

Table Talk

vol. 30, no. 7

Easter 2, 1995



*A Publication of the Student Body
at the Lutheran Theological Seminary
at Gettysburg*

Members of the Publications Division

John Brock, Division Chair

Richard Burgess

J. Plummer

Table Talk is published eight times during the academic year by the Student Association of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. The view and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the editorial staff, the Student Association, or the Seminary.

Table Talk

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
61 N. West Confederate Avenue
Gettysburg, PA 17325

Table of Contents

The Vine of Faith <i>Glenn Palmer</i>	p. 2
A Reflection on the Seasons of Life <i>Mary M. Poston</i>	p. 5
Six Inches of Faith <i>Pamela Beedy</i>	p. 7
The Divine Homeostasis <i>Thomas Cloutier</i>	p. 8
Remembering our Mission <i>Lisa M. Leber</i>	p. 12
His Call <i>Dave von Schlichten</i>	p. 14
The Gift of Faith <i>Nissa Swanson</i>	p. 15
Two Mysteries <i>Ann Dentry</i>	p. 17
From the Editor <i>John Brack</i>	p. 19
Quote	back cover

The Vine of Our Life

by Glenn Palmer

Jesus said to the disciples, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.
John 15:1-2 (NRSV)

When I was an eight year old kid back home in Maine, we moved from one part of town to the other, down alongside where the river and ocean meet and become one. The place that my folks bought was an old Victorian home with these swank "French" double doors, that had been built in the 1880's. My folks bought the house with my Dad's G. I. Bill, and it was a real fixer-upper. My Mom and Dad had to re-do the whole house.

On the back-end of the house there were two things that I got a kick out of. The first was the original bathroom - two round holes on a wooden plank hanging directly over the garden (which explained why the roses always grew so well). My Dad called that place the prayer room, because he said people spent so much time alone in there. I remember how mad I was when my folks tore it out - I was the only kid in my class who had an outhouse that was "in" house, and a two-seater at that (the two seats were besides each other, not one on top of the other).

The other thing that I got a kick out of was the fact that there was a grape vine, a real grape vine that had been growing up the back of the house and on to the back porch. Now, a real concord grapevine is a rarity on the coast of Maine. I remember when we moved into the house, the vine was just a shambles, all out of control, thorny, prickly, and the grapes that first fall just weren't that good: tart, bitter, and biting.

In order for a grapevine to yield good fruit, it must be pruned and cultivated and tended and cared for. It literally must be farmed. So, that's what my Dad, a gentle bear of a man whose biggest regret in life, after growing up on the family farm during the height of the depression, was that he never got to work

the land again. That 's what my Dad did.

He got to work on the grapevine and he pruned, and pruned, and cleaned and cut back, and cut back, and cut back, until all the dead and out-of-control stuff was gone; until there wasn't much left but the main vine, so that the whole process could start again, and that's what it did. Because of my Dad's frantic but gentle work, the vine was strong, and the branches grew from that one vine in all kinds of different directions. Most budded and blossomed and bloomed, and some just died off. That's the way it goes.

The first year that my Dad pruned the grapes they were so-so, but the next year and every second year after that, even until this day some twenty-four years later, that vine shoots forth pure ecstasy: big, ripe, full, oozy, squishy, concord grapes that pop, explode, and burst in your mouth and drip and dribble their way down your chin.

Every third year, up until he suddenly died, my Dad would prune that grapevine back again, and most of the branches would and still do grow strong and steady and sure, and the fruits - the grapes, the results of the work of that gentle gardener, the results of his work, his creation - were and are just wonderful and delicious. ● Only by pruning back the branches so that they could grow together, in different directions, but from the same life-giving vine, only by pruning them back could my Dad be sure he'd get healthy and ripe fruit.

In a few weeks, the folks that I've spent a good chunk of the past four years of my life with will be going off in different directions. Some of us will bear fruit, some will "die", and that's the way it goes.

As we get ready to leave this place and go our separate ways, I cannot help but think that, like my Dad's grapevine, we are being pruned back so that we can start to grow again; so that we can go forth and bear some good fruit, so that we can preach the Gospel and serve God and God's people faithfully.

A good friend, and someone I was blessed enough to get close to, took a call in Indiana recently. He's off growing in his direction, and I've been around the block long enough to know that I may never see him again, as well as never see other folks I've gotten close to in the past four years. So much of what we do in this place is about saying goodbye, being pruned back, starting over and branching off into other directions.

In the midst of this grief and goodbye there is hope. There is the hope and faith by grace that tells us that even though we're a bunch of thorny, prickly sinners we all come from one vine. That vine - our home, our root, the place where we find our meaning and where we all ultimately connect and from where we all grow together - is Jesus Christ, and God - through the work of the Holy Spirit - is the gentle gardener.

We will soon branch off in different directions, yet we branch off from the same vine, and will ultimately be grafted together again, coming full circle one day when God calls us all home to bear good fruit, forever.

A Reflection on the Seasons of Life

by Mary M. Poston

Once upon a time, a l-o-n-g time ago, I considered the season of my life to be correlated with the stages of life. Childhood was Spring time. The Young Adult years were Summer. The Middle Adult years were associated with Fall. And the Latter Adult years were Winter. One was born, grew, grew some more, than prepared to die. In this system, anything that interrupted the growth cycle was seen as an unwelcomed intrusion that was met with fervent resistance.

When I entered seminary, just two years ago, I felt sure that I was about to reap the fruits of many years of seed planting, and pruning, I was ready to grow. And, as most of you know, the first year (every year) is a growing year. Then something happened, in what I believed to be the Summer of my life, that has changed all of these assumptions. I was diagnosed with Cancer. It was not readily evident the changes that I would go through in the months ahead. In fact it is only now that I can reflect back on what I learned about the seasons of life.

Spring is the time of new growth, the flowers come up, the trees bloom, the leaves come out. In the Summer plants develop to their fullest beauty, yet if you look closely, the long-dog-days of Summer are slowly sapping the life right out of them. And by Fall they are showing the full signs of the wear and tear of being born in the first place. Plants begin to die. Leaves fall to the ground. Winter comes as a time of rest which prepares all life to begin over again, in the Spring. And the cycle of life goes on.

Now I see that the first year of seminary was more like Spring. Spring is the time of intense new growth. In the midst of this new growth came chemotherapy, and like the long-dog-days of Summer it sapped the strength right out of me. In the Fall, I began to show the full signs of the wear and tear of treatment. Hair had fallen out. The body's chemical balance was disrupted. Nerve endings were killed. Cancer cells were dying. Then came Winter, it was a time to rest, a time to prepare myself to begin life over again. A time to patiently wait for the signs of new growth. And just as the world around us began to show the very first signs of Spring, so did I. And the cycle of life goes on.

6

As I look around me, I see my fellow students going through a similar cycle. Just when they began to think that they had everything going for them, SOMETHING HAPPENS. Their lives are disrupted. A part of them feels like they will surely die in the struggle.

Yet, as we honor the need to take time for ourselves, to regroup, to take a break, we begin to prepare ourselves once again for the cycle of new growth, (usually disguised in the form of finals, and papers). And the cycle of life goes on.

Many of you have expressed a feeling of awe and wonderment over the way in which I was able to handle this cycle of life so well. This was not the first time that I worked myself through life's cycle. I have raised three children, and I know first hand that just when everything seemed to be going well, SOMETHING HAPPENED. I have been married for twenty-one years, and I know first hand that just when everything seemed to be going well, SOMETHING would just happen. As all of you prepare to leave this campus, whether for the Summer, a year, or a life time, rest assure that something will happen. If not directly to you, then to some one you are ministering too. And the cycle of life will go on.

The seasons of life, Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter come at various times in our lives, always with the same purpose. Spring, along with Christ's Death and Resurrection brings new life to the world around us. Throughout the seasons of the church year, we die daily to sin and rise daily to new life. We rest in the assurance that even when life, as we know it, comes to a final end. We will rise again to new life. And the cycle of life will go on.

MARY M. POSTON is a second year student from the Northeastern Ohio Synod

Six Inches of Faith

by Pamela Beedy

The old white New England style farmhouse sits on a small wooded hillside five miles from town. Dotted around the back side of the house are maple trees that are "tapped" every March.

Down the bank in front of the house runs a narrow brook. Inside the house sleeps a wife of nearly thirty-nine years. On the living room floor snores a five year old granddaughter.

It is a little after midnight on New Year's Eve. A man pokes his head out this front door to call for his dog. Six inches from his head a twenty-two gauge bullet enters the wooden door frame of his house. . .

The random events of life scare the hell out of me. My first reaction to this event was to think "It's a miracle, thank God, it's a miracle that the bullet didn't go through my father's forehead." But deep inside my gut I believe that God had nothing to do with it. My father is still alive because that person was either a good shot or a poor shot.

Never so clearly and simply has "faith" been expressed as it was to me last year by a farmer's wife named Grace. She said, "I have to put my faith in God. I can't put it in the weather." She knows that God doesn't decide from year to year if the crops will have scab. The rain and cold do that. Grace puts her faith unconditionally in God. She takes the good with the bad and knows that in the long run God will take care of her.

I believe my father is still alive not by a miracle, but by a mere six inches. Had that bullet not been six inches off God would still "be there" - that's where I put my faith.

PAMELA BEEDY is spouse of a fourth year student from the New England Synod

The Divine Homeostasis

by Thomas C. Cloutier

According to Webster's, the term *homeostasis* means a state of physiological equilibrium produced by a balance of functions and chemical composition within an organism. In social sciences language (for example, in Edwin Friedman's *Generation to Generation*), the term is applied with analogous meaning to social entities such as the family or the congregation. The word is a combination of two Greek terms: ὁμοιος (*homeo-*), meaning "alike, similar"; and στάσις (*stasis*), meaning in classical Greek "to cause to stand, to bring to a stop."

I have disliked this term ever since my microbiology professor pointed out that "the only homeostatic organism is a dead organism." For this professor, who had in his youth invented Desenex, the purpose of microbiology is to develop weapons intended to induce terminal homeostasis in the target pathogen. Along this same line, the word *stasis* is used in pathology to designate a stagnation or stoppage of any of the fluids of the body, especially of the blood in any of the blood vessels. In physics, the *static* is used to describe forces in equilibrium, or bodies at rest, and it is an antonym for *dynamic*. Adding the prefix *homeo-* only serves to intensify the effect. Certainly, an organism which has stopped functioning, which is homeostatic in this sense, is dead. Similarly, a stagnant congregation, a congregation which has stopped functioning, is often viewed as one in which the Gospel has ceased to function effectively. How can we possibly use this term, homeostatic, as a positive (or at least neutral) term in describing the life of a person, a family, or a congregation?

In science and engineering, one studies *statics* in order to learn about bodies at rest. But one soon learns that there are no bodies at rest. This rock on which I stand is spinning around the center of the earth, which is spinning around the sun, which spins 'round the galaxy, which hurtles through the universe - "God, who flung the spangled heavens . . ." (LBW-463). From another perspective, this rock on which I stand is composed of molecules and atoms which are constantly vibrating and migrating, like a Jell-o salad at a church supper.

All of these supposedly static objects that make up our world - the Jell-o salad,

the rock, the body and blood, the congregation - share two things in common: they are in motion, and they are acted upon by every other object, each of which is also in motion. There is another concept from science which, better than homeostasis, describes the behavior of these objects, ourselves included: inertia.

Inertia is generally understood to mean the tendency of a body to stay put, to remain static, not to be moved. But that is only half the story. Inertia also means the tendency of an object in motion to stay in motion *without changing its direction or velocity*, to stay on track, to be neither diverted nor stopped. The strength of that tendency is a function of the object's mass; for our purposes here, we may consider an object's *weight* to be a measure of its inertia. Other objects will try to change its motion, to slow it down or speed it up, or to change its direction. To counter these forces, equal and opposite forces must be applied if its inertia is to remain, so to speak, static. In fact, our measurement of weight is a measure of these attractive forces. A person who weighs one hundred pounds actually has a mass which is attracted to the earth with a force of 100 pounds. It is significant to note that the force is directional; in the case of a person's weight, the attraction is towards the center of the earth. Each of us also exerts a similar, though much smaller, attractive force on the earth; this force is directed at the center of our being (that is, our physical mass). Pity our poor feet, whose task it is to absorb the difference between these mutual attractions: they spend the day fending off the earth!

These fundamental concepts have rich implications for our individual spiritual lives as well as for congregational life. For example, a congregation which appears to be static is actually in motion. What are the forces acting on it? How is it acting on the other bodies in its environment? If it seems to be motionless in relation to some other body (such as the community), then what are its "feet" doing - i.e., what energy is it expending and what mechanism is it using to fend off that relationship? What forces need to be applied to modify its speed and direction? How might one apply these forces in a manner which will not unduly disrupt its integrity? With regard to the last two questions, it is important that loving, prayerful consideration be given. We might keep in mind the church carnival game of egg-tossing. Or perhaps (more dramatically), imagine shooting a ripe orange out of a cannon: even if it leaves the barrel intact, it's going to splatter when it reaches its target. Inappropriately and precipitously forcing a congregation into too rapid a change can have the same effect.

I do not imagine that we are going to change the common use of the word

inertia. It will remain at rest, unless it changes through normal, linguistic evolution. However, we might reconsider the meaning of homeostasis, especially the second half of this compound term. The meaning of *stasis* in classical Greek is stated above; its New Testament meaning, however, is quite different. For example, in Hebrews 9:8, it has the sense of "continuing in existence." This may seem very static, as commonly understood - until we consider the energy, love, sorrow, pain, and joy involved in merely "continuing in existence," for us as for the tabernacle of Hebrews.

In the Gospels, *stasis* is used to describe Barabbas and his fellow rebels and revolutionaries (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19,25). In Acts 19:40, Paul uses the term in a similar manner, when he warns the assembly that they may be accused of inciting riots. Here we begin to see an active use of the term. The connotations are negative only for those against whom the activity is directed. After all, the American Revolution (or "colonial rebellion") was frowned upon by King George III.

Finally, in Acts 24:5, we have Tertullus indicting Paul for *stasis* in the sense of sowing strife, discord, and disunion directed against the "powers that be." Here we begin to have a meaning for *stasis* which is reflective of what the Christian life can be: "The peace of God, it is no peace, But strife closed in the sod. Yet, let us pray for but one thing: The marvelous peace of God." (LBW-449) If "standing on the rock" of Christ is *stasis* in the sense of Hebrews 9:8, then it is also a continual striving towards that which is of God and against that which is not of God.

What, then, are we to make of the first part of *homeo-stasis*? I would suggest that it is the skin of the orange being shot out of the cannon, and that it is the soles of our feet fending off the earth. It is the tendency and the need to maintain integrity, whether biological or social, individual or communal. It is intrinsically neither good nor bad. It is the grace of God which holds us steadfast in our renunciation of "all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his (*her?*) empty promises" (LBW baptismal liturgy). It is also the thick skin and skull that keeps out the Gospel, the "power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16).

We might well ask where God is in all this, and we should not be satisfied with the pat answer that God is everywhere present - in the soles of our feet as in the rock on which we stand, in the barrel of the cannon as in the orange hurtling

towards its eschatological target. Perhaps you, dear reader, will not think too unkindly of me while I stir together several metaphors and images in suggesting a response. As children and priests together in God, we are members of the Body of Christ whose calling is to witness to the world the power of God for salvation (healing, holistic, reconciling justification), a witnessing which began in the future end of the world and which reaches back to the moment of creation. In that witnessing, each of us has a unique, graceful role to play in ministering to each other, to the world, and to the Word. That witnessing can hardly be described as static. It is dynamic in the highest degree, and its motion and direction are fueled and maintained by the force of God. All of us with vocations in the church (which is to say, all of us in the church) are in some way called to serve in that creative dynamism, and we are fueled for that service by the in-pouring of the Holy Spirit.

And where are we heading? What is the target towards which this Body hurtles? We sing of it in our eucharistic liturgy: the victory feast to come. At that end, I will finally disagree with my revered professor of microbiology. Our creative striving in the dynamic homeostasis of living and witnessing shall be over, but then we shall not be dead, but alive, standing together in the presence of the Divine Homeostasis, singing and praising with the angels the glorious name of the God of Life.

THOMAS C. CLOUTIER is a second year student from the Metro Washington, D.C. Synod

Remembering Our Mission

Another Perspective on the Church in Society Search

by Lisa M. Leber

"Gettysburg Seminary is by foundation, tradition and present commitment a school of *theology*" [LTS Catalog 1994-5, p.8, emphasis in original]. With those words, this seminary opens its statement of mission.

And **because** of those words, the fundamental question driving faculty searches must be: which candidate will best enable this seminary to fulfill its mission to train people to do theology, "the thinking involved in bringing the particular message that Christ has been raised"? [Ibid.]

In some of the discussion surrounding the latest faculty search, this fundamental question has been neglected in the focus on the issue of diversity. As someone who attended a women's college whose student population was composed largely of international students and American people of color, and as someone whose work for Legal Aid enabled her to spend countless hours in the African-American community of rural Virginia, I will say outright that diversity is a good thing. I gained much more than I contributed in those experiences. Being in communities of diversity makes real the wonder of one aspect of God's creation: the differing visions, experiences, and perspectives that constitute the human family.

However, and this is a big however, diversity cannot become an end in itself. Viewing it that way, privileging diversity over everything else, leads us dangerously close to idolatry.

To guard against such idolatry, we must keep before us always what is **truly** important -- God and God's call to us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

And so we return to the mission of this place. This seminary is first and foremost a school of theology -- a community of God's people, sustained by Word and Sacrament, whose primary mission is to learn and teach faithfully

the task of thinking about how to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world. Faithful stewardship of this mission compels those charged with responsibility for this institution to seek faculty members who will best enable students educated here to fulfill their calls to be ordained and lay leaders in Christ's church.

More diversity in the faculty is a respectable goal, of course, for the gospel is to be proclaimed in a diverse world. In order to communicate the gospel in that world, we must learn about and be exposed to it. One thing we who seek more diversity must be very careful about, however, is sending the message that diversity only exists when women or people of color are present. That unfairly presupposes, to use the seminary as an example, that all the white male professors here are alike, each functioning as identical members of the body instead of as unique individuals created by God.

With that caution in mind, we can face the task which lies before us, the task of bringing into existence the conditions which will make more diversity in the faculty of this seminary possible in the future.

As we face this task, we must remember that no simple answer exists. Hiring a woman or person of color who is not the best candidate for the sole purpose of hiring a woman or person of color is simple in some sense, but it is not the answer, because it fails to take into account the mission of this institution. Instead, we must face the task of identifying, nurturing, and educating women and people of color so that they will be the most qualified candidates, the ones who will best enable this seminary to fulfill its mission as a school of theology.

Yes, there is work to be done. Let us pray for the strength and courage to do this work. Let us pray for the strength and courage to continue talking about these issues. But most of all, let us pray for the strength and courage to keep focused always on the mission of students and faculty here in this place -- the mission of learning and teaching so that we may faithfully proclaim the gospel in a world of diverse people who, through God's love, are made one in Christ.

His Call

by Dave von Schlichten

Joseph still fears his mail, although, slowly, his courage is being built up. He used to be terrified of his parents' basement, because there he kept hidden every poem he had ever written, poems from when he was twelve on up to poems from his senior year in college two years ago. A writing professor once had suggested that he submit some of his poetry to a journal, and Joseph responded by hiding everything in his parents' basement and trying to focus on other things, like schoolwork.

Six months ago, as he stared up at the piece of moon rock imbedded in a stained-glass window of the National Cathedral, the same professor appeared beside him, by chance.

"Are you still writing?" she asked.

"No, no, no. I'm not designed for that."

"You seemed designed for it." She stared at the moon rock for a few seconds. "Don't be afraid," she added eventually.

He thought her advice simplistic. But that afternoon he found himself in the basement, and that night he found himself at his computer, typing in his poems, revising.

Now, unsure what has driven him to this point, or what keeps him going, or what he should do next, or if he truly has any talent, he waits for the acceptance (or rejection) of the poems he sent off six weeks ago to some artsy journal in Idaho.

Beneath his uncertainty lies something solid and mysterious and possessive, like a piece of the moon.

He keeps typing. It is necessary.

DAVE VON SCHLICHTEN is a second year student from the Northeast Pennsylvania Synod

The Gift of Faith

by Nissa Swanson

You give
And give
And give
And one day you begin to wonder
If there's anything left to be given
And you wonder what was the inspiration
Behind the giving anyway
And something inside you
Begins to die
And you realize that things will never be the same
That the dying things can never be regained
And you begin to wonder too
About hope
If it exists, and where
And if you can have some

And God
Who sees all needs
Reaches down to show you
The special place inside your heart
Where special new gifts
Are grown and renewed
Things that don't replace the other dead things
But new things that begin a life of their own
And you remember about hope
And about dying

You remember too about another life
A life that was given for no reason
And for every reason
A gift given so that our gifts
Our lives
Might also be made new
And we remember that we are not worthy
of such a gift
But that it was given just the same
It was given so that we too
Might share the joy of giving
The joy of love, the joy of life
With others who are just as unworthy as we
And we wonder at how God can be so gracious
And so full of wisdom
We wonder too at our own unworthiness
And stand in awe of God's grace
We remember how to share, how to give
And we find once again
The inspiration behind each gift
And we remember what living is for

And wonder and remembrance are joined by the Spirit
To give birth and new life

To the gift of faith

Two Mysteries

in memory of Sean Livingston

by Ann Dentry

Tomorrow at dusk I will let his ashes go;
The white, rivuleted splinters of bone
that held together the man I loved
Falling through my fingers.

Into the naked air and down.
(His friend Chuck will fly us.
Three will take off and two land.)

- What a miracle it is, flying.
For centuries we tried to figure it out;
Leonardo drafting flapping monstrosities in pen and ink.
And then one day
the ball bearings turned in the tumbler
and the lock fell wordlessly open,
as someone saw - It was not the movement
But the shape.

. . One current of air split in two,
made to travel over different distances.
So evident. And so elegant;
the gathering of molecules as the formula starts to function
and bare air pushes steel off the ground.

Curious, isn't it?
That we should be so long in seeing it,
as it was before us all the time.
Leonardo in the park watching pigeons flutter;
scowling at the affront to great genius,
Foiled.

Curious, isn't it, also
That I should be so long in fighting it,
keeping his ashes with me for such a time.
Sifting them through my fingers with a furrowed brow,
Wondering what it would take for them
to reassemble.

Dear Friends,

This is my second year on Table Talk. Last year I simply assisted; this year I got to be editor-in-chief. What a very interesting year this has been for me, both personally and as editor. Second year studies have forced me to think along new avenues, and have aided in honing my writing, and therefore editorial, skills. I have had to struggle with what kind of articles to print, what kind of format to use, and where I can borrow the use of a laser printer. On a personal level, I have had the chance to get to know many of the first year students, and have become acquainted with the returning interns. I have struggled with keeping my marriage and family strong, passing classes, and dealing with a candidacy committee who had a view of me that did not gel with my own personal understanding of who I am as a person, believer, and soon-to-be pastor.

I would like to thank all those who submitted articles this year, students, spouses, staff, and faculty. I deeply appreciate all submissions. I strove to help those whose writing skills were in need of assistance, and esteemed those whose talents did not need any reworking. I would especially like to thank all those without whose assistance this publication would not have been put together. My thanks to Lee, Joel, Cindy, Larry, Phil, Keith, Karen, and especially Marianne, for all the fine collating your collective fingers performed.

I would like to encourage all in the coming months. Those participating in C.P.E., Godspeed. To those going off to intern sites, may you remain rooted in your love of the Gospel. You who are off to a call, may God's grace be upon you.

Thank you, all, for your support throughout this year.

God's peace.

"If I remember church history correctly, the persistent problem is not how to keep the church from withdrawing from the world but how to keep the world from subverting the church. In each age, the church succumbs to the Constantinian notion that we can get a handle on the way the world is run, take charge, fit the world's standards of justice into a loosely Christian framework, substitute a little worldly wisdom for gospel foolishness, talk power rather than love, and call this 'Christian social concern.' Whenever the church has sought to prop itself up by the power of Caesar or the democratic mob, trusting the power of legalistic coercion rather than trusting the power of truth, the world has successfully co-opted the church."

William Willimon, *What's Right with the Church* (Harper & Row, 1985), as read in *Youthworker Update*, May 1995.