

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

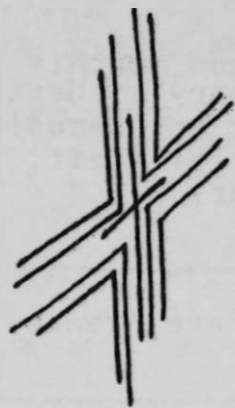


TABLE TALK

December, 1991 ~ Volume 27 Number 3~

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BLAST FROM THE PAST - Part Three

December 8th, 1991

Blessings as we await the Coming of the Lord,

Every few days or so it seems that it might turn cold and stay that way, but then the temperatures creep back up over the 60 degree mark and we start all over again. Still I'm looking out the window over my computer and I see white lights on a tree in my neighbors front yard. Weather or not - Christmas is coming. But not yet! (And to prove my point, just as I wrote that last little phrase, the neighbors turned off their tree lights!)

We have quite a bit more preparing to do. There are still sixteen more candles left unlit on our advent log. Every night my son asks if there is enough light from the candles that we can do our advent devotions without any lamps lit. "Not yet," I told him tonight, "but soon we'll have enough light to read by the candles." The light is growing.

What a surprise! Just when I was beginning to think that there wasn't anybody out there who knew that Table Talk existed, I got an avalanche of submissions. I had figured that we would have a short issue this month, but instead we have quite a few articles to publish. I thank all of you for taking the time to write to our community.

Our "Around the Globe" feature this month is subtitled "Celebrating Christmas in Tanzania." Benjamin Ngede shares the experience of Christmas in his home country. We have a parable by Sue Irons, "Cur Deus Homo," which will brighten your holiday lights. Thomas Jacoby has written a heartfelt article about Christian love. Please take the time to read it and respond with that love. "Lord, To Whom Shall We Go?" is an article by Katherine Douglass addressing diversity of perspective.

We have our monthly features from Matthew Riegel: the SA Presidential Epistle, as well as the third of three parts of the Donald R. Heiges Inaugural Address, "Prospectis for a School of Theology." A new monthly feature by Tamara Riegel, "Bookmarks," will feature new books in our library. Finally - I actually got a few responses to my call for Advent or Christmas memories. Look for these as well.

May your Advent continue to be blessed as you await the coming of our Lord. See you all in the new year. Look for the next issue of Table Talk in February.

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

SA PRESIDENTIAL EPISTLE

For the first time since CPE, I recently prayed outside the context of a worship service with someone whom I did not know. Think of it. How often do any of us run into situations where we feel comfortable asking a total stranger to pray with us with no church building in site. I was not even wearing a cleric or serving in any church capacity.

My ambulance pager opened-up, summoning me to a location near the seminary to assist with a fallen subject. The victim, an elderly women, was in a great deal of distress--more frightened than in pain--and as we loaded into the ambulance I heard her friend say to her that she would be alright because of her strong faith. Enroute to the hospital, she repeatedly mumbled, requesting help from her Father. Having done everything within my medical skills, I asked her if she would like me to pray with her. She quickly said yes. "Heavenly Father," we prayed, "your Son travelled throughout Israel not only preaching the Good News but healing as well, send now the comfort of your Holy Spirit and your healing power into your daughter's life in this time of trial; guide the hands of the nurses and doctors who are about to minister to her that she return to a fullness of health; this we ask through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord." Her breathing slowed, and her anxiety appeared to diminish. We had a pleasant chat the remainder of our ride to the hospital.

My partner asked me on the return ride to the station if I always prayed with my patients. I explained to him that I had picked up certain verbal cues from the patient and her friend, suggesting her openness to pray, and, having exhausted the medical protocols, there was little else to do. My partner pressed me, asking what good it had done for her. I replied that I believed in the power of prayer and that the patient apparently did also. I also explained that a purely psychological approach would point to her belief that it did something positive, pointing to her improvement as evidence.

My partner was still unconvinced--and

appropriately so. The Gettysburg Fire Department has had a string of very bad car accidents, and my partner could not reconcile the meaningless pain he had seen in the field with commonly espoused pollyanna conceptions of God. Where has God been in the last two fatal accidents?

Though my work with the Ambulance Service over the past six years, I have come to witness over and over again God's activity in the midst of tragedy. I am convinced that every time there is an emergency call God is there--not necessarily in the accident itself--God is there working through the emergency crews that come into the crisis. We speak of inbreaking, but that inbreaking may not always be obvious. God's activity through means cannot erase the accident, but it can change the meaning of the accident. Where once there was only Law, God sends unlikely vehicles of Grace.

My partner still is not sure that he can buy this construction, but it gets me through call after call. Most importantly, I believe it is the truth, and I believe that I must witness to that truth even among my colleagues when they present the opportunity. We are surrounded by a world that is simply blind to the activity of God because no one has told them what it looks like.

In these seasons of Advent and Christmas, are we not in a position to witness to a truth that the rest of society cannot see? Is not the activity of God in birth of The Child a hidderness that demands our testimony? In a world of relativism, there is the objective truth of Jesus Christ, born of Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffering death, buried, risen, ascending unto the Father where he sits on the right, Lord of all Creation. During Advent, we prophesy to the world, "Get ready! Here it comes!" During Christmastide we say, "See! Here it is!" Come Epiphany, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

On second thought, I did not pray with a stranger; she and I shared a common brother--and what an opportunity to witness to an unlikely audience! --Riegel

BLAST FROM THE PAST

- Part Three

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

III

Before stating the thesis I quote by way of introduction another sentence from the pen of Richard Niebuhr: "A community of service is not as such a theological center; but a school that only studies man-before-God and man in relation to neighbor without the accompaniment of frequent direct encounters with human *Thous*, serving and being served, has become too irresponsible to be called a divinity school.

And now the third thesis: *A theological school, created and maintained by the church, carries on its work in dynamic relationship with the world, and especially with the culture in which it exists.* As the chapel symbolizes the seminary's workshop, and library-classrooms symbolize the intellectual character of its task, the symbol of its context is a montage of human beings launching space ships and atomic submarines, testing cancer cures and hydrogen bombs, bouncing television off satellites and radar signals off the moon, and yet, as always, conceiving and dying, loving and hating, blessing and cursing, singing and suffering, healing and killing, with or without faith, with or without hope. This is the world God made and, warped and twisted by sin as it is, it is still the world God loves and expects us to love.

Mid-twentieth century is not the sixteenth nor the first century A.D. It is essential that students in a school of theology become discriminatingly aware of the kind of culture in which men are living today, and of what such a culture has done and is doing to men. It is patently true that human nature has not changed over the centuries, but the stresses and strains to which human nature is subjected today are vastly different from what they were when Dr. Martin Luther taught and preached in Wittenberg. Just because a seminarian has had a course in psychology and has acquired some knowledge of the Reformation does not

mean that he can communicate the Gospel to twentieth century man. Moreover, the task is far deeper than what is usually meant by communication. Just because a seminarian becomes somewhat skillful in the communication of ideas (theological or otherwise) does not necessarily mean that through him God's truth and grace will be mediated. In any case, the more deeply, the more broadly, the theological student has studied and experienced the kind of world in which men live today the greater is the probability of his being an asset, rather than a liability, to the church in the fulfillment of its mission.

Therefore, a school of theology will take seriously the world, both as the context of its existence and the field of its concern. When all that goes on in a theological school is done with a view to the actualization of God's truth and grace in the life of contemporary man, then the critical and constructive involvement of students in the world is as important as their knowledge and understanding of what God has already done in history. This engagement will be as broad as time and opportunity allow but in minimal terms it will include dialog with representatives of non-theological disciplines, a period of clinical training in a hospital, participation in political or social action, direct exposure to contemporary art and literature, and apprenticeship in the church's ministry. One of the most serious charges leveled against graduates of theological schools is that they are out of touch with reality. To the extent to which the charge is valid, a school of theology must see to it that its graduates are in touch with reality or creeping irrelevancy will infect the whole mission of the church.

The cultural context in which the church exists today is so radically different from the context of any previous era that theological school must give what may appear to be a disproportionate amount of attention to this context if the

penetrating power of the Gospel is not to become increasingly dissipated. This strange and terrible yet fascinating epoch has been labeled by proffoundly perceptive analysts as Post-Christian, not in the sense that faith is dead or will die shortly or that the church is desappearing or will disappear soon but in the sense that western culture is no longer informed in any significant way by the Christian faith. As we all know, ther was such a time, a seemingly long period of time, when Christianity as a cultural phenomenon was on the ascendant and in its dominance became a powerful factor in the shaping of political, social, and economic patterns. In the words of Will Herberg,

we are coming now into the fruitage of the breakup of the *Corpus Christianorum*, of that integration of man's cultural life which it took a thousand years to build and has taken another thousand years to undo. The breakup of the *Corpus Christianorum* has been displaced by a many-sided pluralism: social, political, religious, and also a cultural pluralism that is compounded of images and habits of thought no longer effectively shaped by Christianity.

There are those who object to the use of the term "Post-Christian era," but, regardless of the label, some chilling facts must be faced, as for example, (a) the steady retreat of the church during the past quarter of a century in a disturbing number of non-western countries which it had entered in the nineteenth century, (b) the change from a favorable to an unfavorable or even hostile climate in almost all western countries, and (c) the almost complete loss to the church in our own country of labor and the masses at one end of the spectrum, and of the intellectuals and the aritst at the other end, and, in between, of hundreds of thousands of direction-determining persons in the major arguments of our cultural life who ignore the church except as political lobby or a status symbol in certain suburban communities. After letting his analytical eye scan the horizon, Martin Marty asks: Are there *any* signs that point toward resuscitation, re-establishment, renewal on a permanent or widespread scale of Christendom?" The clear implication of the question is that there are no such

signs!

This is the world, then into which a school of theologica sends its graduates. Such a school had better see to it that its graduates are under no illusions about this world. And such a school had better (a) inspire and encourage and guide it students to create new forms for the mission of the church in this kind of world, and (b) bring its students to sufficient spiritual and intellectual maturity to survive in this kind of world as servants of Christ and bearers of His truth and grace.

Finally, a word is in order about the organized church. To the organized church is also part of the world; indeed, Luther saw it as one of the three basic orders of creation, along with the family and the state. Consequently, the theological student must be involved in the life and work of the church as weel as in the world outside the church. It is mentioned last because the stress in field work has usually been upon experience in a congregation to the neglect of dialog in the academic arena, clinical traingin, political or social action, and exposure to contemporary art and literature. Nevertheless, involovement in the church's ministry *under proper control and supervision* is essential in the education of a prospective servant of the church. Concurrently with such involvement a student ought to learn the methodology of what a colleague of mine has called "an evangelical self-criticism of the church." Unless such a methodology is learned, appresticeship in the ministry will probably tend to perpetuate practices which should be modified or abandoned and to inhibit the projecting of new tactics for the church's mission in the world. But supervised experience inside the organized church is clearly a necessary aspect of a theological student's orientation to the world in which he is and will be living and working.

To recapitulate: By way of a prospectus for a theological school, created and maintained by the church, three theses have been offered, as follows:

I. At the center of a school of theology is the worship of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

FIRST ANNUAL KRODEL CLASSIC

II. The task of a school of theological 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.

III. A school of theology carries on its worship and work in dynamic relationship with the world, and especially with the culture in which it exists.

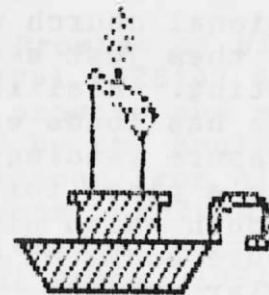
For the purpose of analysis the theses have been considered separately but the separation is artificial. What has been affirmed can be diagramed in the form of three concentric circles. The center circle can be labeled "worship," the next circle "work," and the third and outer circle "world." Neither conceptually nor actually can such neat divisions be maintained. A constant movement should and will take place in any given school so that worship informs work, and work informs worship, and both are informed by the world, and, hopefully, inform the world.

Likewise, any neat division of the fields of theological education into substantive and functional is artificial when *all* work is done "with a view to the actualization of God's truth and grace in the lives of men today." For each field in varying degree is both substantive and functional.

This is a prospectus for a school of theology and a prospectus exists only on paper. Whether or not the idea becomes reality depends largely upon the competence, the commitment, and the community of faculty members. Students in increasing numbers and in increasing quality can be admitted; the finest facilities and equipment can be provided; but whether or not in a school of theology worship is central and essential, the work done is at the same time rigorously intellectual and deeply practical, and relationships with the world are dynamic and fruitful depends upon the members of the faculty.

May God bless those who teach and those who learn, and grant that both teachers and students in all humility of heart may ever look unto Him, the Fountain of all truth and grace.

After some indescribable calculations and recounting, the official winners of the Krodel Classic turned out to be the Hammond-Meyer quartet of Janet, Jim, Scott and their Brazilian advantage Regina. Of twenty-eight putters, Steve Herr (46) and Eoin Dietrich (67) finished the eighteen holes with the lowest scores in their respective age categories. Holes-in-one were gained by Steve Herr, Regina Meyer, and Vickie Carlson. It was a beautiful day on the green, and we thank Del and Nancie of Macduffers for their gracious hospitality. Don't miss the Second Annual Krodel Classic for some serious hilarity.



- Red Cross Blood Drive -

The Red Cross Blood Drive held on December 4th was a moderate success. We were able to collect 39 pints of blood, which was one fewer than last year. To try to make it easier for students to participate in the drive we will co-ordinate our finals preparations with the time of the drive next year. We thank all of those who were able to donate their blood this year. Thank you!

BOOKMARKS
by Tamara Riegel

As catalog librarian in the Wentz Library, I am privileged to see every new book the library receives before it ever arrives on the shelves. I have often contemplated the fact that the library receives and collects works on many varied subjects which may not see much use. These are works which may be peripheral to the curriculum, or they may have little or no relation to the curriculum, so that they are not in demand for class work. Yet some of the works strike me as useful to anyone contemplating professional church work, and some of them just seem interesting. Realizing that everyone has loads of extra time for pleasure reading, I will try to write a piece for *Table Talk* every month which highlights new or obscure books on one particular subject.

Before beginning let me add a caveat that I have examined these books, sometimes reading the introductions for cataloging purposes, but I have not necessarily read any of them. This is not a review, and the opinions expressed in the books may not be my own.

The chosen topic for this month is spiritual direction, which seems to be attracting ever-increasing interest nowadays, especially in the Roman Catholic church (where it is second in publishing volume only to the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*). Spiritual direction, or at least personal spiritual life, is also a matter for perennial discussion on this campus.

Prayer groups and corporate worship are familiar to us, but spiritual direction, which focuses on the one-on-one relationship between a spiritual mentor and the mentored one, may be less well known. Informally spiritual direction goes on all the time here, whenever one person looks to another for spiritual guidance. Perhaps we would benefit from a more formal practice, such as exists at Roman Catholic seminaries. It would have to be at least as helpful as synod committee relaters.

Spiritual direction is an ancient practice in the Christian church. The letters of the Fathers (and Mothers, when they are extant) abound with examples of spiritual advice and mentoring. Such correspondence continued in medieval times. For an example, take a look at *A Woman's Quest for Spiritual Guidance*, Hellenic College Press, 1986, which is the correspondence of a 14th century Byzantine princess with her spiritual guides.

Some examples of basic introductions to spiritual direction are *Exploring Spiritual Direction*, by Alan Jones, Harper & Row, 1982, and *Mentoring*, by Edward Sellner, Ave Maria Press, 1990. The latter focuses on spiritual direction for the lay person, and on the mutuality of the mentoring relationship. It also has a chapter on C.S. Lewis' experiences with spiritual direction.

Writings on Spiritual

Direction, edited by Jerome Neufelder and Mary Coelho, Seabury Press, 1982, is an anthology of writings from the Old Testament to the present, including a few selections from Martin Luther. *The Way of Spiritual Direction*, by Francis Kelly Nemeck and Marie Theresa Coombs, M. Glazier, 1990 (BX2350 .7 N45 1985), develops a theology of spiritual direction based on Thomas Merton and St. John of the Cross.

Other books develop spiritual direction in relation to other topics. Thomas Merton wrote *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Liturgical Press, 1960). *Women at the Well: Feminist Perspectives on Spiritual Direction*, by Kathleen Fischer, Paulist Press, 1988 (BV4527 F57 1988), discusses the particular needs and interests of women who undertake such a relationship. *Readiness for Ministry Through Spiritual Direction*, by Forster Freeman, Alban Institute, 1986, is another specialized title.

ADVENT

The season of Advent is upon us. For those of you looking for liturgical resources, here are a few of the newest:

An Advent Sourcebook, edited by Thomas O'Gorman, Liturgy Training Publications, 1988, is one volume in an excellent series (hymns, prayers, stories, etc., ranging from ancient to modern).

Advent, Christmas: A Guide to the Eucharist and Hours, by Kevin Irwin, Pueblo Pub. Co., 1986, is a commentary on the liturgy which highlights the

relationship of the liturgy to the season and to the Scripture readings.

Keeping Advent and Christmastime, by Peter Mazar, Liturgy Training Publications, 1988, is a liturgical resource especially suited to family worship. Another family resource, *Before and After Christmas*, Debbie O'Neal, Augsburg, 1991, has suggestions for young children.

For Joanne and the Bowsart Committee, *Deck the Halls*, by Ralph Dessem, C.S.S. Publishing, 1986, is a service for the hanging of the greens.

The Promise of His Glory, Mobray, 1991 (BX5147 A3C5 1991), contains prayers and services developed by the Anglican Church for the season from All Saints to Christmas. *Welcoming the Light of Christ*, Michael Perham, Liturgical Press, 1991 (BX5147 A3C53 1991) is a commentary on *The Promise*.

EASTERN EUROPE

A couple of brand-new books on Eastern Europe have just come in. *Martin Luther: Theology and Revolution*, by Gerhard Brendler, Oxford University Press, 1991 (BR325 B69513 1991) is a new book with a unique perspective on Luther by an East German author. *Revolutions in Eastern Europe*, Niels Nielsen, Orbis Books, 1991 (BR738 .6 N54 1991) looks at the church's role in the political events in Eastern Europe.

A reflection on the Fall, '91 semester, written by a first-year student.

Christmas is still a few weeks away as this is being written. We've all gone through an experience that has changed us forever. Many of us are reveling in the relief that we've survived our first semester. But many of us also feel like some part of us did not survive. Without question, this experience has forced us to grow. Also without question, it has cost some of us dearly.

There are those among us who would say, "That's just the way the program works." And that may be true. . . in some cases. For those of us who are able to perform well on exams, or comprehend quickly, or read rapidly, or write papers with ease, we probably feel like things happened in just about the right way. The program is probably OK with us, if we are a "good student".

But if academic studies are difficult for us, or if the stress of moving a whole family to a completely new existence has stressed us to the breaking point, or if we are a mother trying to care for young children, or if we're a single student, who struggles with problems of self-awareness and identity, or even if we just can't seem to do anything for ourselves or our families in the precious few hours left to us in the week, then we may not think this program is so great.

And we think about those who force all this work on us. We are convinced that they have little regard for our personal dignity and sense of well-being. We see ourselves as having been stripped of power to manage our own use of time and robbed of anything even resembling normal activity. We have placed ourselves at the complete mercy of an institution, in order to undergo a process that, we hope and pray, will result in our being able to do what we believe God wills in our life.

The high calling of the ministry and the demands for suitability of those participating in

a program such as this make it all too easy for our own individuality to be treated as unimportant. Some of us feel like we've been chewed up and spit out. It is not an overstatement to say that there are some emotional and spiritual wounds that need immediate attention.

We understand that we are a community. And we know that, somehow, we must come up with the ways and means whereby we can meet each others' needs. But what does that really mean? Exactly who are we and how do the things we go through affect our community?

Yes, we are students, who have chosen to undergo a program unlike that of any other kind of school. Here, we haven't just had to learn history, or communication sciences, or philosophy. Here, in addition to all of those things, our very concepts of who we are, why we exist at all, and how we must learn to interact with others, have been radically shaken up in less than three months. But, is our common role as students all that binds us?

Aren't we also those who administer the program, who make the decisions about curriculum, and who must use the great gifts we have been given to accomplish this life-changing work in students? Aren't we also those who strive to educate, edify, temper, correct, encourage, humble, and do countless other things that make real the aspirations of this seminary, part of the church of Jesus Christ? Those of us who are students can easily forget the awesome responsibilities willingly accepted by those of us who are faculty, administrators, and staff.

Emotional wounds do not happen only to students. Students can inflict pain on faculty members, who stand before them on a daily basis, opening themselves to the risk that what they do may not be received in the way they intend. Unless we've actually walked in these shoes, we have no idea of the negative emotional impact of doing our absolute best job in front of a large group of adults, who make it

By clear, by comments and actions, that we are not measuring up to our task.

Becoming a faculty member does not cause one to be able to bear rejection. Students can overlook that teachers are children of God, just like students. All share the same nature; all are made in the same image. Emotions and feelings are an integral part of this image.

Nor should faculty members assume, when they appear to make judgements about a student failing to "measure up" in any way, that these assessments, even though the student understands their necessity, do not exact great emotional cost. We are all of us. We are bound together by Jesus Christ. We are not students and they the faculty. Nor are we the administrators and they the students. Don't all of us have a share in the successful outcome of everything that goes on here?

It is not enough to say that we have created certain parts of the program, which deal with this problem. If there's one thing about programs that we need to guard against, and this applies even more directly to parish ministry, which is at the heart of why we're all here, it's their characteristic of becoming a substitution for our larger personal involvement. We tend to think that we need only carry out our defined part of the whole - our individual job description. We put a box around our Christian responsibility.

Here, in this seminary, it takes the form of our thinking that Mark Oldenburg or Norma Wood will provide the necessary safeguards against the vicissitudes that the program can inflict. Or we assume that those who need love and understanding will somehow stumble into the right situation and find what they need. We all have the God-given ability to help those of us who need it. We dare not wait until an individual gets to the end of their rope and cries out for help. We must seek out with tenacity and vigor those places where we can apply the healing balm of love.

Our structured discussion groups do not

provide the means for this kind of emotional therapy. The defined subject usually limits discussion. Our structured intercessory prayer system is a wonderful thing to have, but is not the total answer. Nor is it enough to say that we should privately pray for those needs of which we become aware.

What is lacking is a time of very relaxed group sharing, where role barriers are overcome and we seek to give of ourselves to each other, in the way of love shown to us by Jesus Christ. As long as there are distinctions of "we/they" in our actions, we are not fully realizing our tremendous, unique opportunity to forge a community out of many individuals.

If we, who are all united by a common realization of God's sovereign love in our lives, cannot allow love to break out among us, what great difficulty will we have in showing this light to a world in darkness? This is the time that has been given to us to learn from each other. Some of us teach in the classroom, some of us outside this structure. All of us learn from all we do.

Especially in this season of preparation, but in all times and in all places, can't we begin to make use of this precious opportunity to learn how to love unreservedly? It takes practice to become able to be one in spirit with another human being who is different from our self. It's not easy for some of us to cry with someone who suffers, or to forget about our own sophistication and be willing to look downright silly in the sharing of a child's jubilation over something that we may not think is particularly important.

Certainly, this time has been given to us for the learning of all kinds of knowledge, which is supposed to make us better ministers of God's love. But we need to work at learning how to throw our arms around each other and bear each others' burdens. This does not automatically happen in our worship. We need to grow into the role of being the vessel from which God's love is poured out to others.

We all need help with our coping. There are many good people in our midst who will continue to bring the light of God to many others. Some of these good people will not survive the harsh requirements of this curriculum. We should not be proud of our attrition rate. It may be necessary for some of us to face the fact that we are not meant to function as pastors or AIM's, but we don't have to accept the impersonal, institutional method in accomplishing this. "Weeding out" may be unavoidable, but we should hate every second of it.

All of us will undoubtedly make up our own mind about this, but many have observed that people who have little knowledge of the things we learn at seminary, but who know how to allow the spirit of love to move through them, are far more helpful than educated, aloof individuals, especially during those instances of crisis and conflict in the lives of God's people, when they need help the most. We all have certain special gifts, given by the spirit, but all have been given the ability to love. All knowledge will pass away, but the greatest gift, love, will never fail.

We are one body, with many parts. We are children, we are adults, we are students, we are teachers, we are women, we are men, we are gifted intellectually, we have a difficult time with reading and writing, we are secure in our identity, we wrestle with doubts and pain about who we are. We are of all races, all genders, we are conservative, we are liberal, we are willing to take great risks, we are afraid to venture out of our normal way of doing things. We are slow to accept change, we are radical, we are great orators, we are slow of speech, we are daughters and sons, we are grandmothers and grandfathers, we are naive, we are wise. None of us is all things; we can't all offer the precise help that is needed at any given time. But we are responsible for each others' welfare. It is essential for us to make time for learning what real selfless, giving love feels like and

how we do it. Empathy is not an easy thing, but it is an essential skill for those who minister the Gospel.

(Maybe there should be a class . . . 3.101 - "The Art of Christian Loving". . Maybe the course description should include, "Textbooks will not be required for this course. Instead, bring your life experiences to class".)

Of course, this is only a silly thought. Or is it? If we allow ourselves to waste the golden opportunity for doing things of this sort during our seminary years, we only hurt our own community - our own body. If the body has a sore foot, it doesn't walk or run very well.

Maybe this break between the demands of fall semester and J term would be a good time to get something like this started. If so, let's get busy. Maybe all this has been tried before. If so, let's try again. Maybe CPE will do this for us. If so, we should be helped to prepare for that experience, rather than made to fear and expect the worst from it. Maybe there is some already established group that serves this purpose, here on campus. If so, everyone should know about it.

In any event, what will be lost if we make the attempt to move beyond the established structure, even if all our expectations are not met? On the other hand, what could be gained if we succeed at what we try to do?

May we all continually strive to become better able to give and receive God's love, shown to us in that while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us.

Thomas Jacoby

Lord, To Whom Shall We Go?

by Katherine Douglass

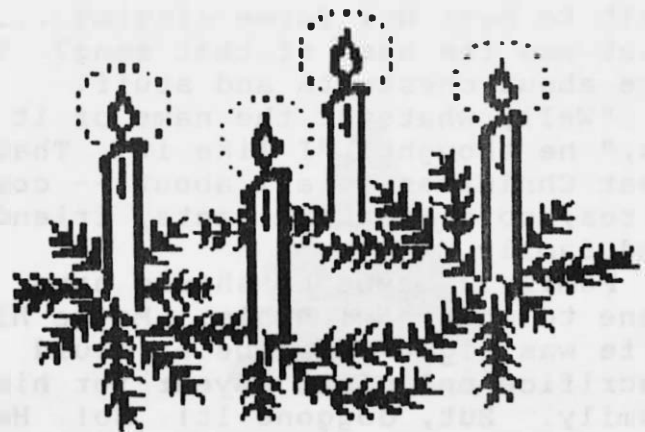
I've just finished re-reading one of my favorite novels, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*. In reading this book, I was reminded of Henry James' famous short novel, *The Turn of the Screw*, not because *The Good Soldier* is a ghost story or has anything to do with the supernatural, but because in both tales, we are confronted with a disturbing question: Can we believe the words of the narrator? Are they telling us the truth? Are they mentally unstable, writing the words of mad people? Or are their perspectives simply narrow or biased?

In *The Good Soldier*, the narrator, John Dowell, tells us the story of his discovery of his wife's constant infidelities, primarily with the man whom Dowell considers to be the best in the world, "a thoroughly fine fellow." He has discovered that everything that he believed to be true about his wife and his closest friends is utterly false: an appearance meant to disguise the worst of human nature. We listen to him tell this twisted tale, and think, how could he not have realized? Why doesn't he have any anger, any righteous indignation? How can we believe someone who is so out of touch with reality? Dowell has lived in the world and been oblivious to what has gone on around him. He has been completely insensitive to relationships, to moral behavior, to the reality of his situation.

As many of you know, *The Turn of the Screw* is a story within a story, with the heart of the tale, of the return of evil spirits and a battle over the fate of two children, told by their governess. While some read this story on its face, others find that all of the evidence of this haunting resides completely in the mind of the governess. We are told she is "nervous," has depressions and mood elevations, and comes from a family with a history of insanity. And no other person in the story can testify to the presence of the evil ones, Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. This woman is in the opposite condition to John Dowell's: she sees more than is in reality. Are we to believe her?

Shouldn't we at least question whether this story of hers is true?

All of this led me to think of our preaching and of our community of faith. Aren't all of us subject more or less to the biases of John Dowell and James' governess? Is there anyone who can see and testify to exactly the truth? Of course not. If there is any truth in our preaching, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Left to our own devices, our preaching would be as distorted as these narratives. And there is more to it: in the community of faith, called by the Spirit, we don't have to rely on the words of one narrator. We have a diversity of speakers, we have ongoing conversation. Certainly the creators of the New Testament canon understood this when they included not one but four gospel accounts. We can hear the Word of God from different and yet faithful perspectives, and be the richer for it. And we can praise God for this marvelous diversity.



CUR DEUS HOMO

It was Christmas Eve. The chicken farmer's wife and children were getting dressed for church, and the chicken farmer was trying to explain to his wife -- for the umpteenth time -- why he wouldn't be going with them.

"I can't believe it," he said, "I just can't believe that God Almighty was ever a man. It makes no sense to me. Why would God come to live with measley little humans when He's got that wonderful court in Heaven?"

"Well," his wife replied, "I don't know how to explain it to you, but I think you could at least come to church with us once a year...for the children."

"I can't!" The farmer was in shock. "You know how I feel about hypocrisy! I can't go and pretend I believe all those words I'll be forced to hear and say. It would ruin my Christmas!"

Mrs. Chicken Farmer just shook her head at her husband's unintentional irony. "It's too late now, anyway," she said, "we have to leave. Come on, children."

After his family had gone, the chicken farmer settled into his favorite recliner, popped a cold one, & clicked through all the cable stations until he found the Perry Como Christmas Eve Special. He couldn't wait to hear Mel Torme singing ... what was the name of that song? The one about chestnuts and stuff.

"Well, whatever the name of it is," he thought, "I like it! That's what Christmas is all about -- cozy fires, cold weather, Santa, friends, and family."

Family...maybe he should have gone to church with his. Maybe his wife was right -- maybe he could sacrifice one night a year for his family. But, doggone it! No! He wasn't going to compromise his beliefs! He was setting a better example for his children by standing up for his convictions than he would by participating in the perpetuation

of some old crazy myth!

God made man, indeed! That's utter foolishness! God is in His Heaven making sure that the planets don't collide, or something. He doesn't have time to worry about what's happening with us, for cryin' out loud! That's why He gave us those 10 Commandments -- if we do those, we'll be OK and God can focus his attention on the really important stuff. He doesn't need to bother with us till we die or the world ends...whichever comes first.

The chicken farmer was pleased with his logic. He knew that any rational human being would agree with him...that 'God made man' was a story for irrational minds.

"That's why," he thought smugly, "I stayed home tonight. 'God made man' is a fairy tale for women and children, not for a rational man like me!"

He was idly flipping through the channels during Perry's commercial break. "It's not like I don't believe in God, or anything," he was thinking, "I just can't understand how anyone could think that He ever walked the earth as one of us. Why would He do that?"

On his trip around the TV dial, the chicken farmer caught glimpses of the news -- troops patrolling Bethlehem, Christmas cease-fire broken in Yugoslavia, a 3-car pile-up caused by a drunk driver -- and of a 'Save the Children' telethon.

"We've sure made a mess of this world," he thought. "I can't understand that, either. God told us how to behave so that this wouldn't happen. I guess it's not His fault if we're so stupid. He was very clear -- 10 little rules for life -- and if we can't do it, that's our problem, not God's!"

The chicken farmer made it back to his channel just in time for Mel Torme, but Mel wasn't even past the part about Jack Frost when the farmer heard a tremendous commotion in his back yard.

"Oh, no! Not now...not when Mel's singing. I wait all year for this! Why now?!?"

But he knew the sound of bunch of frightened chickens when he heard it, and he was hearing it now. He had no choice but to go out to see what was bothering them. "See you next year, Mel," he said as he pulled on his boots.

He opened his back door, and saw that his entire flock of chickens had somehow gotten out of the hen-house. The wind must have blown the door open, but he'd have to worry about how the chickens got out later. Right now he had to worry about how to get them back in.

The farmer opened the hen-house door wide and turned on all the lights. "There," he thought, "the chickens will see the light from the building and come back in."

But the sudden light only made the birds more frightened, and they ran around in great confusion, bumping into each other, the porch steps, the fence, the farmer.

"They're going to hurt themselves. Maybe if I scatter some seed in front of the door, they'll come over here, and I can push the door closed behind them."

He scattered the chicken scratch, but his brood was too intent on trying to escape the dark, cold night to notice. They were going everywhere except the hen-house.

The chicken farmer went back to his porch and stood there waving his arms and shouting, hoping to scare his birds back toward their house, but he succeeded only in scattering them more.

"Come, on, you stupid birds! Your house is right in front of you. Your nests are in there. It's warm in there. Why are you running around out here like...like..." He was going to say, "like chickens with their heads cut off," but he thought that was little too weird.

The chicken farmer began to run around the yard with his chickens,

flapping his 'wings' and cackling, running back and forth between his birds and the hen-house, wishing that they'd get the message & follow his example of going in out of the cold. But they didn't.

Frustrated, the chicken farmer plopped down in the snow. "What else can I do?" He was speaking aloud. "I've tried everything to get you back to the safety of your hen-house, but you don't understand me. You won't do what I do -- you don't know what I'm saying to you. If only I could be a real chicken for 5 minutes, then I could talk 'chicken' to you and you'd understand me. Then I could tell you in your own language what you need to do."

At that precise moment, the bells of the church started to ring in celebration of the Incarnation, and as the weary chicken farmer, utterly baffled over how to rescue his brood, listened to them, he began to understand why God became man.



Around the Globe...

"Celebrating Christmas in Tanzania" - with Benjamin Ngede

Christmas is always a big and happy day in Tanzania. The churches are full of people during worship services and the streets are jammed with people. The car drivers beep their horns in the city streets, the drum beats are heard in the villages, the dancers jump high interchangeably in response to the different drum beats, their legs tied with the local bells called "njuga" move as if they are electrified into different directions. The music heard attracts many. In short Christmas celebrations are enjoyable. It is this time of the year when most families make their family reunions.

This day is celebrated by all people regardless of their races and religion. Muslims always join their fellow Christians to make the day a remarkable one. Normally the church services are attended even by those who worship only on one day of the year, you can call them Christmas Worshipers if you wish. If you happen to visit their homes you would find a very fine decorated Christmas tree in front of their houses. Sometimes a big poster is hung on this tree which contains these words: "WISHING YOU A HAPPY CHRISTMAS."

The parents buy Christmas presents for their children and for friends, too. The children are given the opportunity to choose what they would like to buy for themselves and even for their friends as presents. Most people would prefer buying new clothes for this very special day. Presents and Christmas cards have a special place in this time of year, and the Christmas tree, decorated with

different shining colours of electric bulbs or paper tissues, stand still in the living rooms of every home.

Services in the churches start at six or seven, depending upon the agreed time. In the Roman Catholic Church the services start at 12.00 midnight. Our Lutheran Church services start in the evening of the 24th of December. The preaching of that evening is done through seeing a Nativity Play which is always prepared by one of the Church groups like the women's group or the youth. Choirs sing interchangeably, since there is always more than one choir in the congregation. The service may last from two to three hours. In the morning of December 25th is the time when the actual celebrations are seen. The number of services are increased like where there were two they add one so as to make three, and where there were three to make four. All of the services are full of people.

After these church services are over, people are invited to individual homes to continue the celebrations. The foods prepared for this day are more than one would expect and "PILAU" is commonly used or eaten on this day. Pilau is made out of rice mixed with vegetables and meat together with different spices. Cow meat, goat meat, lamb, or even chicken can be used to make this fantastic meal. The drinks are available as part of the meal. Strangers are welcome without any invitation to come in and have their share. We end up our celebrations by the opening of the presents for the families.

ADVENT MEMORIES

In 1981 I decided that I was going to submit some poetry for possible publication in the December Surprise Package Issue of Currents in Theology and Mission, a publication of Christ-Seminary SemineX. The poetry was supposed to have an advent theme...and had to be submitted no later than June 1st!

I was four months pregnant at the time and I can remember sitting on the front porch of our apartment in Southington, Connecticut with sweat pouring down my back, trying to keep my breakfast in my stomach where it belonged - but where, during my version of pregnancy, it seldom stayed - and attempting to "think advent!" It isn't easy, but somehow I managed to get some words onto the paper.

I wrote about a mother and child and the wonder of that relationship and how Mary must have felt with her child moving around inside of her. I mailed off those poems and went on with being pregnant during summer months.

On November 10th, my son Jedediah was born. A couple of days later I returned home from the hospital and found an envelope in that day's mail. Inside was a letter dated November 10th saying that CTM had accepted two of my poems for publication. What a special advent memory, none of which took place during the advent season. Still, the time of preparation for a child was ever present.

- Susan Folks

Once when I was 4 years old, I woke up early and snuck out to the Christmas tree. I didn't get far because I was sure that I saw a giant lion standing next to the tree. I ran back to bed, and I didn't want to come out later to open presents. - It turned out that the giant lion was a blown-up punching bag!

- ☺

A friend began a cross-stitch pattern on a solid black canvas, several weeks before Christmas. At first only a star in metallic silver and golden beams slowly spread across the loop. Each time she picked it up a few more details appeared, a post here, the donkeys mane there, a bit of white washed skyline, a shepherds crook... each one a different shade of color transforming the black of the material into a radiant scene. Thousands of stitches later, when the piece was finished, a picture of complex intricacy revealed itself in the image of a humble stable with beasts of burden and kings and paupers. Maybe because the background was still very black, all those tiny crosses created an intensity of brightness and color that focused on the starlight shining on the Babe in the manger. When she was finished, she had looked at this scene for many hours and it was already imprinted in her mind, so she gave it away as a gift on Christmas Day.

- Frank Kocek

My fondest memory of Advent is when I needed to make a "German Christmas" item for my German class. And, in practice for my later educational career, I waited until the last minute to do it. I ran out of time and still didn't know what to do, when my grandmother asked me to go for a walk. During the walk she showed me this green-growing thing on the ground and told me how our German ancestors used to wrap it around pieces of wood and make Advent wreaths on which they placed candles to count the weeks of Advent. And viola! My project was had - and done. - Jan Eisasser

Advent Memories ~ cont.

middler musings

The Middler Class extends to the Junior Class -- our beloved antagonists -- wishes for a restful and calm Christmas season...one on which you will look back with a misty eye come January as you try to recall the meaning of the word 'sleep'.

For the Senior Class our wish is that you enjoy a Christmas celebration full of delight and happiness as you prepare for the discovery of synod assignments and for the joys of the call process (i.e., cruciform life). *Dominus vobiscum.*

To our esteemed faculty -- you who work and sweat as hard as we do (but you get paid for it) -- we offer our warmest wishes that you experience the Nativity of Our Lord as a time of renewal, refreshment, and re-creation (remember...we'll be back in February).

To All -- we sincerely pray that your celebration of the Incarnation will be filled with rejoicing at the wonder of our God's coming to live and die for us.

HOLY, HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way
of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a
highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be
made low;
the uneven ground shall become
level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be
revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has
spoken."

- Isaiah 40.3-5