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Remembering Bob Sproul

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It is late at night as I pen these thoughts in the quiet of my study. They do not come easily: so many thoughts, so many recollections, so much sorrow at the passing of so great a man, a son of California, a friend.

By precept and example, Robert Gordon Sproul taught us the art of living, of loving, of giving. His was a life of committed service, of faith in the young, of confidence in their teachers, of love in the home, of respect for the distinguished University he served so well and so long.

It was my good fortune to have been born and raised in Berkeley and, thus, to have had not infrequent occasion to see Bob Sproul in action, to have made his acquaintance, and to have worked with him in his later years. Perhaps it would be worth recalling the assistance he gave me during my graduate years on the Berkeley campus, for it will illumine some of what made President Sproul the man he was.

I had chosen the California loyalty oath controversy (1949-56) as the subject of my dissertation. The history of that particular incident in the University's past was painful to recall even as late as 1964. President Sproul remembered the controversy with no less distress than other principals whose cooperation was essential to the research. But remember he did, with respect for all, with perspective on his own involvement, and with a thoroughness and honesty few men could muster under similar circumstances. No acrimony, no vindictiveness, no resentment or bitterness crept into our conversations, nor was any such found in his personal papers. Here was a man full of charity and good will toward all, capable of acknowledging his own shortcomings, while overlooking the frailties and weaknesses of others. His generous and sensitive attitude toward my inexperiences and halting efforts helped carry me through the research. How I shall miss him! How very lucky I have been to have known him.

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