

THE

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STUDENTS VOICE OPINION ON OLIVER OLSON CONTROVERSY

Editors' Note: Due to the large amount of student opinion surrounding Dr. Oliver Olson, we, the editors of THE SEMINARIAN, have decided to go to press early this week. We feel that the student opinion that we publish will serve its purpose more effectively if it appears Monday, before the meeting of the Board of Trustees of this seminary, rather than on Wednesday, our usual day of publication and after the Board meets. What follows are the opinions of various students of this seminary. Except for our saying, "All comments are welcome!", in our October 6 issue, these opinions were unsolicited by us.

DAVID CONFER WRITES

To the Seminary Community:

Last night I spent several hours composing a letter for the "Seminarian." In it I carefully recounted time after time last year when Dr. Oliver Olson exhibited an open, communicative teaching style in the two courses of his in which I was a student. This morning I have decided to discard that letter in favor of the one that I am writing now.

Last night's letter was more appropriate a week ago than now. It was on October 13th that the bombshell hit the student body--the executive committee had failed to recommend to the Board that Dr. Olson's contract be renewed. Dr. Bost explained the action to us in the following manner. Though the student evaluation was positive overall it included criticisms that were considered of great importance by some faculty members. These criticisms reinforced their own perceptions that Dr. Olson's style is too often "judgemental" and "rigid;" that his conception of teaching and communication is "truncated;" that he does not listen to people sufficiently well, and indeed may not have the desire to listen.

I was appalled by this evaluation of Dr. Olson's style, and quickly found that I was hardly alone. During that following week many of us shared with various professors that though we acknowledge weaknesses in Dr. Olson's style, the pluses for us decisively outweigh them, and that he fills a unique, valuable role in our community. We have been reached, motivated, and touched by him in a way that the seminarians of future years here should have the privilege to experience.

Last week we believed that the sharing of our feelings might heal the division within the faculty, since much of the argument against Dr. Olson within the executive faculty committee had seemed to be based upon their perception of student opinion, i. e., that too many students have reacted negatively to his style. Since then 80% of the Seniors and 85% of the Middlers have gone on the record affirming Dr. Olson's style as worthy of being kept at this Seminary! How

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EDITORIAL

It is little more than five years ago that Professor Martin Heineken described this seminary community to a class of Juniors. The root of the term 'seminary' "...is 'semen'. You know, those millions of little wigglers in which is contained the mystery of life". These seeds are poured "...if that is the right phrase" into the female ovum. "So a seminary is a seed-bed bearing fruit for the church". This is a rather earthy description for such a divine settlement, but the description does seem most appropriate.

The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia is a beautiful seedbed. If you take a leisurely walk on a simple autumn, you are nearly charmed to mysticism. The sun flares against the fall leaves so that it is difficult to find which is natural, which ethereal: a golden play before an azure curtain. The graystone buildings glimpse here and there from between swaying boughs. They seem irrefutable declarations of purpose. How do you question pinnacled turrets dusted by history or with a clock that punctuates silence with passing days? It is difficult to become critical of a community of people as eternal as this season: walking here and there, meeting, teaching, preaching, counseling, celebrating and managing together in a ceaseless profusion of excitement and devotion emanating from the simple obsession to understand this graceful relationship with the God who dared new life.

But here too, there is danger. This seminary community mystifies so by its idyllic portrait, that it tempts us to worship it. It appears so pure and graceful in sight, sound and purpose that we are tempted to rend our clothes, cry aloud in desire, and rush to her aid and service lest she be attacked. The "place" becomes a "she" whom we defend and to whom we kneel in an ecstatic semblance of love. Succinctly said, this seminary may seem so beautiful at times that it precariously mystifies us into a community chauvinism: an idolatry wherein we force community to smile divinely from a pedestal which we have created.

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THE SEMINARIAN STAFF

Editors: Bill Damrow and Ray Miller

Typists: Sarah Davison

Mike Cobbler

Stapler: Jeanne Rowan (x2)

(David Confer's Letter, continued from page 1)

many other professors could have gotten as solid a vote of confidence? And yet our reinforcing of the positive student evaluation seems to carry no punch with the faculty. This tells us that though anonymous student gripes against Dr. Olson played a major role in the executive faculty committee's discussion on the night of October 11th, student opinion was not of the root causes for the five faculty members voting against the renewal of Dr. Olson's contract. Though we have chopped-down the value of their using anonymous student opinion to back up their arguments their basic reasons still remain.

Since we can compare Dr. Olson favorably enough with the rest of the faculty in terms of a) his scholarship, b) his grasp of educational concepts within his classrooms, and c) his support among the student body what are the key reasons why Dr. Olson's contract will not be renewed?

We cannot be sure, but two guesses are looking better every day. First, several faculty members disagree with us and feel that Dr. Olson's style cannot fit in with the direction in which they see Mt. Airy moving. Second, several faculty members are very sensitive to the criticism of Dr. Olson coming in from supporting synods and other outside constituencies, criticism largely based on his outspoken stands on ILCW matters.

I encourage the Board of Trustees to compare the analysis of Dr. Olson's style by several faculty members that of the student body (who are, in many ways in a better position to judge that style). Does his style really warrant dismissal?

I encourage the Board of Trustees to investigate the role of outside opinion and pressure on the faculty's decision. Is the Seminary not a place where our top scholars can be prophets, stating unpopular opinions as long as they can back up their theological arguments on strong grounds. In this regard, consider the letter from Dr. Jensen of Gettysburg, a battler against Dr. Olson on ILCW matters who is urging that Dr. Olson not be silenced in this matter.

I encourage the Board of Trustees to consider the "style" in which those faculty members who held grave concerns about Dr. Olson's style handled them. Did they go to him, as one Christian brother to another, and share their concerns? Was he given sufficient feedback by his critics so that he could make an effort to deal with these perceived deficiencies? Dr. Olson had no idea that such deep feelings against him within the faculty existed. Could not these five faculty members, after finally making clear their feelings on the matter, not have given him at least another year that he might wrestle with this and grow as a teacher and an asset to our community?

In closing, I would like to cast a vote for openness--among the faculty members and between the faculty and students. I do not claim that students are the best judge in matters such as the hiring and firing of professors. However, we are members of this community. When a well-respected and appreciated member of our community is told that his presence is no longer desirable we have a right to understand why, even if it means that the above issues will be brought out in the open where our outside constituencies can see them. Closing us out from the discussion of the real issues will only weaken this school.

Yours in Christ,
David Confer

Another Letter

I write to you, brothers and sisters in this community, with a sadness which has been deepening through the past two weeks. When first the news about Richard and Oliver Olsons' leaving LTSP came to me, my reaction was one of surprise. As events have developed the surprise changed to anger, particularly about O.K. Olson's situation. Anger and frustration became a part of my life as the reasons for the non-renewal of his contract were revealed/hidden. Anger grew as it became clear that no one really cared to depart from the programmatic track for "handling" such situations; as it became clear that one really ought not re-evaluate or change one's mind, lest procedure be disrupted, vacillation charged or passion listened to.

I am, therefore, writing today in sadness instead of anger. For I live here. LTSP is my home, my place of work, my community. You are, in fact, my brothers and sisters. To keep peace in the family, to be able to "face you at breakfast," so to speak, pushes me toward sadness, a nicer, more acceptable feeling than anger.

But in my very capitulation to sadness I betray the man and the community for whose sakes I grieve. It is because of his refusal, staunch, consistent yes, even at times rigid, that he is leaving us. It is because of the firmness of his confessional stance and his careful teaching of confessions that Oliver Olson leaves LTSP. The demand from the community to become one of the family by adopting its style (as well as its theology) was rejected. And so we cast out this brother.

How clearly we say that only like-minded, similar-spoken persons are welcome here. How clearly we learn from example what happens to the dissident, perhaps prophetic, tongue, even here where we verbally acknowledge that prophecy is part of ministry. We learn that it is wisest to speak modestly within this open community-- and certainly within our synods and churches. Any one who would come to join us as teacher/student can no longer have the luxury of belief in a real "unity in diversity" here.

Dead voices of reformation, powerless to annoy us now, are looked to as models: Jeremiah cast in the cistern, Paul in prison, Luther in hiding. Perhaps we do Dr. Olson a favor in removing him from amongst us, thus placing him yet more firmly in the tradition of those who suffer for their beliefs. To keep him here, to learn from and teach him, to grow together using one another's insights, would indeed lack drama and would serve as a model much "too good to be true."

Because this seminary has felt like my home since I first came here three years ago, because I hold it and the faculty and the church very dear, it is painful for me to have, let alone publicize, the disappointment I feel and the kind of thinking I perceive at work. But my need to live with this "family" can not force me to silently betray Oliver Olson who has been my teacher or, indeed, the very community who will not bear him.

Faithfully,
Sarah Davison

An Open Letter To The Community

This community has gone through a lot in the two weeks since the faculty decisions of October 4th. I would like to take this opportunity to make several comments.

A special thanks must go to Dr. Bost who has been honest, open, very available and very pastoral throughout the past two weeks. He is in a difficult position, having been here for such a short time, and his willingness to share his information, concerns and time have done much to illuminate the situation for all of us. Thanks also go to the faculty for sharing their views and for taking time to talk with students about the issues involved. The student body, also deserves credit and thanks for responding as they have--expressing honest concern for both the issues and the persons involved--each in his or her own way.

I have been upset by the politics and backbiting going on, by the rumors around and by evidences of what I must term "paternalism", that have been expressed. I know that I am not alone in these feelings. Some of these are inevitable in this kind of situation, many of them not. Serious questions have been raised about the evaluative process, both in this instance and in general. This is an issue that will have to be dealt with over an extended period of time by the entire Seminary.

But I have also been much impressed with the love and concern expressed by all members of the community. There have been sharp disagreements voiced, but they have usually been given in an atmosphere of Christian concern. Every one of us has been affected by the events, and the pastoral care extended to others is a true indication of the nature and commitment of this community.

Whatever the decision reached by the Board of Directors on Tuesday members of this community are going to have to continue to "pull together" and to minister to each other. Wounds have been opened for some that need to be healed and each of us is responsible, in some measure, in helping to heal them. Whether we are "pro" or "con" or undecided, we all have a stake in this decision and in the way that the decision will effect us in the future. It is time to continue, or even to begin, the processes of sharing with each other our comments, positive and negative, to openly express our opinions of each other and of issues and to exchange, lovingly, constructive criticism.

Yours in Christ,
Judith Bahrs

As a junior in this community I am unable to comment directly on Dr. Oliver K. Olson's work at ETSP. However, I feel as an individual I may have some valid input.

Students choose a seminary for a variety of reasons. One of them is academic excellence. I was first pointed toward LTSP by a co-author of Dr. Olson's and have looked forward for quite some time to the opportunity to work with a teacher having credentials and a reputation such as his. On a visit here prior to entering, I found him very encouraging with respect to my ministry and this institution as a place for both academic growth and practical experience. It is indeed a shock that one of the best scholars in America may not continue his work here, which reflects a standard of excellence for seminaries are able to maintain.

In Christ,
Teresa Bailey

CHUCK KOUP'S WEEKLY FOOTBALL POLL

Here it is! What many of you have been eagerly awaiting! THE SEMINARIAN's Weekly Football Poll run by none other than Chuck Koup. The following football games were played on Sunday, Oct. 17. We regret that we were not able to obtain the final results of the games before press time. Here's hoping that your picks are just as correct as our own expert pickers!

	Phila	Hous	Oak	Dallas	Chi	Det	World
	vs	vs	vs	vs	vs	vs	Series
	Gr Bay	SD	Den	St L	LA	Wash	
Steve Moyer	Phi	SD	Oak	Dal	LA	Was	Cin
Mack Smith	GB	Hou	Oak	St L	LA	Was	NY
Dr. White	Phi	SD	Den	Dal	LA	Det	Cin
F. McElderry	Phi	SD	Oak	Dal	Chi	Det	NY
Glenn Zorb	Phi	Hou	Oak	St L	LA	Det	Cin
Bob Hopkins	Phi	Hou	Oak	Dal	Chi	Det	Cin
P. Gustafson	Phi	Hou	Oak	St L	Chi	Det	Cin
Bruce Davis	GB	Hou	Oak	Dal	LA	Was	Cin
Dr. McCurley	Phi	Hou	Oak	Dal	LA	Was	Cin
Gary Meserole	Phi	Hou	Oak	St L	LA	Was	NY
YOU (Fill in)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

A VOICE CRYING FROM THE WILDERNESS (OF OHIO!)

Greetings!

You invited comment on the subject of faculty changes, so here's mine. Although I was not terribly shocked about the faculty's decision re: Dr. O. K. Olson, I was/am dismayed. This man has contributed much to this campus and Lutheranism the past few years. His dedication to the faith is commendable. His concern for a student's growth, professionally and personally, is outstanding. Dr. Olson has impressed me as wanting to help Mt. Airy put out the best Lutheran pastors possible. It was in one of his courses that I was really encouraged to go beyond the printed and lectured material; he wanted us to make new connections, to be theologians, not just students.

To find another to replace Dr. Olson will be no easy task. Personally, I'd like to see Dr. O. K. Olson's services continued after this academic year. Besides, I was hoping to take his "Lutheran Church in North America" course when I got back next year!

Mark T. English

Editors' Note: Mr. English is interning this year at The Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, 2820 West Alexis Road, Toledo, Ohio 43613.

(Editorial, continued)

The other extreme in community chauvinism is to force her beneath our feet in order to serve our own idyllic sense of community. We may call her "Gomer" and declares her character and reputation to be at stake if she does not fulfill our idyllic dream. Beneath our verbal heels we ironically chastise her floundering for breath. Again, the community becomes "she" to the same sense of chauvinism: a more complex idolatry wherein we force "community" to assent to our own personal feelings and visions of what idyllically should be. "God hates visionary dreaming" said Bonhoeffer, "it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious."

These are the two dangers of any "seedbed bearing fruit for the church:" on the one hand, the idyllic-idol demands worship, praise and defense. On the other hand, the idol tempts us to make it obedient to our own idyllic visions. Neither is relationship, much less love.

The problem with idyllic idols is that they really are so tempting: visionary yet selfish, encouraging yet demeaning, aesthetic yet dead. Idylls are most tempting because they call us from Christ: the Christ who calls us to worship Him alone, even from the midst of His sown field.

Bill Damrow
Editor

IS THERE ROOM FOR DR. O. K. OLSON AT LTSP? A BLACK SEMINARIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

As the seminary finds itself on the horizon of increased participation in black studies and increased enrollment of black students, it is important for me to say what Dr. Olson has done to help me see the tension in being a black seminarian in a white church. First of all, he helped me see the importance of assertiveness in preaching law and gospel. I had difficulty last year facing one of the tasks that would be ahead of me--somewhere along the line. I would have to tell white folks that they are sinners. I wondered often if whites could accept that from me--a black man. In taking that concern to Dr. Olson, he pointed out to me that it is God's Word we preach no matter who we preach it to. The primary consideration is what is preached, and not who is preached to. At the same time, Dr. Olson showed me that one can heartily affirm their heritage in worship. There are lots of means for expressing one's heritage in worship, and one means need not exclude another. The marks of the church, and the message of the Gospel must remain clear in every case.

I mention all this because I get a mixed message from my church. I see trends that I fear. Last year I heard a speech on taking the law out of law and gospel. Women are allowed to be ministers but are not allowed to be persons. Blacks are allowed to be ministers but they are encouraged to become "niggers," merely an end to a white church's need. A pastor started a sermon this summer with "I really had problems with this text." White churchmen talk about learning of a black experience and they are not even aware of a white experience.

Knowing full well that I am a monkey wrench in the "white male club" I spend a lot of time wondering what I'm doing here. More than any other professor, Dr. Olson has made that purpose clear to me. Letting him go would be a denial of the progress already made toward diversity. Letting him go would smack of "white niggerism" and would make it impossible for me to trust the rhetoric I hear about black progress.

Michael L. Cobler