

Returning the Diploma

A sobering but highly inspirational event once occurred at a commencement ceremony at Vanderbilt University.

The chancellor announced from the platform that a certain graduate had sent back his diploma. It had been returned with the confession that in a single examination the student had used help that was forbidden. Although it had never been suspected, and the years had passed, he had never had any peace of mind.

The man, therefore, returned his diploma, and asked that his name be stricken from the roll of alumni and an announcement made of his confession. He preferred public disgrace, rather than bearing any longer the intolerable memory of a single secret sinful act.

The chancellor said that after much consideration, he had decided that the young man's repentance and suffering had been sufficient atonement for his error, and that he should keep his diploma. The young man would not consent to that, however.

"Here is the diploma," the chancellor said, holding up a mutilated parchment before the graduating class and guests. "I have cut out the name, and the secret will die with me." The hall sat in stunned silence.

Having a clear conscience doesn't mean never making a mistake. The way to maintain a clear conscience is to quickly seek forgiveness when you have committed a wrong against God or man.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men (Acts 24:16).

– Beecher Hunter