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SEMINARIAN

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NOTES FROM LEBANON

Seminarian Tom McClellan is in the tiny country of Lebanon for this academic year. Tom entered Mt. Airy with the Class of 1963 and was selected as this year's Mt. Airy student to teach English at the Schneller School in Bikaa, Lebanon.

In a recent letter to a fellow seminarian, Tom said, "My letters are for anyone who may be interested in traveling or in hearing of first-hand experiences in this part of the world." Knowing that most of us are thinking of travel now that exams are drawing nigh, we are sure Tom will be happy to know we printed excerpts from his letter.

"My trip here was an unforgettable experience in itself. Casablanca and Alexandria, the two main Arab cities I visited, are similar in their intrigue, in their contrasting atmospheres of the old and the modern, and the wealth and the poverty.

"Cyprus was a quiet place that seemed isolated from the rest of the world... Athens is quite a modern and active city. It seems that the Acropolis stands a silent watch over Athens and its people. I may be sacreligious, but it (Acropolis) seemed to be the most sacred place I have yet visited. It seems like the Mecca of the Western world. Perhaps I shall change my mind when I visit Jerusalem.

"The Greek ship was much more interesting than the American Independence... My cabin alone was filled with strange people from distant lands. At first I was with a French priest going to Athens. From Athens I was with two Greeks from Alexandria; a French Jesuit priest who spoke perfect Arabic was in the bunk under mine. There was also a Sudanese man... Another Sudanese came in later. He wore a flowing white robe... I was shaving one morning when in the mirror I saw he
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Sam Seminarian Reports...

ULCA WORSHIP CONFERENCE

On October 17th and 18th delegates from 28 of the ULCA's 32 synods assembled at First Lutheran Church in Pittsburg for the Second Annual Worship Conference. The principle speakers were the Rev. Dr. Roy J. Enquist, professor of religious education at Wittenberg University, and the Rev. Dr. George R. Seltzer of this seminary. Dr. Enquist spoke on "The Sacrament of the Altar and the Theology of the Liturgy" while Dr. Seltzer addressed the conference concerning "Principles and Standards Behind the Service Book and Hymnal". Some of the highlights include:

- The worship life of the church should be improved by using laymen to assist at communion services. Such a procedure was approved by the 1960 ULCA convention, but few congregations have employed it. The statement said that such a layman should be "a communicant member of the church, approved by the church council for this purpose, to be given training by the minister and be specifically commissioned for this ministry in his congregation only." In addition, the statement stipulated that the layman's ministry should be subject to annual approval by the church council or congregation.
- Dr. Enquist stated that "the regular use of the laymen in the reading of the scriptures would be a much healthier practice than the interruptions of the service on special occasions by presentations by the men's club or Luther League!"
- "The passing of offering plates among the congregation during the service is a distraction from the business at hand... the practice of passing the plate creates the impression that the church is asking for money while in fact the true meaning of the offering is that the church is giving money."
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UNITY

These columns have been irenic, I hope, for more than one reason. First, the groundwork had to be laid for further discussion. Secondly, it is our firm belief that polemical, negative thinking is an unnecessary obstruction to ecumenical progress. But the time has come, it seems, to begin a few definitions in contrast to the attitudes and definitions of others.

Involved in the rejection of polemical thought as the basis of theology is the supposition that theological formulations are not ends in themselves. If they were, we could fight for them in opposition to all variants and obscurities without the slightest qualm; it would be easy to divide all the world into wrong and right and stop there.

But what if our ideas and thought-forms are basically our conception of revelation and not self-sufficient ends--then our task must be defined in a different way. If we understand a theological principle as an attempt to understand God's will and not as that will itself, we will be more wary of applying the principle of contradiction to them.

For example, if as Dr. Heineken says there is an absolute either/or between Luther's formulation of the act of justification and all other analyses, then ecumenicity is for Lutherans exactly what it is for Rome: conversion to us. But if this Reformation heritage is understood within an historical situation and upheld solely as a positive definition, must it reject the theologies in which its emphasis is not as central or is defined in different terms?

Just as there are some questions which cannot be properly asked of a theology, just so there are certain presuppositions with which ecumenicity cannot deal. We might as well face up to that!

There seems to be a final choice here between thinking in opposites and thinking relatively. Only when you can stop saying, "this is wrong" and start saying, "it is not as good in this way or" (continued bottom of next column)

NOTES FROM LEBANON (continued from p.1.) had spread out a little carpet and was in the process of saying his prayers to Allah. It seemed so strange and almost humorous in such a tiny cabin. I could not help but think of Queequeg, the savage, in Moby Dick."

Lebanon is a very small country, says Tom, "about half the size of New Jersey" It lies directly north of Israel; to the west lies the Mediterranean, to the east Syria.

"Most of the other teachers are German and speak little or no English. I think they are a little younger than I... The country is hard to describe. Bikaa is a plateau valley that lies between two mountain ranges... Bikaa, our valley, is quite beautiful to behold from high up in the mountains."

So goes Tom's letter. Next fall, he will undoubtedly have much more to tell us about his year in Lebanon.

Sam Seminarian (continued from p.1. The offerings could be placed in plates in the narthex and presented at the altar at the appropriate time.

-- The laymen could be used to chant when the minister is not musically inclined. Too often reading by the minister and the response of the organ becomes a "ping-pong game!"

-- Involving the laity in the liturgy could be accomplished by a "free-standing altar". Dr. Enquist acknowledged that there is some objection to such an arrangement on the grounds of getting too close to the people. "If there is no room for ugly old ladies and squawking babies in the Body of Christ, then perhaps we had better examine our motives in this which we place our hope."

UNITY (con't) that", can you escape from the prison of thought-forms and categories which doom any discussion with others before it starts. To express more adequately than I have the ecumenical attitude to which I refer, I quote from J. Robert Nelson's article in the recent Christianity and Crisis: "The world waits for the appearing of churches that are sufficiently united to teach and confess the fullness of faith that many theologians and their students have already embraced."

George Weckman

Editorials

The Trouble With People...

"He [the Christian] is bound into a fellowship with all who share with him in this new life through Jesus Christ so that he has his life in the Church, and not just the Church of the present but the Church of all the ages" (James D. Smart, The Teaching Ministry of the Church, 1954, p.110.) This statement is certainly not new and not particularly originally worded. But it seems adequately clear to elicit assent on our part. We recognize it as pointing to an important mark of the Church—"the communion of saints." How much this communion is realized in each age is a matter of debate, and we do get a little tired of all the talk about "togetherness." Somehow it seems that, although we're not perfect and are aware of it, we're making an effort at being a real brother to other Christians. How successful we are may be another matter of debate; yet few of us have the energy or interest any longer to press such a debate.

What seems so often to stand between Christian brothers are those subtle but effective differences, the ones which do not lend themselves easily to the attraction of opposites. We might imagine ourselves dying for a particular person but can hardly see ourselves rooming with him. We might help push his car out of the snow but would be most uncomfortable being assistant to him in his pastoral charge. It is impossible to bridge the gap which our backgrounds and personalities have fixed between us. We may sincerely try to love him but give up at trying to like him. In a seminary community this can be seen played out in huge distorted images, perhaps because so much of what happens here becomes a pattern of what's to happen with the less intimate relationships in the parish or institution later on.

Yet why do we keep banging our head against a stone wall? The disjunction between loving and liking is, in the Christian perspective a false one.

It's not that there isn't such an animal as "liking": it's simply that it doesn't enter the picture, in the last analysis. It pales away when love enters the heart. To keep seeking out the people we like is to keep barking up the wrong, the very wrong tree. For when we put names under the heading, "Be polite to, but...", we're looking only at these people. We're seeing all the things, big and little; about them that repel or bore us. We're seeing all the ways they can be nasty or false or drab.

And when we talk about accepting people as they are, we're inevitably talking about Christ. We don't know how to accept people as they are, but He did — and does. If we look, we'll notice that He didn't slur over the differences between people in His love, but He did bridge the gaps. He didn't turn Peters into Jameses or Magdalenes into Marthas, but He did build the bridge—and that's what is really important.

Lest someone be mistaken, this is most definitely dogmatic (with all due respect to systematics.) But do you think we'll ever stop looking toward our brother as the starting point of our Christian love? And start examining our state of affairs with God? He can be the most unpleasant and distasteful person around us, but what he is is strikingly unimportant when He is the Author of our love for him.

Perhaps, then, the best response to the statement, "I can't stand him" is, "Then, kneel."

The Seminarian is published weekly during the academic year by the Student Body of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, 7301 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia 19. Editor: R.J. Zimmerman; Associate Editor: J.R. Kehrli; Staff Writers: C. Crumpton, L. Miller, B. Thorpe, G. Weckman.

PH: The Bible is good literature.
 PH: Nothing to excess.
 PH: Maryrs are masochists.
 PH: Practice makes perfect.