Another was to address certain remarks to specific people. He'd say, "I was in Chicago the other day and talked to a man who--Harry, I think you'll find this interesting . . . ." And he'd have every Harry in the congregation hanging on every word--and the rest of us, too, for we never knew when he's have a special message for us.[1]

Both of the church secretaries interviewed rememberd the preacher's way of hailing individuals during his sermons, kidding them about a recent or forgotten incident, or asking them to confirm a point he was making. Asked about Alexander's involvement with members of the audience, Ralph said there was a constant interchange between pulpit and pew, remarking that not all of the interaction was merely verbal.

> Many times he would make contact with different individuals. For instance, if he would back up too far on the platform and step on someone's toes, he would stop and talk to them and say, "Sorry, John, why don't you keep your feet back?" And then he would go on preaching. Or, if someone in the congregation nodded, his head drooping or something, he just might say, "John, wake up!" You never knew what he might do. He was always interacting with people.

Alexander's drive toward directness and intimacy with his audiences was reflected in his preferences in church architecture. In the designing of the new First Christian Church sanctuary, completed in 1956, the pastor's suggestion that the church members surround him in semi-circular fashion was carried out. Alexander wanted to be as close to his people as he could without sacrificing visual or acoustical effectiveness.

Vocal Effectiveness

Alexander's voice, as it has been preserved on audio tape and

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[1]Letter of Mrs. Robert T. Axworthy, May 30, 1970.

soundscriber discs does not sound intrinsically outstanding. There is not the profound depth of a Paul Robeson nor the ringing clarity of a Mario Lanza in the pastor's voice. His vocal skills lay in the versatility and judicious application with which he employed his generally pleasing voice. Certainly a significant number of his listeners were favorably impressed with the minister's vocal performance. In response to questions about Alexander's "vocal quality, power, inflection appropriate use of variety," listeners responded with such descriptions as "excellent," "the best," "superior," "great voice," "expert," "excellent voice with power to spare," "terrific," "unsurpassed," "uplifing and quieting," and "good." None were more critical than the "good" response.[1]

One of the qualities Alexander conveyed in his communications, whether he was counselling individuals, addressing business and civic groups, making political speeches or preaching sermons was an unaffected and conversational naturalness. When he spoke to large groups, Alexander increased the volume and vitality of his vocal delivery, but he did not slip into a mannered or pretentious style either in or out of the pulpit. Here is what he thought of the practice of some of his preaching associates who had succumbed to an officious, unnatural delivery.

> We have developed preacher-tones today. I heard a minister give an invocation the other day, and I don't mean this unkindly, but really it was hard for me to keep my eyes shut and listen to what he was saying after he had addressed the Almighty. It was because he said "Ooohhhh God Ooohhhh." And you wonder how anyone could pay attention. A nice fellow, but he has even developed a special preacher-tone. He doesn't use it when he sits and the table and talks with you. But he feels that he has to carry that over into the pulpit. And why? It's because of things like that that we have a problem between precher and people.[2]

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[1] Letters, questionnaires, and interviews.

[2] "Rediscovering Jesus," p. 6.

The long-play records which have preserved two of Alexander's occasional addresses,[1] as well as the soundscriber recordings of the pastor's sermons at First Christian Church, demonstrate a voice with (1) pleasant clarity of tone hindered only slightly be a trace of huskiness, (2) responsiveness and flexibility shown in his use of variety in key and inflection, (3) clear, easily intelligible, unpedantic articulation and enunciation, (4) warm, resonant, vital quality (not dull), (5) effective modulation of loudness with avoidance of monotonous levels, (6) lively and generally rapid rate broken by meaningful pauses which accentuate the frequent humor, and (7) pronunciation traits best described as general American.

Energetic Speaking

Phillips Brooks's statement on the importance of physical vitality in preaching delivery was fulfilled quite well in Alexander. Brooks said:

> . . . be vital, be alive, not dead. Do everything that can keep your vitality at the fullest. Even the physical vitality do not dare disregard. One of the most striking preachers in our country seems to me to have a large part of his power simply in his physique, in impression of vitality, in themagnetism almost like a material thing, that passes between him and the people who sit before him.[2]

Although the energetic showman-pastor of Oklahoma City disregarded many of the rules of good health--frequently neglecting to eat judiciously, failing to get sufficient rest, smoking too heavily--he nonetheless exhibited apparently boundless energy while delivering his speeches. His

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[1] "Are You Part of the Problem or Part of the Answer?" and "The Will to Win." (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Edward M. Miller Associates,1960).

[2] Lectures on Preaching (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1898) p. 107. Quoted in Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures, p. 89.

vigor and stamina seemed inexhaustible. Vera Stovell remarked how the athletic pastor always found reserve power when he needed it.

> Sometimes he would fly back in on Sunday morning and be dead tired. Maybe he would have time only to rest a couple of hours or maybe there wouldn't be any time at all. Still, when it came time to preach, he would bound right up to the pulpit with energy and enthusiasm and just deliver a wonderful sermon.[1]

Alexander's commitment to his role as persuader was a compulsive force behind his delivery style. Phil Burns, who heard Alexander give hundreds of political speeches and thousands of sermons, remonstrated with the redhead about the demands of his delivery; Alexander's reply to such advice is revealing. Burns said:

> I never saw him come out of the pulpit that he wasn't wringing wet. Nervous exertion. Putting everything he had into it. Time and again I said to him, "Why don't you take it a little bit easier?" He would say, "Phil, everytime I make a speech I want it to be the best one I've ever made in my life."[2]

Margaret Roso, who served as secretary at First Christian during the late 1940's, also recalled Alexander's delivery as having made heavy demands upon his physical resources.

> He was always pacing up and down. He would loosen his tie, stuff his hands in his trousers pockets and shrug his shoulders. Always movement. He was drenched in sweat at the end of a sermon. Such exertion! To him it wasn't a matter of standing there and talking to people. Bill really worked at preaching. He would get his handkerchief out and wipe his face and rub his hair--he would be wet clear through his coat when he got through. And then, he would go out on the steps and shake hands with people--no matter what the weather was. He caught a lot of colds that way.[3]

When it came to speech situations, Alexander was oblivious to his own discomfort. Catching colds, spending his powers on exhausting campaign itineraries, and getting along on snatches of sleep on cross-country

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[1]Interview, January 17, 1970. [2]Interview, April 1, 1970.

[3]Interview, April 10, 1970.

flights were simply part of the price he was willing to pay in order to serve his national ministry. Somehow his energy reserves were never dangerously depleted although he admitted to being exhausted during his demanding campaign schedule of 1950.

The Alexander hallmark of an energetic delivery is a constant one, but one with sufficient variation to bear repeating. One member of Alexander's congregation remembers his effectiveness as a happy combination of massiveness and animation.

> Bill was a big man, and for such a big man he moved very quickly. He sort of barged. Being a slightly-build person myself, I sometimes felt his presence overpowering.
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> . . . . . .
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> He moved and gesticulated expansively on the platform, and the only thing which could be described as "distracting" perhaps, was his using his handkerchief to wipe his face. He perspired profusely and he was forever whipping our his enormous white handkerchief and mopping his face. He must have used a dozen a day, for I never recall that they were anything but spotlessly white, and fresh.[1]

A newspaper reporter, in his analysis of Alexander's delivery, saw the athletic bearing of a boxing champion.

> As the minister warmed to his subject his words flowed out faster --trippingly, as the poet said. The massive shoulders, bulging through the formal attire, gave hint of the physique and muscular training which once made Bill Alexander heavyweight boxing champ in Missouri. He leaned forward somewhat as he strode into his main these; his gesturebecame sharper, swifter--and one who knew of his pugilistic prowess could visualize, in his abrupt, sharp, arm movements, the cuts and jabs of the final rounds.
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> . . . The old ring training kept showing in the pulpit stance as Bill Alexander continued preaching, sparring figuratively and shifting his feet with the stiff springy knee movement of the accomplished boxer as he kept edging, back and forth, from one side of the pulpit to the other, talking and moving, talking and moving, hardly pausing to brush away from his forehead a stubby red curl that had jarred out of position.[2]

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[1] Letter of Mrs. Robert T. Axworthy, May 30, 1970.

[2] Kansas City Star, January 22, 1950.

Many others in Alexander's audiences saw in the easy coordination, springy step and stabbing energy of the athletic speaker evidences of his ring training.

Neither Alexander nor his host of admirers would very much appreciate the comparison of the Oklahoma city minister with the best-known preacher of the preceding generation, William Ashley Sunday. Alexander had a vastly superior academic and theological training, was in many ways more more sophisticated, and had an appeal which was less tainted by the flavor of commercialism which frequently troubled Billy Sunday. Nevertheless, in the area of delivery, there is striking similarity: both were star athletes, both displayed unusual vitality on the platform, both were unusually uninhibited in the pulpit, and both were eminently successful in arresting and maintaining the attention of their audiences.

Weisberger's description of Sunday's delivery, insofar as it concerns the energetic, all-out action of the speaker, would very fittingly have applied to Bill Alexander.

> Sunday skipped, ran, walked, bounced, slid, and gyrated on the platform. He would pound the pulpit with his fist until nervous listeners expected to hear crunching bones. He would, in a rage against "The Devil," pick up the single kitchen chair which stood behind the reading desk and smash it into kindling; once it slipped away from him and nearly brained a few people in the front rows. As he gesticulated and shook his head, drops of sweat flew from him in a find spray. Gradually, he would shed his coat, then his vest, then his tie, and finally roll up his sleeves as he whipped back and forth, crouching, shaking his fist, springing, leaping, and falling in an endless series of imitations.[1]

In some respects, Alexander was more restrained than Sunday. He did not smash chairs, rail against the Devil, slide into home base, or fall on

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[1]Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), p. 247.

the floor to illustrate his point. But these differences stem from a temperance and sense of decorum rather than from any inhibitions on Alexander's part. The other aspects of Sunday's delivery as described by Weisberger are also characteristic of the Oklahoma City minister's pyrotechnics in the pulpit. With either of these two preacher-athletes, it would have been almost impossible not to attend to their presentations.

Animation and Variety

Alexander knew better than to tire an audience through undue repetition of any delivery characteristic. Therefore, he varied his facial expressions, posture, gestures, and movements as he shared his ideas with hearers. Ralph Alexander remembers his father's unusual use of variety and mobility as characteristic of the man's public and private communication habits.

> The thing that I remember most, and that used to worry me sometimes, was that he would be all over the platform. The platform down at the old church was not a big platform and there wasn't a lot of room, but he used every inch of it. I can remember him sometimes when he would go over and he would be making a point and he would be standing like this, you know, and he would be saying something, and he would go down, and he would be down on one knee , and I can remember thinking everybody on that side of the church, the pulpit is there opposite, and they can't see him, and I used to worry about that.
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> The church was wired, there was a microphone there, but he never used the microphone, except when he was right by the pulpit. The way he went all over the place--he had a tremendous voice--he filled the sanctuary. In fact, I remember one of my boyhood friends saying "Someday I am going to be a preacher and have a voice like a locomotive." But, you know, he would be down on his knees pleading, the next minute he would be up and be back over--all over the place--and it never seemed forced; it never seemed like something he was doing for effect, you know, it just seemed to be him.
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> I can remember when we used to have conversations in the den at night. One summer Don and I were in Oklahoma City, we would talk every night to maybe three or four a.m. In fact, I had a job as a life guard, and after a few mornings I said I can't do this. He said "Quit the job, this is more important," so we would talk, and he would do the same thing in the den--he would start getting excited about

> something--he would get up and talk and walk over by the mantle, talk, and go back. You know, that was him and that became part of him. I think this movement was just an awful lot of it, and the fact that the movement was always natural. I've seen people move around where it seems very forced, and almost studied but it never seemed that way with him.[1]

Alexander's close friend, Phil Burns, saw the animation in his pastor's delivery as a dimension of his showmanship and the inimitability of his once-in-an-epoch personality.

> . . . he was unique as an individual in everything he did . . . You know, Bill never stood still in the pulpit in his life. He had notes but seldom glanced at them. Ordinarily a political speaker would get up and read a speech and stand in one position and was uninteresting. But old Bill would just trot from one end of the platform or truck he was on, waving his arms, red hair blowing in the wind, practicing his histrionics. The average candidate is not an actor, but Bill was an actor . . . He took showmanship into preaching; he took showmanship into his political campaign. . . . There will never be another preacher like Bill Alexander. I have often said that after Bill was gone the preacher who could suit me hasn't been born. And his mother is dead.[2]

The uniqueness of the man Alexander cannot be captured in print or, so far as I know, by any other medium of communication. It was his engaging and enveloping personality which pervaded and enriched the exciting delivery skills he had diligently cultivated over his years as entertainer-persuader.

Delivery and Personality

A. Craig Baird's discussion of delivery, after dealing with the usual basics of vocal and physical aspects, suggests personality as another element fundamental to all the rest. Baird asserts:

> Behind the voice, articulation, language, bodily activity is the personality of the communicator. These techniques of vocal and bodily

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[1] Interview, January 29, 1970 at Lawton, Oklahoma.

[2] Interview at Oklahoma City, April 1, 1970.

> expression obviously refer to the intellectual and psychological self of the agent, as his communication reaches the auditors and observers who are to react.
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> . . . . . .
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> . . . reacting observers and listeners, consciously or otherwise, read into the delivery the warmth of personality (or lack of it), enthusiasm or indifference, aggressiveness, or unassertiveness, mental and emotional power or weakness, belief or uncertainty, modesty or boastfulness, optimism or pessimism, vanity of self deprecation, strong or weak convictions, mental or moral courage or its absence, selfishness, altruism.[1]

In the discussion of a speaker's delivery--and especially of Bill Alexander's delivery--one must finally look again to the personality of the communicator. It was his personality, expressed through his artful delivery, which was chiefly instrumental in the showman-preacher's persuasive accomplishments. My own remembrance of Alexander's tremendous powers as persuader-entertainer confirm such an estimate. Although it is difficult to say with any precision exactly what Alexander did which impressed my memory on the one occasion when I was in his audience, I have come to attribute his persuasive effectiveness to the fusion of the magnetism of his personality with his scintillating vocal and bodily delivery.

I believe it was in 1947, while I was in my junior year at Tulsa Central High School, that Bill Alexander spoke to our school assembly one morning. Of his ideas I can remember but one: that a fellow must always keep trying, no matter how tough his situation. The reason I remember this was his marvelous telling, through humorous and self-effacing mimicry, of the night he was knocked down seventeen times by a top-flight prize fighter with whom Bill had picked to fight. How he could laugh at such a beating baffled me! Memorable as the core idea was, the free,

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[1] Rhetoric: A Philosophical Inquiry, p. 211.

animated, charming, transparently genuine, athletic and ingenuous spirit projected by the giant redhead to his youthful audience (an age group notorious for their general inattention) as he vigorously delivered his message proved to be unforgettable.

Alexander's long-time friend and fellow preacher, Paul McBride, in speaking of his colleague's "presence" had the usual difficulty in setting forth what exactly it was which made the red-haired wonder so effective with an audience. McBride suggested the strong and favorable impressions Alexander characteristically made upon his audiences were often independent of the content value of the message.

> His outstanding characteristics cannot be described. The results he got did not follow his actions. I have seen him in a rather mediocre performance in which I was quite sure he had made no special preparation and had just fallen back on some old material and repeated it, when the response would be unbelievable. He seemed to have the quality of being accepted at face value and it appeared that he received favorable remarks from those who heard him, when he did a masterpiece, or when he just ad-libed a few stories and left the impression that he loved everybody.[1]

Somehow Alexander, through facial expressions, vocal characteristics, relaxed muscle tone and action, obvious strength and graceful movement, all enhanced by a pleasing and appropriate variety and adaptive applications, projected a winsome, wholesome spirit which was powerfully attractive to his hearers.

Perhaps an appropriate way to close this portion of the study would be to cite Henry Ward Beecher's definition of the speaker's art: "Oratory is truth sent home by all the resources of the living man."[2] Alexander was possessed by the truth he lived by; he used his impressive

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[1]Letter of May 18, 1970, p. 2.

[2]Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art, p. 9.

physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual resources to nurture and polish to splendid efficiency a delivery which was, by all evidence, mightily effective in driving these truths home to his hearers' minds.

PART III

CHAPTER XIII

PERSPECTIVES, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Perspectives

On Sunday afternoon, April 3, 1960 at about one o'clock Bill Alexander and his wife, Marylouise, climbed aboard a twin engine Aero Commander piloted by the Alexanders' good friend, Jimmy Shuman, veteran flyer who frequently flew Bill to lecture engagements across the country. Alexander was to be the main speaker that evening at the opening meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of Chief of School Administrators.[1]

Shuman's flight plan showed 8:30 p.m. on the estimated time of landing at the Harrisburg-York State Airport near Hershey, Pennsylvania. That evening, when Shuman radioed the airport that he would land as planned, he was told that the field was closed due to the rains. Shuman did not notify the airport that there was any trouble but simply said he would attempt the landing; at 8:23 he was given clearance to make an instrument landing. Seven minutes later, the plane crashed into a parking lot at Irwin's Dairy in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, three miles from the airport, killing all three occupants. Shuman was forty-nine years old; Alexander was forty-five; his wife Marylouise was thirty-six.

In death, as in life, Alexander was at the center of controversy;

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[1] Tulsa Tribune, April 4, 1960.

the possible causes for the air disaster were disputed by many of the principals. One aviation figure accused the Harrisburg Airport of excessive delay in improving the landing system at the airport facility. Others asserted the Enid Aviation Company owning the plane had failed to keep the craft in proper flying condition. Further questions were raised about the pilot, M. S. (Jimmy) Shuman, in trying to land at the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania airport which was closed because of rain and fog conditions that night.[1] Some speculated that the plane was low on fuel, necessitating an emergency landing. The mystery of the crash was compounded by the discovery of part of the plane's landing gear near a broken fence post some four miles from the scene of the crash; evidently the plane had fallen dangerously low, then climbed again only to finally crash.

The death of Bill Alexander came as a tragic shock to his family, the church, and to the innumerable people who admired and loved the happy preacher. Yet in some ways--none of which dispel the disastrous loss-Alexander's death seemed a poetic and fitting finale to his brilliant career as spokesman; indeed, it was so symbolic that, had he not loved life so much, he might have willed such an end for himself.[2] Will Rogers said, some seven years before his own death by plane crash, "'This thing of being a hero, about the main thing to it is to know when to die. Prolonged life has ruined more men than it ever made.'"[3] There is no

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[1] The Oklahoma City Times, March 7, 1961 reported a $55,000 settlement of a suit brought by the Alexander estate against the owner of the plane and the estate of the pilot.

[2] Alexander had spoken of his own accidental death on several occasions; he had also planned in careful and complete detail a funeral service for himself. This service was faithfully carried out on April 7, 1960. Interview with Vera Stovell, February 13, 1970.

[3] The New York Times, July 18, 1928, p. 23. Quoted in William

doubt that Alexander's death, coming when it did and in the way that it did, served to add to his already heroic dimensions. His sudden death, en route to a speaking engagement, was symbolic of his commitment to sharing his ideas through speech communication. Some saw in the sensational nature of a plane crash a link between the manner of Alexander's death and the style in which he lived: "Bad weather and poor visibility were blamed Monday for the crash in which Reverend William H. Alexander died as he had lived--in a burst of the spectacular."[1] Death coming to him as it did in the prime years of his mature ministry, served his memory better than if it had permitted him a longer life, but one whose end may have been marked by disability and gradual obscurity.[2] Moreover, the insurance proceeds of $400,000 from a policy for which First Christian Church was beneficiary, secured the splendid youth center, making this fulfilled dream a fitting memorial to the minister. Terrible as they were, the peculiar circumstances of Alexander's death seemed to form a kind of transcendance and resolution of his entire life and careers, investing the whole with symbolic meaning. This transcendant act provided climax and closure which, while of a deeply sorrowful nature, added greatly to permanence of his speech personality in the minds and hearts of the many whose lives he had touched.

Brown, "The Rhetorical Techniques of Will Rogers," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Speech, University of Oklahoma, 1964, p. 432.

[1] Mark Sarchet, "Storm Blamed in Plane Tragedy of the Alexanders," Oklahoma City Times, Monday, April 4, 1960.

[2] Alexander was very apprehensive about ill health. He dreaded the surgery necessary to restore his fading eyesight, postponing the occasion so long that he was severely handicapped without his glasses, which he would not wear while delivering a speech. The surgery was never performed. Interview with Vera Stovell, January 28, 1970.

But what of the speeches themselves? Judged by literary standards, Alexander's sermons and lectures probably will not rank with the carefully structured and meticulously phrased works of such preacher-lecturers as Emerson or John Wesley or Peter Marshall or Paul Tillich. This is not to say they should not be published, since there are countless books of sermons and lectures which are not up to the level of Alexander's work. Nevertheless, if we are to assess the matter fairly, we should carefully apply the best standards. In his study "The speech as literary genre," Richard Murphy concluded:

> To be literature, the speech must transcend the immediate occasion, and have a certain timelessness. Lincoln dedicated Gettysburg, it is true, but he did it in timeless value of democratic belief. To design a speech which will have universal appeal, and yet meet the demands of a social setting, is a colossal job. All those little local flourishes--who is on the platform, acknowledgements to the committee on arrangements--so dear to a specific audience have to be cast aside if the speech is to be recorded as literature. Lincoln managed it, but it is quite a feat to appeal to the day and to the ages in one effort.[1]

Such a standard eliminates a great deal of speech communication. There are, indeed, few Gettysburg Addresses.

Since Alexander's works of persuasion, as is common to oratory everywhere, grew out of the social settings in which he found himself--local, evanescent situations--it is not surprising that the bulk of his speeches lack the timeless appeal of literature. Moreover, his habits of preparation and delivery were so thoroughly adapted to the events of the moment that the standard of permanence seems ill-suited to his art. The standards of the parliamentarian-critic John Morley are more appropriate--not only to Alexander's political speaking but to his efforts

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[1]"The Speech as Literary Genre," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIV (April, 1958), 122.

in the three areas of persuasion common to his efforts.

> The statesman who makes or dominates a crisis, who has to rouse and mould the mind of senate or nation, has something else to think about than the production of literary masterpieces. The great political speech, which for that matter is a sort of drama, is not made by passages for elegant extract or anthologies, but by personality, movement, climax, spectacle, and the action of the time.[1]

Such emphasis upon "personality, movement, climax, spectacle and the action of the time" is precisely the perspective from which Alexander's persuasion must be assessed. By such a standard, his expertise is solidly established while the literary standard of permanent elegance is actually unfair to such rhetorical remains.

Morley's likening a political speech to a drama suggests yet another perspective relevant to criticism and the speaking of Bill Alexander. As noted throughout the study, Alexander was a dramatist-rhetorician. Since the various arts are to be judged according to the qualities peculiar to them, then the dramatic element so characteristic of Alexander's speechmaking might demand its own judgment. Professor of Dramatic Literature, Brander Matthews, however, held there was a strong commonality between the practitioners in drama and oratory.

> The dramatist and the orator are bound by many of the same conditions; and one of these is inexorable: Each of them must please his immediate audience. The poet can appeal to posterity; but if the orator does not hold the attention of those whom he is addressing his speech is a failure then and there, no matter how highly posterity may esteem it. The sermon accomplishes its purpose adequately, if it moves the congregation that listens to it; and so does a comedy, if it amuses the spectators that see it. If a speaker holds his hearers in the hollow of his hand while he is talking to them, and if he makes them thrill and throb with his words, then he has done what he set out to do, even if his words, when reproduced in cold type, fail absolutely to explain his success.[2]

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[1] John Morley, The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, II (London: 1903), 589-590. Quoted in Dwain Moore, "Morley's Concept of the Nature and Function of Rhetoric," Western Speech, XXXII (Fall, 1968), 258.

[2] "The Relation of Drama to Literature," in Essays on Rhetorical Criticism, ed. by Thomas R. Nilsen (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 5.

Matthews' critical stance is doubly appropriate for Alexander's dual role as dramatic preacher and/or showman-lecturer. He spoke to the occasion and to the audience and it was with those he achieved his effect. This effect--and by all evidence it was often superlative--is not to be found in the typed manuscripts which remain. Neither is the strength of his persuasion captured on tape or disc although the life and the earnestness, the wit and the timing of the speaker are in clearer evidence here.

McCall's estimate of a great preacher of another day is remarkably applicable to Bill Alexander both in the chief characteristics he shared with Parker and in the evanescence of their respective influence. McCall concluded his study of Theodore Parker with this summation:

> He was a great popularizer of thought and knowledge, demolisher of conservatism in religious thought, a relentless agitator against all he considered evil, a stimulator of audiences; but "with the personal pressence of Mr. Parker the chief element of his power over men has passed away . . . " His was the transciency of rhetorical effect, not the permanence of measurable contribution.[1]

Reading the above makes one believe it was written, not of Parker, but of Bill Alexander himself.

Lionel Crocker's assessment of Henry Ward Beecher's contribution again demonstrates the similarity between two preachers separated by a century of time yet linked by strong identifications in personality and preaching traits. Professor Crocker said that Beecher

> . . . will not be remembered by posterity for any contribution to theology, political science, literature, or any other branch of learning he touched. He will be remembered as an orator, who could

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[1]Roy McCall, "Theodore Parker," in A History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed. by William Norwood Brigance, I (New York: Russell and Russell, 1943), p. 263.

> attract and hold large audiences and "influence their conduct with truth sent home by all the resources of the living man."[1]

Alexander's resources were unusually vast. With his abilities and energy, Bill Alexander might have been many things: an athlete, an actor, a humorist, an educator, a journalist, a statesman, or a lecturer. He chose instead to be a preacher, and somehow he was these other things, too. All of these characteristics enriched his speaking personality, offering a marvelous variety of appealing ways to win people to his gospel of happiness.

Conclusions

The following were the major conclusions derived from this study of William H. Alexander as a speech personality.

The influence of Alexander's parents was extremely important in the forming of the reform-minded yet fun-loving personality of Bill Alexander. The ready trust, dramatic flair, competitive spirit, and commitment to social reform which Alexander came to personify were instilled and nurtured by Ralph and Clara Alexander.

Had Alexander's talents as showman and persuader not found opportunity for satisfactory expression in his unique ministry, he would probably have become a highly successful showbusiness personality; the pastor's approach to public speaking was basically that of a showman. In his efforts at persuasion he drew on his experience as nightclub performer and vaudeville entertainer, bringing techniques of dramatic entrance and timing, color and contrast, mimicry and humor, animation and dialogue, to pulpit and platform. Alexander's intelligence and excellent

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[1]Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art, p. 47.

scholarship would probably have led him to high academic achievement including teaching and literary contributions had not his gregarious nature preferred the public contact offered by a preaching and lecture career.

By academic training and practical experience, Alexander knew the importance of sentiments, fears, and motives in persuasion. In seeking to win his listeners to his causes, he appealed to their strongest feelings chiefly through the skillful telling of stories centering on parent-child affections and the tragic losses of war.

Alexander's ability to compose, arrange and deliver his messages spontaneously, when combined with the heavy demand for his services as speaker, led to his use of shortcuts in preparation. This lack of direct preparation for a specific speech sometimes worked to his advantage, as he concentrated on perceiving the immediate interests of the audience, building rapport with his listeners, and centering his message upon the needs of the hour as he saw them. Compensating disadvantages of Alexander's busy schedule and rhetorical shortcuts as seen by some of his associates were: failure to properly cultivate his unusual intellectual gifts, undue use of repetition of some speeches and sermons, the slighting of content in some of his messages, and a carelessness which resulted in failure to give credit to the sources of some of his speech and sermon ideas.

To conclude that Alexander's delivery was sensational would be to employ description without the use of exaggeration. The opinion of observers was unanimous: Alexander's skillful use of vocal elements, communicative facial expression, variable and meaningful use of gesture,

body tone and animation, was unforgettably impressive. Nevertheless, Alexander's strongest source of persuasion was found in his characteristically optimistic and joyful personality. His manifest love of humanity, his quick, incisive mind, and his deep commitment to social reform combined to form impressive ethical proof. The constancy and strength of Alexander's personal appeal was repeatedly demonstrated in his ability to sustain his credibility through many crises, any one of which would probably have destroyed clergymen of lesser strength. Although this study attempted to assess the contribution of such elements as showmanship, use of style, leading ideas, and arrangement of speech materials, the conclusion is inescapable that Alexander's main strength as a persuader was his exciting and winsome personality.

When evaluated by the standards of immediate effect upon his audiences, the abiding value of his chief ideas, the expanded program of his congregation, and the constancy of the demand for his services as lecturer, Alexander's public speaking apparently was consistent with the good of the society he served and met high standards of effectiveness, as well. Alexander's proven leadership ability, combined with his rhetorical powers and generally selfless commitment to serve his fellow man, justify the classification of him as a man of stature.

Recommendations for Further Study

Possible directions for future studies of the rhetorical principles and practices of William H. Alexander are: (1) use of the case study method applying appropriate critical standards to representative sermons selected from the approximately 150 extant sermons of Dr. Alexander; (2) a comparative study in ethos, examining the similarities and

dissimilarities between the ethical strengths of Alexander by a person of more conservative life-style, such as Billy Graham; (3) an evaluation of Alexander's political speech-making, noting the relationships between his chief values and his selection of campaign issues; (4) an analysis of Alexander's uses of humor in oratory; and (5) a study of Alexander's relationship with his primary audience, members of the First Christian Church of Oklahoma City, comparing values common to the membership with aspects of Alexander's behavior and inquiring into possible problems of dissonance created and resolved.

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