

Buoyed up

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [October 20, 1999](#) issue

You would never have read anything by me and probably never have heard of me were it not for Jerald C. Brauer, who died September 26 at age 78. When *Christian Century* editor Harold E. Fey asked Brauer, then dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School, to recommend a young writer who might become a contributing editor to this magazine, Brauer gave him my name. I started work here 43 years ago.

And no doubt I would have remained happily in pastoral ministry had Brauer not dragooned me into Ph.D. work in 1954 and beguiled me into joining the Chicago faculty in 1963. We cotaught for 35 years. During my visits to him during his terminal illness from leukemia, we tried to recall whether there ever had been a cross word or ruffled feeling between us. Zero. He was teacher, mentor, adviser, vocational director and friend—one of those people whom God puts in the way of fortunate or providentially directed souls.

One day when Harriet and I visited him he was sitting up, with his beloved Muriel at his side, wearing a baseball cap my grandchildren had given me and I had passed on; it bannered NO HAIR DAY. With a clipboard on his knee he was scribbling away. What was he doing? "Editing the first draft of the stuff they're sending the newspaper morgues for my obituary." While he was happy to see mention of his having attracted scholars like Mircea Eliade, Paul Ricoeur and Paul Tillich to the university, he wanted to make clear that he was proud to have helped discover and nurture a generation of young faculty members.

We shared a Christian faith creatively distorted by the Lutheran perspective. One day during his illness, when we were exegeting Romans 8, he said, "Marty, aren't you glad we were brought up in Pauline Lutheranism?" The text: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

During this hour of study interspersed between talk of the family he would soon leave (a subject that always evoked tears), of friends who rallied around (that

usually produced laughter), of the Green Bay Packers, of wines, and of students we had known, I asked Brauer about his prayer life on the sickbed. He said that one developed no theories of prayer then and did not always have the energy to pray, but he was buoyed up by his awareness of the interceding of the Spirit, his friends and many congregations. He reached for metaphor: "I'm up a bit one day and then fall, but not on hard rock; it's more like a trampoline that lifts me up again."

Another metaphor: "After six weeks of having my privates bathed by hospital staffers, I was allowed to shower. For 20 minutes I let that water *cascade* over me and I thought: *regeneration!*"

Near the end he said he'd had enough of metaphor. We softly sang bits of Bach's *Komm, Süsßer Tod* and the closing chorus of the *St. John Passion*. And I thought of a translation of the final words of "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" that does not survive in current hymnals but lingers in the mind: "Who dieth thus, dies well." In faith, hope and love, Jerry also lives.