

In the name of the father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit.



TABLE TALK

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November 14th, 1991

Greetings in the Name of Christ Jesus Our Lord,

My yard is filled with trees that muffle the outside world. At night it gets so quiet that there is an eerie atmospheric quality. If I sit staring out into the backyard for too long I start to wonder if the rest of the world is a painting and I am the only animate part of it. At those times I am immensely thankful for the chipmunk that lives in the tree stump right outside the window and the huge owl that thinks we live here to be the audience for his nightly concert. Yet sometimes the stillness is wonderful. Sometimes that quiet is a gift so precious that I want to hold on tightly forever.

In many ways this is a representative glimpse into student life. There are times when things are going along smoothly and we wonder if perhaps we've missed something along the way. At other times things are so hectic that we long for just one, single afternoon of solitude. And of course this is not just student life, this is seen in all walks of life. With the leaves falling from the trees and the afternoons blending grey and pale blue, it is easy to forget that there are blazing fires and bright glowing lamps inside.

So this is my word of encouragement to those who find this a depressing time of year - sing along with the owls out there and remember that we're not in this alone.

This month it was like pulling to teeth to get written information from this student body. I don't know if we're that boring or just unwilling to share. In either case start preparing for next month NOW. We're looking for short pieces telling about your favorite Advent or Christmas remembrance. We'll publish all that we get, wishful thinking, in the December issue of TABLE TALK.

We have some interesting articles this month. Our featured student from Around the Globe is Zbigniew Tomczyk. He is open to discussing what he has written, so take this opportunity to get to know him better. We also have an excerpt from a letter about Estonia that discusses the religious climate in that land. There is, of course, the ever popular letter from our Student Association President which is well worth your reading time. Jan Elsasser has looked into how a Christian fits into the ecological movement of the 1990s. Finally, we have the class reports. The Seniors outline the initial plans for graduation, while the Juniors and Middlers are still jockeying for position over the Luther Colloquim skirmish.

So - READY - SET - READ!

Until next month, on behalf of the Publication's Committee, I am Susan Folks.

SA PRESIDENTIAL EPISTLE

Recently, I attended a wedding in the heart of Upstate New York Synod. Although I find weddings themselves to be somewhat uncomfortable experiences--especially when I am a participant--I could sense in me something beyond the normal discomfort. Something began to gnaw at me the longer I spent time in that parish. It was not the fact that the presiding minister at the Eucharist fractioned the host during the words of institution (although Tamara did have to elbow me in the ribs to subdue my groaning). It was not that he explained the real presence with the prepositions "in, with, through, and over" and forgot to mention the bodily presence (letting the crypto-calvinist feel more comfortable). It was not that he stated that a communicant "should" be baptized to receive the sacrament (undermining the cultic aspect of the meal). Although the aforesaid more than made up for a sermon that likened marriage to a softball game, it took something else to give me that queasy feeling in my stomach.

In the fellowship hall, I noticed a series of computer generated signs (I find bulletin boards an excellent medium for getting to know a congregation) announcing a wide range of adult education classes. The classes were scheduled for convenient times and focused on interesting topics related to life in the church, and each one was lead by a different deacon. Deacon! I thought this was an ELCA parish! Not that I am opposed to deacons--as a matter of fact, I think it would be a great idea if we had all types of deacons (deaconesses, monks, and nuns too)--but the ELCA, Inc., has not yet recognized this form of ministry. Perhaps this was a former AELC parish; that would explain it. The AELC would have carried with it from pre-Seminex days a titled lay position of deacon, but this had been a LCA parish. The only experiments in the restitution of the historic diaconate I remembered were centered around major metropolitan centers like Detroit and New York. Even so, I would have expected that the ELCA would be

actively suppressing these deacons just as they are suppressing the deaconess community (deny this as they do). If I wanted to get at the heart of this matter there was no choice but to talk to the pastor.

In conversation with the pastor, I discovered that the size of his parish (largest in the synod) necessitated an augmentation of the ministerial team. Rather than hiring an additional pastor, it was decided to empower certain laypeople to share in the work of his ministry (this was actually done by his predecessor). These deacons are therefore commissioned (this, he told me, can mean anything you like, but its not ordination) laypeople who teach, do visitation, preach, and assist with communion. The only problem he had encountered was that some of the older parishioners did not approve of receiving communion when the pastor was not present. Alarm bells! Yes, indeed, he explained to me that when he has not present for scheduled eucharists, his deacons presided over the consecration of the elements. I might be able to argue in favor of the laity doing so, but AC 14 and the policy of the ELCA are both rather clear on the point. Not one of us is permitted to preside without episcopal dispensation for "emergency situations." Emboldened (or perhaps simply astounded), I told the pastor that it all seemed like a breakdown in church discipline to me and asked if Bishop Perry was aware of the situation. The pastor assured me that Bishop Perry was aware and that the deacons functioned as an extension of his [the pastor's] ministry. He further explained that they functioned at his pleasure and were required to tender their resignations when he resigned or retired. At which point, he retired from the conversation.

Admittedly, I did not handle the conversation as tactfully as I might have. Nevertheless, I am struck by the theological and political insufficiency of his system. Although one could argue

against such a system solely on the grounds of a violation of AC 14, I believe their are other weak points which do not require an arch-confessionalist stance. Within the polity of the ELCA we permit episcopal dispensation for laity to preside over the sacraments in emergency situations. I find it difficult to believe that this pastor's scheduled vacations and synodical responsibilities constitute such an emergency. Even more central is the question of call and authority. Does a community of faith call someone to ministry or does an individual? The requirement that the deacons resign with him and the understanding that they function at his pleasure implies that their authority for ministry is derived not from his office but rather from his person. By the same token, should not he tender his resignation when Bishop Perry resigns since the local pastor is an extension of the episcopal office.

I might not be concerned if this parish's practice of ministry were isolated to the central valley of New York, but the ELCA (I am told) is looking at this parish's system as a possible model for the church as a whole. For the past few years, I have looked forward to a restitution of the historic diaconate as a practical answer to the ministerial crisis faced by the church. I also believe that such an office of ministry would be faithful to the confessional tradition of the church. A coopting of titles without a supporting theology, however, can only lead to a breakdown of good order. Deacons should be called and ordained. The shape of their ministry should be clearly articulated and suited to the gifts that God has given them. Their call must be rooted in the personal authority of Jesus Christ as experienced in the workings of his Holy Spirit in the faith community and not the personal authority of any human being who is not also divine. Such an office should stand independent in dignity from the office of pastor. They are different vocations, although a transitional diaconate may prove beneficial to those who seek pastoral office.

My thoughts on this subject have not been

laid out in any systematic manner. I have simply presented some of my musings on the subject for your consideration and look forward to a dialogue addressing the questions of ministerial structure. The formation of the ELCA left us with no answer to these questions, but a study continues. So much hinges on what the church decides the nature of ministry to be. The ELCA Task Force on Theological Education has even attempted to address the shape of future seminary education with little more than assumptions of where we will be as a polity in five years. Those of us who are now in the midst of our seminary education cannot afford to be unconcerned. I commend to all of you the Resource for Discussion by the TF on Theological Education and the draft document by the Division for Ministry.

--Riegel

ON CONDUCT

Community life in a seminary context must be governed by both the Gospel and the Law if it is to be faithful to our anthropology of *simul iustus et peccator*. To this end, a code of conduct was adopted for the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, and incorporated into the Student Handbook (page 53, s.v. "Conduct of Seminary Students" and "Process for Counsel, Admonition and Discipline"). For two decades, a Student Conduct Board has been authorized to "receive, hear and weigh charges against students whose conduct violates" "life and conduct grounded in the Gospel." [see Student Handbook, s.v., "Student Conduct Board"]

Practices and deportment inconsistent with the instruction of the Catechisms should be met with mutual counsel and admonition. Mutual encouragement and edifying conversation should strengthen students in evangelical living.

Should questions arise with respect to these issues, a student should consult either the Handbook or a member of the Student Conduct Board.

--Riegel

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

Part Two

Inaugural Address
"Prospectus for a School of Theology"
Donáld R. Heiges

II

The second thesis: *The task of a theological school, created and maintained by the church, is the study of God's truth and grace as evidenced in history with a view to the actualization of His truth and grace in the lives of men and women today.* Surrounding the chapel, the symbolical center of a school of theology campus, are the library and classroom buildings, symbolizing the work to which both students and faculty members give themselves.

A theological school is not a foundling home for social rejects, nor a browsing corner for dilettantes, nor a trade school for ecclesiastical specialists, nor a citadel of pietism for frightened Christians. A school of theology is an institution of higher learning; it is an institution dedicated to intellectual pursuits whose prototype is any top-ranking professional school on a graduate level. The enterprise is educational in the broadest and deepest sense. The enterprise is theological because it attempts nothing less audacious than the description and interpretation of the mighty acts of God in history for the salvation of man. Indeed, it goes beyond description and interpretation to what I have called actualization, but more of that later.

If this concise delineation of the character of a school of theology is sound, then such a school should be open only to those students who regard theological education as a serious intellectual undertaking and who are adequately prepared for such an undertaking. There are, of course, other important criteria for admission but unless an applicant meets this qualification four score testimonials to his impeccable character and great sincerity should not swing open the door.

Upon enrollment seminarians should accept honestly and completely their status as students, and act accordingly. As I recall my own seminary days, we did not think of ourselves primarily as students.

We felt that we had moved out of that category when we had left college. Into what category we had moved was not quite clear. Borrowing from eschatological terminology, I suppose it could be said that we lived a "foreshortened" existence. The kingdom of the parish was already upon us, and our seminary life was definitely *ad interim*. That our three years here on the hill constituted an order of life with an integrity of its own and with valid claims upon us as students apparently did not occur to most of us.

The tragedy is that many seminarians seem to take a cheap utilitarian view of their theological education. It is merely a means to an end, that is, to receiving the "union card," otherwise known as ordination. Admittedly, from a Christian perspective all education ought to be a means to an end, namely, the glory of God. I am talking about a phenomenon on a much lower level, the phenomenon of a seminarian who evaluates everything in terms of its obvious usefulness to him in the Church's ministry, of a seminarian who constantly has his eye on the job ahead of him rather than upon the truth to be apprehended and served.

It also follows that a theological school should accept honestly and completely its responsibility for scholarship, and act accordingly. There are other things for which a school of theology is responsible, but unless it insists upon creditable intellectual performance on the part of its students and intellectual competence on the part of its faculty members in their respective disciplines the school forfeits a respected place in the realm of higher education.

Theology was once "queen of the sciences," and a great university prior to the modern era was unthinkable without a strong theological faculty. As we all know, such a relationship has long since disappeared. Sir Walter Moberly identifies four stages in the decline of theology in the university world. This initial stage

was that of "ecclesiastical monopoly." Then came the stage of "primacy" when, in the words of Rashdall, theology functioned as "the architectonic science whose office it was to receive the results of all other sciences and to combine them in an organized whole." The third stage Moberly calls "equality" inasmuch as theology became merely one discipline among others rather than queen of them all. Finally, there is the present stage of "bare toleration." Moberly concludes his analysis with this observation: "Thus today the older struggle for supremacy has given place to a struggle for existence." It is highly doubtful that theology will ever again regain its position as sovereign. the doubt becomes a certainty with reference to our religiously pluralistic American culture. But theology can never be content with a status of "bare toleration."

To a large extent the low estate of theology in the academic arena can be traced to the sweeping secularization of all education, and especially higher education. In this secular academic climate it is assumed as self-evident that theology does not constitute a legitimate sphere of serious intellectual inquiry.

There is another reason for the low estate of theology in this country, namely, questionable academic standards, especially in the denominational schools. Today no school of theology which is open to this criticism, and remains vulnerable, has a right to respect in the field of higher education. At least it ought to be said that the Lutheran Church in America cannot afford to maintain such educational institutions.

Let me reiterate: (a) a school of theology should be open only to those students with demonstrated academic competence and with serious intellectual intentions; and, (b) a school of theology should provide an academic structure and community in which a serious intellectual undertaking is both a possibility and a necessity.

In my second thesis the task of a school of theology was defined in terms of "the study of God's truth and grace as evidenced in history." This study was further

defined in terms of "the description and interpretation of the mighty acts of God in history for the salvation of man." Such study takes within its sweep the classic fields of biblical, historical, and systematic theology. In these fields the canons of scholarship must govern the work of both students and faculty members. The major objective of such study, however, is not the production of scholars, although a few scholars had better emerge and go on to doctoral work or the seminaries will eventually be forced to close their doors. The major objective of such study is indicated in the latter part of the second thesis, namely, "with a view to the actualization of His truth and grace in the lives of men and women today."

The statement of ultimate objective in this form has several implications. I shall suggest two only. In the first place, although a student is rightly expected to assimilate a considerable amount of factual knowledge, the emphasis must not be merely upon mastery of facts but upon *the mastery of a methodology* with which to deal with the facts. For example, since it is possible for a student to take only a few courses in exegesis the goal of such study should be not the transfer of material from a professor's notes to a student's notes but the development, so far as possible in three short years, of responsible exegetical skill. Or, the goal in the study of historical or systematic theology should be the development of a student's ability, to use a phrase of James McCord, "to think theologically." The emphasis upon responsible methodology not only advances the ultimate objective as stated but also increases greatly the probability that the graduates of a theological school will never cease to be students.

The second implication is this: work in the classic fields of biblical, historical, and systematic theology may still not reach beyond the cloisters unless the curriculum of a seminary also includes study *and experience* which will bring about (a) an understanding of *contemporary* man and his culture as well as (b) proficiency in the use of tools (existing and newly designed) with which the church seeks to minister to

this culture. With reference to understanding contemporary man and his culture, and familiarity with the forms of the church's ministry (i.e., worship, preaching, teaching, counseling, etc.), the study which goes on in library and classroom must be related to personal and planned experience. The provision of such experience has for years taxed the imagination of theological faculties, which have devised such phenomena as field work, clinical training, and internship. These programs have too often become addenda to the alleged major business of a seminary rather than a continuous built-in dimension of the total enterprise. This observation leads into the consideration of the third thesis.

Red Cross Blood Drive

On December 4th, the YWCA and the seminary are sponsoring a blood drive. Representatives from the American Red Cross will be in the community room at the YWCA from 1:00 - 7:00 p.m.

What we are looking for are DONORS. On November 19th and 22nd, there will be someone in the coffee shop during the coffee hour to answer questions and sign up blood donors. Our goal this year is 55 pints!

If you have any questions before then please contact Deb Williams at the YWCA (334-9171) or call Susan Folks (337-3053).

Senior

Sagas

SR. CLASS REPORT:

On 8NOV91 the Senior Class held a meeting. Updates were given by various committees. Plans for graduation are taking form with it being decided that the graduation ceremony will be at 3:00 p.m. on 15MAY92 and the Eucharist at 7:30 p.m. There will be a dinner between the two events at the Holiday Inn for seniors and guests. Mark Oldenburg will preside at the Eucharist and Richard Carlson will preach.

During the Luther Colloquium, \$8.75 was raised by the Sr. Class. This was given over to the S.A. treasurer to pay for a portion of copying costs so far incurred by the Sr. Class.

Other activities in the works include the Sr. Class' sponsoring of a miniature golf tournament to be held on 16NOV91 from 1-3 p.m. and a Sr. progressive dinner to be held on 15NOV91 starting at 6:00 p.m.

REMINDER: Sr. resume's are due to be mailed by 1DEC91! Best of luck and God's peace in the completion of these.

Respectfully submitted,
Bob Wagner:
Sr. Secretary/Treasurer

JUNIOR JOTTINGS

Greetings from the gallant warriors of OPERATION LUTHER STORM. On the night of 30October1991, members of the junior class gathered together to begin the daring assault on the statue of our founder. Undaunted by threats of violence our heroes put into action a plan that had been formulated weeks in advance in anticipation of the coming night's activities. The junior class divided into two teams. Team A was the security element composed of highly trained counter-terrorist types. Led by Colonel Chip "mad dog" Dukes, the team set out late the night of 30October to begin harassing actions and keep the middlers awake all night, while Team B, the actual strike force waited until daybreak to carry out their gallant assault.

At approximately 0000hours, the first skirmish took place, as Team A was caught trying to lock the middlers into the chapel. The strike team was indeed surprised by the numbers of mercenaries that had been recruited by the middlers in the hopes of bolstering their thin ranks. Nonetheless, all but two of the chapel doors were locked, thus cutting down exit points for the middlers. Early dawn our heroes returned armed and ready for combat. Using Valentine Hall as a supply depot, Team A continued to attack the middlers throughout the night. Casualties for the middlers were high among women. Notable among the wounded were Laura Hocker, Jan Elsasser, and Chris Chantanlow, who was hit by a chemical filled water balloon. Casualties for the juniors ran high, yet morale tended to increase throughout the night as the juniors realized ~ 7 ~

that the middlers were being pushed to their physical and mental limits. Wounded in action was Brian "wild man" Stevenson, who suffered a broken wrist on one of the forays. During the interview, Colonel Dukes stated that Stevenson, a veteran of the Belgian Congo Civil Wars, and Soldier of Fortune Magazine's 1988 man of the year, would probably receive the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions. When asked for a comment, the brave soldier replied, "It was all in the line of duty." Other heroes from Team A were Brian "the mad cornhusker" Deckinger, and John "I'm really a sensitive guy" Teitman. Colonel Dukes had nothing but praise for these two who led several of the assaults even after sustaining serious wounds. Dukes was quoted as saying that the seminary needed more men like them.

Team B was to wait until 0230hours, at which point, they would conduct an initial raid to test the strength of the middlers. Led by Major Sandra "giggles" Leifeste, Team B came out early to scout the opposition. On their scouting mission, Tony "the terrible" Schneck and Mike "the shadow" Reed were ambushed in their urban assault vehicle by some reckless middlers. Sustaining serious wounds, they retired to the depot to issue ammunition to the rest of the strike force. Lew "OMB" Messinger was recruited out of the John F. Kennedy Special Forces School for this mission. When asked for a comment, Messinger replied, "DUKES!!!!!" thus stating his obvious affection for Team A's leader.

The middlers surrendered after a fierce ambush by the strike force. Sergeant Steve "Ranger" Herr led the panic-

stricken mob, as the beserk warriors of Teams A and B savagely mauled the remnants of what had once been a proud outfit. The strike force, with the statue now secured, retired for an hour to regroup, and celebrate their great victory. Returning at 0445hours, they gathered around the statue to work their magic on Luther. Major Leifeste had recruited from the terrorist group, Islamic Jihad, such well known international figures as Chrystal "the brute" Reichard, Tim "the crusher" Rall. From the United States Armed Forces, Major Leifeste recruited Frank Koeck from the SEALs, and called out of retirement Colonel Bruce "big daddy" Wilder. The statue was decorated in the image of a lesser demi-god Dean Thulin. After this, the team melted into the shadows of the rising sun, content with the defeat that they had dealt the gregarious middlers.

Be assured that next years juniors will not be so fortunate as to face the class of 1994. They will have to deal with the battle-hardened veterans of 1995.

Middler

Contrary to appearances, the Middlers procured a stunning victory over the Turks during the night of 29/30 October 1991. Through a combination of cunning, intelligence, and zeal they were able to realize their goal with little difficulty.

That goal was to protect the icon of our Beloved Reformer in such a manner that the heathen Turks would be called to repentance. If the pagans remained stiff-necked, however, the Middlers were prepared to grant them the illusion of victory, ensnaring them in an unfounded arrogance that will turn against them when next the foes meet.

The Middlers' plan was brilliantly conceived and executed (as promised on these pages a few weeks since): after taking enough food and drink at JD's (which, of course, stands for *Jesu Dei*) to sustain them throughout the long, cold night, the heroic warriors sequestered themselves in the Church of the Abiding Presence for the triune purpose of seeking strength and guidance, awaiting the appearance of the Turkish horde, and giving their adversaries the false impression of being unopposed.

The Turks were so duped, and the daring Middlers permitted them to wallow in self-deception, thereby heightening the shocking impact of surprise counter-attack.

Simultaneously flooding the Church with light and opening wide its doors, the stalwart Middlers marched forth to the strains of their resplendent anthem, *Ein Feste Burg*. The symbolism was clear: the Turks were being offered the chance to acknowledge the true locus of light and strength. To complete the imagery, the Middlers used water as their only weapon -- a sign of victory in Baptism.

Yet the stubborn Turks were unmoved by this display, and after a brief but intense skirmish, the Middlers abandoned them to darkness, heeding the advice of Matthew 18:17b.

All Turks should mark this well: the Middlers have comported themselves in accordance with the third stanza of their signature hymn, and will continue to do so.

Around the Globe...

with *Zbigniew Tomczyk*

My dreams from the time of my studies in Poland, come true I have always desired to study theology differently from my European, cultural background; in an environment of different mentality. So I am deeply thankful to all the people (especially prof. Krodel), who have made this studying possible for me.

Moreover, I have an excellent opportunity to absorb language, because everyone speaks English. Oh! I would forget. One exception: when you pronounce my name. You do it perfectly. In other parts of the States the people often do not manage to do it and at that time I am "Z-man" or even "Jack"!

It's very striking to notice the variety of personalities in this seminary; various temperaments, ages (many people of second careers), experiences... I admire solicitude of preparation for every eucharist ceremony. And your strong throats, each one 10 times stronger than that of the organist in my Polish parish.

From the beginning I was met everywhere with kindness and friendliness from everyone. The greetings "Hi!" "How are you?" "Hey buddy boy": how likable they are!

How charming is the beauty of nature in these surroundings. And the characteristics distinctive of this place; cricket's chirping, squirrel's amusement, and the miraculous sunsets. Indian Summer reminds me of Polish Golden Autumn.

It's very hard not to mention the food which I enjoy very much: Pancakes, Hot-dogs, large (high) sandwiches and ubiquitous (appearing, present everywhere) ketchup. Coke and beer you can drink like water! Given the opportunity let me encourage you to visit the Plaza (contradicting the forejudged bias of Table Talk, September 1991). I recommend the sandwiches - "pastrami", "gyros", "Reubens". They also have interesting customers! My guests together with my friend Brian, have evaluated it at three stars (Brian debates a possible 2 stars). You have Polish names of dishes: kielbasa, pierogi, golabki (glumpky). McDonald's owner is a Polish American, but in Poland we haven't a McDonalds yet!

From my very early childhood, my association with America has been: Disney World, stars of Hollywood, "I'm sorry" of Marilyn, Tina Turner, Elton John, Stairs into heaven of Led Zeppelin, New Orleans jazz, "Unforgettable" of Natilie Cole, Paul Simon, Indigo Girls...I can recite without end.

From the very beginning, our countries have been in a friendly relationship. Every Pole would mention at least the names of two generals, who took part in the battle for USA independence; K. Pulaski killed in action and T. Kosciuszko, who in Poland (a few years later) became the leader of a national insurrection in what was the last moments of Polish independence.

This bound thread of friendship has never been broken. Come to Poland (without visas) and see!

At present, Poland - as you surely know - breathes with fullness of political freedom. On October 27 the first after the 2nd world war entirely free elections to the parliament took place there. Changes in this matter happen extremely quickly, from day to day, even a few years ago this was beyond comprehension. On the other hand, the country is in a very deep economic crisis. From a human point of view it is extremely difficult to have hope for the better.

It has clear cut (distinctive) repercussions in life and activity of the Church. During the period of pressure from foreign ideology, the Church as a bastion for cultural values so essential for national identity. Murdered at that time Father Jerzy Popieluszko remains a symbol of that battle. Now it belongs to the past. Last year catechesis (the teaching of religion in school) was reinstated. The Church, however, has to confront itself by standing in the face of very important historical challenges. In these times of universal pauperization of the public, there is a spreading of antivalues of consumptionism and pornography, and also -what is very likely the worst- big frustrations and listlessness of the people, especially the youth.

We stay in front of the question: How shall we lead life out from this entanglement of the world of no hope, and lifelessness (numbness)? How to make situations sensible, situations which the people call "nonsense", "senseless", "with no sense", and which - from the human point of view - are indeed without sense.

Surely the reflections above are generalized. It results, however, from difficulty in expressing experiences (many times rich ones) with words. I invite you to dialogue as a chance for completing it and overcoming possible misunderstandings. Experience demands sharing.

Zbigniew Tomczyk

About Estonia

The following was taken from a "Christmas in October" letter from Jean and Vern Frazier. The letter is being shared with us by Pearl Hoffman. The Fraziers were asked to go to Tallinn, Estonia for three months to fill in for the pastor there, so that he might return home for those months. The letter tells of the land, the people, and the church in Estonia. Thank you, Pearl, for this gift.

The Estonians, numbering about one and a half million, are a unique people. Although related to both the Finns and the Hungarians, their language, culture, and customs are distinctively their own. Fifty years of living under occupation--deprived of freedom of speech, press, and religion; forced to live and work where they were told; watched and spied upon by foreign soldiers and police; always afraid-- have impacted every phase of life.

~ cont. on page 14 ~

On Being a "Green" Christian

Jan L. Elsasser
November 14, 1991

As many of you know I am very interested in the environmental movement. It seems that since Earth Day 1970, popular support for the movement has grown. You cannot walk through the store today without seeing an item which claims to be earth-safe, bio-degradable, or "green". The support is encouraging in many respects, but frightening in another. I have read a number of books on what is called deep ecology--the "green" movement--and the need for sustainable earth policies. I think that they are very insightful and useful for daily life. But I have concluded that while Christianity and deep ecology can be related to one another, they are not completely compatible. To put it another way, you might be a pea-green Christian, but you cannot be a truly "green" Christian.

I am not saying that "green" and Christian are oxymoronic. That is simply not the case. But neither are they harmonious. To unite the two and remain truly "green", one must reject some basic Christian understandings of the creation and the human relationship in, to, and with the creation.

To be sure, some of the fundamental understandings of the "green" movement are in concert with Christian understandings

about the world and the human creature. An example would be the understanding of the total relatedness and intermingling of all the components of the creation. Clearly, the Genesis accounts of the creation agree in at least two ways. First, in the priestly account as God creates, the creation itself participates in the creative act of God, so that God commands the earth to bring forth vegetation and the sea to bring forth living creatures (Gen. 1:11-12, 20-21, 24-25). Second, the relationship in which the first humans are put to the earth shows this inter-relatedness. The very word play of "adam" (human being) and "adamah" (ground)¹ shows such dependency. Human beings must live off of the land as the other creatures also live off one another and the earth.

There are incompatibilities as well, however. The "green" movement expects a great deal of respect for the natural processes of the earth. Such cycles are not to be tampered with for they are the life force of the world. There is almost a reverence for the cycles which include death. For death and decay are part of the process which feed already existing life forms. Death is not only natural, death is good. Death ensures that there are not too many creatures alive at one time to jeopardize the

¹ Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), p.4.

food chain and sources. Death also ensures that others will be able to live precisely because they can feed off of those now dead and decaying. For the Christian, however, death is our wage for sin (Rm. 6:23) and not a good thing at all. Our hope in the cross and resurrection is to be re-established in a right relationship with God in which we will have eternal life free from the curse of sin and death.

This observance brings me to the next point. The "green" ecology does not recognize sin. This exclusion of sin leaves two problems. The first is that we can possibly conclude that we are ultimately able to redeem the world from the injury existing between and caused by the member parts by fine tuning ourselves with the processes of nature. From a Christian perspective, we are unable to right ultimately the wrongs we do. We can change some behaviors, perhaps, but we cannot alter the basic relationship. The second problem is a bit more complex. Some ecologists and green lobbyists take into account the negative side of the second law of thermodynamics (entropy)², for instance Jeremy Rifkin in his book Entropy. Such a law means that there is no stopping the decay currently taking place. The natural law dictates that

² entropy--in any given closed system everything moves towards a disordered state.

ultimately this ordered world will move to chaos. Taking into account the law of entropy is as close as the "green" movement comes to recognizing sin. Yet the movement does not see the law as something which will be changed. The law is the law. It is not evil. It just follows its natural course of playing itself out, which is unfortunate for us. Clearly, entropy must be named as a force of sin and evil in the world seeking to undo the order which God called out of the chaos. We cannot simply say it is happening and settle into a doom and gloom reality that one day the ordered universe will be complete chaos. There is hope for the redemption of the world from the ill of sin and death as well (Rm. 8:19-23). As Paul writes, we long together for redemption.

So the question becomes, why do I care to write about such a topic? I write precisely because every question requires theological meditation. We cannot be swept into any popular movement without first reflecting theologically on the issues. Christianity needs to be critical. Ecology is something to be supported on different levels, but its assumptions should not be so readily embraced. Yes, environmental activism is good, I practice it myself; not because I want to redeem the world from decay and collapse, but because I have been called by God to be a steward of the earth.

All of us have been called to that same task. Christians can be in joint action with many secular groups. But they must do so with their feet planted firmly in the ground at Golgotha with their eyes focused on the cross. Only then can we see clearly.



Prepare your homes...

Nov. / Dec.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
17	18 2:00 4:00 7:00pm Hein-Fry Lecture	19	20 Music Gettysburg Travnicek String Quartet 7:30	21	22	23
24 Worship 7:30	25	26	27	28 Thanksgiving	29	30
1	2 Classes Resume	3	4 Eucharist 7:00pm	5	6 <i>TABLE TALK articles due for December</i>	7

Continued from

page
10

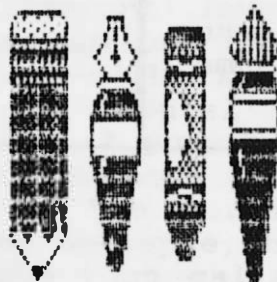
A wariness, an eerie quiet, prevailed wherever groups gathered, even in queues. People seldom struck conversations while waiting as those in the West do. Even children at play were quiet...no boisterous shouting or running about as children elsewhere are wont to do. And yet, their spirit has not been broken.

Everywhere, (since "glasnost" in 1988 has allowed them to speak more freely), people expressed to us their quiet determination to be free and their willingness to endure any hardship to achieve that goal. There are many who remember Estonia when it was free and independent between 1920 and 1940 before the secret agreement between Stalin and Hitler resulted in its takeover by the USSR. They remember the arrest and deportation of 90,000 Estonians, and they long to recreate the "nice little country" Estonia was.

In our personal contacts, we found them to be independent in spirit, well educated, fond of art and music, hard working, and thoroughly delightful. The members of our small English speaking congregation met us at the boat, helped us move into our flat, gave us books (in English) to read, patiently taught us where to shop and what to buy..in short, were guardian angels watching over us. We were impressed by their avid interest in the West, their optimism in spite of deprivation, their generosity in sharing themselves and their time, their ability to make the most of whatever they had, and their ingenuity in "beating the system" to supply their needs...a truly humbling experience for us.

Estonia is a Christian nation. Before the occupation in 1940, it was 70% Lutheran, 19% Orthodox, and the rest, other denominations. Repression of the church...no Christian education, no religious services, no church publications...and denial of jobs and/or places in university to any person professing Christ effectively reduced the number of publicly committed Christians. Two generations were affected.

But today, the church is in renaissance. People, both young and old, are seeking God. Last year in the first public confirmation since 1943, 2000 were confirmed in Tallinn alone. Churches are open daily, tended and kept clean and in good repair by lay people. Churches now used for other purposes are being returned to the church. New parish houses are being built with the help of the Finns and others. The Theological Institute in Tallinn is training Sunday School teachers and lay leaders. The thirst for God, for an anchor in their changing and uncertain world, is overwhelming the pastors and church leaders.



Start your
ink
flowing
for
December's

TABLE

TALK!

MAKING CHOICES.

One good thing that Roy Enquist has shared with his classes is the urgency of the church's need for its members to speak out on ethical issues. The future is coming whether we notice it or not, and for a body of proclamation to say nothing on important issues is nonsense. I think we do notice and do comprehend the significance of issues such as abortion or the environment or homosexuality; and I think that any silence is due to either satisfactory consensus or such emotional investment in our positions that we dare not expose ourselves. I don't want to assault anyone's boundaries of trust, but I encourage this seminary student body to share something of themselves on these important issues freely but discreetly.

As a starting point, we need to transcend the polarization that can occur when we cloak our own positions in language of moral justification. If I have decided to have an abortion or not to have an abortion, to enter a homosexual relationship or a heterosexual relationship, I can not seek the righteousness of that decision in an argument of right and wrong. Such a quest assumes a defensive posture that deflects all discussion. Such an argument sounds like so many letters to the editor in the morning paper in which some moralist is shouting, "Be like me!"

If I have made a decision about my life and therefore about the lives of those near me, I can only seek the righteousness of that decision in the convenient grace of God. Wasn't it such a faith that was manifested in Jesus as he stood before the world eager to judge him by its own sense of morality and law? That faith manifested in

Jesus was a faith in and openness to the future that God controls and that God is bringing to the world.

The church needs to lift up the freedom we have by grace and enable people to make decisions. I am not saying people are free to do anything they want. Nobody does "anything they want," but we always "will do something." Unless we want those "somethings" to be done outside of conversation with the church, the church needs to avoid the defensive postures of moralism and self-righteous justification. I am not saying that there are no objective truths. However, whatever objective truths I discern are not "out there," but deep with in me. There's the rub.

If somebody is deciding for or against an abortion or living in a homosexual or heterosexual relationship, the church has too much wisdom and compassion to deflect discussions with anybody. The church is better off helping people to examine the context and consequences of their decisions than crushing people with deontological rhetoric. The future will have people who have decided for abortion. The future will have people who have decided against abortion. The future will have people who are homosexual and heterosexual. And God controlling the proclamation of freedom by grace, the future will have all these people in the church.

Viking Dietrich

NEWS ABOUT YOUTH

Diane Jackson is a third year student who commutes from Haymarket, Virginia. Throughout her time at Gettysburg she has continued to work full time as a Director of Youth Ministries. "God willing," she says, she will finish her academic requirements this year and complete CPE and internship this coming year. She has met most people on campus, and enjoys sharing experiences and ideas with all. I am glad she has volunteered to use her experiences to initiate discussion here about youth and youth ministry. Thanks Diane, Viking Dietrich.

Youth ministry in mainline churches is in trouble. Recession has made a lot of anxious people even more anxious when it comes to certain programs. There is a decided lack of courses regarding youth ministry being taught in our seminaries. It is almost as if it is expected that anyone can "do" youth. After all, what kind of training does it take to go with a bunch of kids to the bowling alley and out for pizza afterwards?

For the next few months, I will offer some of my experiences with youth. Generally, I will discuss a current issue that my youth groups are dealing with, some practical ideas or activities, and a resource address and description. Your ideas and suggestions are most welcome and will be included if you drop them in my mailbox. I am aware that in teaching parish and internship the request to be involved with youth ministry is quite common. It's a wonderfilled ministry if you have some structure and resources. I guess I feel like I've complained enough and this is an attempt to offer some help.

Young people come to church youth groups for as many reasons as there are differences in the personalities of those who come. Young people, like all of us, have

certain expectations of church involvement. One thing we sometimes do to help keep youth meetings from becoming too boring is to minimize the time spent on Bible study. Still, whether they know how to ask for it or not, they want to experience and hear from the pulpit and lectern something that is relevant to where they are in the world.

TIP - Instead of using the Scriptures from the current Sunday, use next week's lessons. However you choose to study the material, when they hear it reinforced the next Sunday in church, they like the feeling of familiarity with the text. Don't we all?

RESOURCE - Let's start with the good old ELCA! Write to: The Division for Congregational Life-Youth Ministry, ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL, 60631. Phone: 1-800-638-3522. This quarter's packet has some really nice material including the 1991-1992 Program Planning Guide, "The Greatest of These is Love." These planning guides can be used piece-meal or in sequence. It's free! 'Til next time, Diane Jackson.

