

SEMINARIAN

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CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM - 1961

Seminarian Tom McClellan is in the tiny country of Lebanon for this academic year. He had the wonderful opportunity of visiting Bethlehem for Christmas and in a letter addressed to the entire Seminary community he tells of the celebrations to which he was a witness. The letter is dated December 25, 1961.

"It is sunny and warm (50 degrees) in Bethlehem on the day we celebrate the birth of our Lord. Yesterday was really the day of celebration and began as the Latin Patriarch proceeded into Bethlehem to the Church of the Nativity, continuing an old tradition. In the afternoon most of the Protestants met at the Shepherd's field. A service was held around an open cave similar to those used so long ago. All sang American Christmas carols and heard an American meditation. Afterward everyone received a morsel of bread and meat in the style of the traditional shepherd's meal.

"At 9:30 P.M. the main Protestant service was held in the Bethlehem German Lutheran Church; the church was filled to capacity. It was a simple yet quite beautiful and dignified service especially when compared with the Latin service. Everything was in German except the first sermon delivered by an American.

"In the late evening all attention turns to the Latin services in St. Catherine's Church, the Roman part of the Church of the Nativity. Solemn High Mass is sung and it is usually so crowded that tickets are needed to enter. Fortunately our friend at the Lutheran School arranged for us to go and the crowd was much worse than any N.Y. subway rush hour. Sometimes it got very noisy in the rear of the church but the service at the altar proceeded undisturbed. We entered at 11 P.M. knowing that Mass started at 12, but ceremonies go on all evening. Things reached a high point in the Mass when the great church bells rang out proclaiming the birth of the Saviour. Simultaneously at the altar the Patriarch rang the little altar bell, everyone rose and

and a huge electric lighted star appeared over the altar. Below the star two Jerusalem crosses of neon lights appeared in red and in a semi-circle the neon letters spelled out 'Gloria in Excelsis Deo'. The incense poured out; the elements were elevated. Finally at 1:45 A.M. the service drew to a dramatic close when there was a great procession to the Grotto in which Christ is said to have been born. The Patriarch symbolically carries a doll in a crib and places it in the manger. As he passed by many reached out to touch the babe in a demonstration of their devotion. In the church under the huge cross at the altar there is a small baby doll in a glass case. Finally at 2 A.M. my Christmas Eve in Bethlehem was finished.

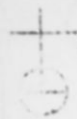
"I will stay here two weeks traveling through the Holy Land and becoming acquainted with Jerusalem, a city that emanates a strange power that somehow captures its visitors, but that is another story.

"My good fortune overwhelms me. I am traveling with three German friends and transportation is no problem. Furthermore, one of them is a good friend of the Inspector of Lutheran Schools in Jordan. He lives here at the Bethlehem Lutheran Church - Orphanage. A special room was arranged for us with all linen and blankets, and most unexpected is that we are eating our meals here at the the school - and eating better than in Khirbet.

The director even gave us all Christmas presents so I am really most thankful. "I wish you all a good New Year and I am looking forward to resuming my studies at Mount Airy next year."

Tom McClellan

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, Pa. Editor: R.J. Zimmerman; Associate Ed.: J.R. Kehrli; Writers: C. Crumpton, L. Miller, B. Thorpe, G. Weckman. All students are invited to contribute.



A PLACE OF PRAYER

Occasionally this column has dealt with problems and solutions connected with the worship life of the Seminary. The writer has sought to "stay clear" of the ridiculous high church-low church controversy as it is fomented on this campus, first by ignoring it and then by attacking it outright, even though in an allegorical manner.

Today's column is presented under the conviction that prayer is an essential part of the Christian life and is not restricted to one liturgical party or another!

One aspect not completely discussed in the worship report presented in the fall was the matter of personal devotions—completely personal devotions. Naturally private prayer would be offered either in one's room or in the Chapel. Often a room is not conducive to worship, and what do we find in the Chapel? Tape recording equipment, classes, the Ladies Guild, etc. Now there are good enough reasons for these people to be there—the members of Ascension congregation certainly have more than a legal right to the use of the building. But for the seminarian a very obvious problem occurs: there is, in fact, no place a seminarian can go to pray or meditate, a place which he knows will always be available.

What is needed, to put it bluntly, is a place set aside for prayer and only for prayer: no meetings or services. If one needs precedent, observe the meditation chapel at Wagner College and at many other such institutions. Perhaps a room in the Main Dorm could be set aside for this purpose, as there are vacant rooms. Or perhaps this idea should be referred to the committee concerned; in which case, I so refer it. The request, I feel, is not unreasonable. Hopefully, it is feasible. NEXT WEEK: Sam Seminarian will begin a new set of articles entitled "The Pastor's Reading." Based on faculty interviews, these articles will suggest ways the parish pastor can keep abreast of events and research in the theological disciplines.

For some people the unity of the Church can be achieved only when everyone converts to their particular point of view. The confidence of such people in the truth of their own theological assertions and in the authority of their ecclesiastical structure is admirable, if only for its tenacity. These people can be found on both sides of the gilded curtain that severs Christianity.

But there are others, again on both sides, for whom the task of unity is not quite so simple. They recognize elements of the Church throughout Christendom, and they also are aware of sin and its ubiquity. It is these latter who see the full impossibility of making visible the unity they recognize behind all the disparity, the unity in Christ.

Out of the second attitude has come the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which begins on Jan. 18, tomorrow a week. For the person who fully faces up to the necessity of visible unity and who is yet aware of the demand it makes on him to accept others in Christian love, prayer is the task at hand.

Prayer, first, because only God can effect a truly reformed catholicity. Four hundred years of antagonism simply will not be bridged by human effort.

Prayer, secondly, because, as Luther says in explanation of the Lord's Prayer: God's name is holy in itself (God's Church is one in Him who creates and sustains it.) But we pray that it may be hallowed by us also (that in prayer we shall be dedicated under God's direction to the attainment of that unity which He wills.)

It is especially significant that Roman Catholics will be participating in this same week of prayer. They more than others have felt self-sufficient and entire within themselves, but now even this wall is crumbling in truly ecumenical concern. This week of prayer is the only all-inclusive step toward unity in the Church today, but it is the right beginning. Next week's issue will include some prayers for the following days' use.

George Weckman

Editorials

A LETTER TO THE FACULTY

Dear Brothers,

The beginning of a new year seems a logical time to express to one another more than the trivia we daily exchange. There are always those things which for one reason or another never quite get said. Certainly the student body as a whole is not unified in what we would like to say, but we of The Seminarian are willing to take the first step in what could be a significant venture in communication, something badly lacking in Mt. Airy. You might be rather surprised at some of the versions of your ideas which circulate not only here but also in the parishes of our church. Something is said—often just a chance remark in class—is repeated by students to other students, becomes part of an "oral tradition" in conjunction with other somewhat altered "logia", and serves, among other things, to inform the impressions not only of current students but also entering students. Freshmen in college have been known to repeat interesting syntheses of the views of a Mt. Airy professor, solely on the basis of hearsay. Your opinions—not only in matters related to your own fields but also in such matters as worship, the new Lutheran church mergers, the stance of confessional Lutheran theology today, the current ills of our parishes, etc.—are important to us as students. We need to communicate and really communicate with one another.

One way this conceivably might be done is through this seminary journal. You have several times been invited to write for it. An official invitation is still on the faculty bulletin board. Yet only Dr. Bagger and one faculty member have made suggestions to the staff, and no one has written for the edification of the whole community.

The lack of communication is strikingly apparent in the matter of the merger negotiations of the two seminaries. Students have had to read The Lutheran or rely on hearsay to learn what was going on in our own school. Some matters were probably not for

publication, but certainly the basic areas of agreement and lack of it between the two seminaries might have been released at least to us.

Another matter some of us have noticed: for half the school year now Dr. Paul Scherer has been on our campus. Not once has he preached in chapel. The Seminarian respectfully suggests that he be invited to do so.

The mention of chapel brings up another issue. With all the serious study of the chapel program over the past few years, only two real changes are observable: Communion is less frequent and offered at odd times and The Service (without Communion) is used on Wednesdays with few really knowing why. Otherwise the services remain bleak and somewhat impoverished. Even the SBH is only partly used. The Litany and General Suffrages are only rarely used. The hymns belong predominantly to one period. Even Bach's harmonizations are unexplainedly cut out. The Second Setting is rarely used, and variant musical settings for the chants are all but unknown. Few have even heard the Third Setting and so could hardly be expected to treat it intelligently. Sermons or even five-minute meditations are extremely rare this year. Why couldn't one faculty member or student per week offer a meditation? Extra-SBH materials have yet to be seen. Perhaps all this is part of the reason why attendance is still very poor. If those of you who regularly do not attend have reasons for so doing, let's hear them rather than having to rely on our fruitful imaginations.

Next week we shall publish a letter to the students, for there is much to be said there. But let us as brothers put the best construction on one another's motives, set out to communicate and share creatively, and hence justify calling ourselves a Christian community united in the love and service of the Lord Jesus.

In His Name,

The Editors

ABOUT LEGALIZED GAMBLING

(Ed. Note: The following was written by Pastor Lloyd A. Berg of Calvary Church, New York City, for the April 1961 issue of the parish paper, Calvary Spotlight. Seminarian Ben Thorpe thought it worthy of this Community's attention, and we agree.)

As you know, our mayor and others are eager to legalize off-track betting in New York. It has been cheerfully noted that with the largest police force in the world the law cannot be enforced--on this particular matter. And so the financial capitol of the world can best finance its functions by getting a cut from the bookies.

Eager to cooperate as our city reaches new heights of human progress, I would like to bring further suggestions. In a Swift manner, let me offer "Some Modest Proposals".

Another thing the police have been unable to do away with is the matter of muggings and burglaries. These increase daily. Clearly here is another place for constructive action. Legalize them. License them. Carefully regulate them. And tax these operations rather than the poor home-owners. There have been some pretty rough characters involved in this business too. But in this way, ground rules can be established, and only men of unquestionable character will take part. This will provide excellent vacation jobs for college students.

Let's move on to greater and greater gains. . . Let us also include the "houses of ill repute". Human nature will never change. So, let us legalize these, too--and then tax them very heavily. Why should that good money go to waste? And not only that. By legalizing them we can drive out the improper elements and keep it clean. Proper licensing and supervision can insure that there will only be nice girls involved. The whole moral climate of the city will experience a tremendous uplift.

In sale of narcotics there are further opportunities. Everyone knows this is going on all over town. Properly taxed the profits can go where they belong--in the pockets of decent citizens.

Having gone this far, a contract could be negotiated with the nation's leading drug manufacturers. The city will license

distribution of pneumonia and tuberculosis germs in strategic places. The drug manufacturers will refund to the city 33% of the net proceeds from the increased prescription sales that result. Judging by the revelations of the Kefauver Committee, a sufficient number of firms could probably be found to enter into such a contract. The squeamish and the sentimental will rebel at this step. It will be necessary to remind them that illness is rampant anyway. Their chances of a lifetime without disease are quite poor even without this program. As long as illness exists it is recklessly foolish not to tax it for worthy purposes.

Some will object that certain of these steps are ethically objectionable to a few particularly religious people. This ignores the basic fact that no one will be forced to take part. The sensitive souls can follow in the footsteps of a noted religious leader and thank God that they are not as other men are--and also thank God that other men are that way so that their weaknesses can support the good people.

Really now, it would all work out so nicely.

Sam's Selections:

Psecular Psalm 23

Science is my shepherd, I shall not want;
It makes me to lie down on foam-rubber
mattresses.
It leads me on four-lane highways.
It leads me into the psychiatrist's office
for my ego's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley
of the hydrogen bomb,
I will not fear it; the jets and atomic
bombs, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the
presence of the world's billion hungry
people;
Thou anointest my head with home per-
manents,
my alcoholic cup overflows.
Surely pensions and social security shall
follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the old folk's home
for ever.

WATCH FOR IT! COMING TO THE SEMINARIAN

SOON!