

# Table Talk

News and Views of the  
Student Body of The Lutheran  
Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.



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## THE EXORCIST:

"A PRIMITIVE RESURGENCE"

- - Ralph Smith

No matter what one's point of view, it cannot be argued that the subject matter of The Exorcist is good and evil. Author William Blatty, who wrote the screenplay and the book on which it is based, goes so far as to call it a "parable of good and evil." Having absorbed that assertion one can assume that what is about to be said will not be something new under the sun. And indeed we find that Blatty's sincere preoccupation with the occult, demonology, parapsychology, possession, and related social phenomena does not break into the realm of brilliance. There is a profound lack of meaningful insight evidenced throughout Blatty's investigation of the substance of his plot. So, having witnessed The Exorcist both in print and in cinema one has to discuss only the manner of artistic presentation and how this succeeds or fails in revealing Blatty's particular good -- evil predilections.

Without question the movie is an artistic failure if your own subtle perceptions of art fall anywhere near the norm. The film totally lacks any artistic power (not dramatic effect). The acting is disconcertingly superficial and where it does work it is more by default than conscious effort. Out of sympathetic concern for the actors, however, one must acknowledge that it is not entirely their fault. Blatty's screenplay reveals clearly through its paucity that it is almost assumed that everyone has read the book before attending the movie. The dialogue, coupled with the direction of William Friedkin, seems designed to convince you that content must be sacrificed for the sake of form. Friedkin allows no time for the development of his characters; consequently, they are all flat. There is no body, no depth, no degree of achievement effected in the film. With the exception of the external confrontation between the exorcists and the demon in the climactic scene, one never sees any struggle. The focus is entirely on a particular manifestation of evil, rather than on the difficulties that manifestation creates for all who become involved.

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Just as the movie is an artistic failure, so it is unequivocally a somewhat laudable technical achievement-- though to say so is to damn with faint praise. Blatty and Friedkin chose to illuminate the brutal facts of the possession of a twelve year old girl, and they succeeded in doing that and nothing else. Although Blatty draws finely the line between credulity and incredulity, he never falls across it; the audience never has to suspend its disbelief. The movie moves on the plane of the possible. Blatty portrays only those things which people vaguely believe possible in the realm of psychokinesis, telepathy, etc. Yet he takes pains in his novel and at least shows in the film that all somatic and psychological explanations for the girl's behavior must be exhausted before an exorcism will be considered. Thus, the action of the movie tends to defeat Blatty's purpose; he wants to assure us of his conviction that possession by some supernatural force, inexplicable by any other means, is a reality; but the movie, with its plausible portrayal of the horror, the shock, and the sensational fails to convince. It is to the ambiguity in the popular imagination as to whether such things exist that Blatty ponders, and that is why the film will be a popular success. It has nothing to say, but it has something to show.

The popularity of the film despite (perhaps because of?) its brutal presentation understandably has caused a minor uproar. Critics abound, many crying out against the potentially dangerous effect the movie may have on a neurotic population. In doing so they advocate censorship. And it is not a matter of qualification depending on the circumstances, you either have censorship or you do not. The value of The Exorcist resides in its attempt to cut through the sophisticated circumlocutions society has amassed concerning the malevolent actions of men. One can argue whether Blatty's return to a primitive, simplistic picture of two personified forces is legitimate but one cannot deny that it has touched a tender nerve among the American populace. And it should not be criticized on the basis of ideological prejudice. In last ditch efforts to justify the film in light of its popularity, many, including Blatty, himself, point to the triumph of good over evil implicit in the outcome. But clearly there can be no real triumph if there is no struggle.

Still, we might be comforted by Blatty's apparent benevolence in that he and Friedkin are filming a longer ending to be attached to the current release in order to assure that the audience does not misread Karras' triumphant suicide. The new ending will provide, Blatty states, "a surge of joy." Unfortunately, more than an added surge of joy will be needed to make the film commendable as a worthy cinematic experience. If you are up for dramatic effect, fear, blood, repulsion, and the success of the church, by all means be the first on your block to participate in The Exorcist; it does reveal that we cannot yet explain everything.

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Correction: Our last issue of "Table Talk" erroneously printed that "the new Consultation was passed" (see "The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia" by A. Samuel Muthiah). This should have read "the new Constitution was passed." We offer you our sincere apologies, Mr. Muthiah.

LUTHERAN HOUSE OF STUDIES - "Process and Comment"  
--Randy Barr

Over the past four years a strong we-they relationship has developed between the resident students in Gettysburg and those residing in Washington. Some of the responsibility for this broken relationship can be laid on the geographic distance as well as the incomplete communication between our two groups. Another reason for this we-they split is due to the name-calling and stereotyping from both "sides." Terms such as the following have been used to describe those who live in Gettysburg: afraid of the big city, security of the womb, farmers, country bumpkins, and so on. On the other hand, those who live in Washington and/or support its program have been labeled: rebels, severe authority/psychological problems, relevant snobs, misfits, and so on. This kind of distance, stereotyping and incomplete communication in Black-White relationships (or lack of relationship) led to the racial strife of the sixties and subsequent Black Power movements. Legislation then emerged as a behavior modification technique to deal with the race/class disparity experienced and protested by Blacks and other minorities.

Clearly the analogy in Black History cannot be carried over to the LHS experience but no analogy can. Nor am I trying to give anyone a lesson in minority relations, behavior modification techniques or the long-range effect of such legislation. I am saying that as a student in the LHS I have experienced relative deprivation concerning personhood and participation in the community of the Lutheran Theological Seminary. Let me list a few examples of things that LHS students have experienced that point to what we consider second or third class citizenship in the Gettysburg community: exclusion from student association elections; exclusion

from class elections; weekly calendar of events arrives in the middle of calendar week; little or no notice of special social, worship or academic events; representation on only the LHS committee of the faculty; no clear policy on distribution of student association dues; no one on the staff of Table Talk; reality that the LHS program may be terminated at any time; shared, part-time faculty, etc. The list is quite longer than this but I hope that you have the flavor of our despair and frustration.

This year, I believe for the first time, there has been an intense and sustained effort on the part of the sixteen resident Washington students to be more closely and equally related to the geographically separate Gettysburg community. After a great deal of debate, we all agreed that a decision had to be made regarding the worth, identity and relationship of the LHS with the seminary.

We strongly believe that the Washington program is and can grow to be more of an integral part of theological education. We further believe that the LHS is too expensive, in the broadest sense, to simply be an addendum or an enrichment program for the seminary curriculum. In essence, through the LHS Committee, we developed policy that would force the question of the program's integral nature to the seminary program. This policy package could not and was not dealt with lightly because it includes commitment to faculty deployment, long-range life for the program, minimal requirements for each student's involvement and the solicitation

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of special funds to develop a unique program as part of the whole LHS.

The recent positive action of the Board on these policies reflects movement toward legitimization and equality for the LHS students. We are pleased that the Board has given us a YES. We will be full citizens in either locale but we will not be second class citizens anywhere.

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"Right to Life"--greg gullicksrud

The smiling face of three parochial school children spiced the front page of the February 13th issue of "The Philadelphia Inquirer." A sub-caption explained that the children were competing for a new bicycle by trying to produce the most (not the best) anti-abortion postcards. I am disturbed by the Catholic Church's narrow concern for life. While vigorously demonstrating for the right to life echoed by anti-abortionists, the Catholic Church has ignored young men in Canada, who also believe in a right to life. Should there not be amnesty for those men who believe that a fetus which has developed into a draft age human being should not be aborted in the name of war? The time has come for the whole Church to be consistent in its view of human life. We should acknowledge the values we are inculcating among our children: more postcards for bicycles and more babies for war. Has America's production syndrome, which Scott Gustafson so aptly described in an earlier issue of "Table Talk," led us to regard humans in terms of production and creative obsolescence? We have the right to life after birth.

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#### TABLE TALK STAFF

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Next Issue: Friday, March 8th.

On Monday, Feb. 18th, the musical "Godspell" was presented in the gymnasium of Mt. St. Mary's College. In keeping with its newly established tradition, "Table Talk" had one of its underpaid staff writers review this dramatic performance...

"And Seeing...Shall Not Perceive"  
"Godspell"--by marcia thompson

"oh dear Lord, this thing I pray: to see Thee more clearly." This seems to be the only foreseeable complaint one could have about "Godspell," if one likes fast wit and humor. The seating arrangements were not quite equivalent to front row seats at the Kennedy Center, or even back row seats, for that matter. The fact that the person who played "Jesus" in the original Broadway production was the same one for this production helped ease the blind spots.

After due consideration, it has been determined that much of the play must have come from the Q source, because it sure wasn't all based on Matthew. Form-critically speaking, though, I think they abolished the two-source theory, and probably some of the minds of the nuns and priests in the gym. One line that made the ladies in blue smile, was when comments about brothers and sisters were being made, and one player said, "But Jesus, I'm an only child." And Jesus said, "Don't feel bad; so am I."

When they tried to feed the five thousand at intermission, their faith must have only been half of a mustard seed, because the wine they gave out did not make it past the first five rows.

The use of Aramaic, I think, at Passover was just enough to place you in that sensitive, quieted mood that was felt when the disciples finally realized the time had come for their friend and leader to leave. The touch of  
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"Godspell"(cont'd.)

that scene could only have been climaxed by Jesus being nailed to the wire fence, which was used as a backdrop. At that point, a wooden cross wasn't needed to feel the pain.

The only ending disappointment was felt when the finale took place too soon. They forgot that Jesus rose from the dead. They never has Theological Foundations either.

I can only say that any time the message of God is proclaimed, and heard, the cause is worthwhile. I conclude that a child would have laughed and cried with the Clown.

"Prayers":

\* \* \* \* \*

O God,  
we thank you for a theology of your word  
and along with it this seminary,  
a practicum in sinning.  
Help us to see our sin in a different way:  
that is, as the opportunity to sin for one another.  
We ask this in the name of Christ,

amen.

O God,  
we ask that your blessings be upon us,  
for we are your professional religionist.  
And as such, we often leave our words  
but not our bodies  
with people.  
Help us to put some flesh on our words.  
We pray in the name of Christ,

amen.

two prayers,  
the author of which is

unanimous

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Lately Philately: There are two small boxes in the Field Education Office. These boxes contain duplicate stamps, and are available to anyone. If you have any duplicate stamps, please drop them off in the office. Let's make this thing work!

## A PARABLE

Once upon a time, a lion ate a bull. He felt so good, that he roared, and roared. A hunter heard this bellowing lion, and killed him with one shot.

Moral: When you are full of bull, keep your mouth shut!

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Personal: Will the person who left two ping-pong balls in Dr. Gobbel's mailbox, please pick them up?

ADIAPHORA

Coming events:

Mon., Feb. 25th; Judge McPhail--Community Meal, Refectory, 12:30 P.M.

Tues., Feb. 26th; Mardi Gras Party, 4th floor Valentine sponsored,  
somewhere in the big building, 9:30 P.M.

Wed., Feb. 27th: Ash Wednesday (Service, too)

Fri., Mar. 1st: World Day of Prayer  
Synoptics Exam--If you are big on parables, you won't  
want to miss this exciting exam, Room 202,  
Valentine, 9 A.M.

Talent Night--Refectory(following dinner).

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