

the Seminarian

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Volume XXXII

April 23, 1981

Issue 19

VIOLENCE

Some time ago as I watched television, a commercial for Wonder Bread appeared. I have seen the same commercial a number of times since. The commercial depicts a little girl playing baseball with other young people, boys and girls. The young girl hits the ball and races around the bases. As she dashes for home, the catcher catches the ball and the girl slides into the glove, nudging the ball loose. Safe! is the call. The girl has made a home run. Wonder Bread is telling me something other than "Buy Wonder Bread". There are at least two other messages here, (1) Little boys and little girls may play baseball together, and (2) Unsportsmanlike conduct is an acceptable way to score a run. I can wholeheartedly agree with message (1). I cannot at all agree with message (2). The little girl is clearly out, and yet by knocking the ball out of the catcher's mit, she becomes safe and scores a run. This is all portrayed very innocently, and this is the disturbing part. I have seen the same thing occur in professional baseball, one player crashes headlong into another player, one or both writhing in pain and injury, and the result is the same: the ball is knocked loose and a run is scored. Wonder Bread won't show us that scene, and yet the two are intimately related - they are both excessive in their violence. We all must recognize that we witness violence every day - even violence portrayed innocently - and we all must understand that all violence is harmful.

The last two editions of the Seminarian contained viewpoints on both sides of the gun control issue. Mark, Bruce, and Neal, I appreciate your honest input and each of your articles has been valid and helpful. I cannot pretend I am on either side. I personally dislike guns, and yet I also know that many people in this world feel just the opposite. Because I dislike guns, I can only say that I never want to own one, I cannot say that you must not own one. This article deals with the gun control issue only to the extent that it is a symptom of a larger syndrome that infects each of us to a degree, whether we think so or not. Our society is infested with violence, so much so that we are often unaware of the subtle ways we accept it, such as in the above cited example.

Do you feel assaulted each time a murder story is reported in the news? Or do you only get upset when it happens to someone prominent? Our media systems have so bombarded us with violent news that we do not allow ourselves to get upset by such "common" items. Many other sources of violence that we observe can be cited - immortal television stars who are killed on one show and return to the screen in another series the following week, sensationalized advertising of pornographic horror films (pornographic toward death, not nudity) - the list is a long one. The only way we can change it is to change our attitudes toward it. Get upset. Feel assaulted. Don't allow yourself to be desensitized by the media hype. Every act of violence that you refuse to be upset by is an act which you sanction.

Donald J. Mason

SISYPHUS THE CHRIST (PART III)

There are those who would reject my rather dismal assessment of the efficacy of the Christian mission in the world, and the apparent hopelessness and futility of it, by appealing to the omnipotence and mercy of God as the one who would deliver or liberate us from such a grinding and painful existence by instituting the desired state of affairs (the "kingdom of God"). Those who subscribe to this view shift both responsibility and participation from themselves to a divine "deus ex machina" who will put a stop to this wretched and woeful Creation when She/He desires to. Surely, they would insist, the hope, purpose and sanity of our existence arises from the knowledge that God is beneficent and would not have set us to a task that is beyond our abilities. Our conspicuous lack of accomplishment must, therefore, be a temporary state of affairs, one that will be rectified by our activity, God's activity, or a combination of both. While I would not categorically reject the assumption which gives rise to the preceding argument, the fact that we are still faced with the same massive stone, the same relentless slope, and the same painful price of participation leads me to several conclusions, one of which seems more satisfactory than the others. The struggle persists, and even intensifies, because it is the conflict between stone and slope (agape and indifference) which drives defines and fulfills our existence. The "task" has not been completed, and will never be completed, because we have been fashioned from struggle, through struggle, and for struggle. For us as for Sisyphus, God neither desires nor accomplishes the end of the struggle. It is God who perpetuates the struggle!

At first glance, the conclusion I have drawn appears to lay the foundation for a theology of sadism. We have apparently been given existence which demands participation in an activity which has no goal. We are called to spend ourselves for nothing. We seem to be living in absurdity, providing senseless entertainment for a divine audience which thrills to suffering and delights in anguish. Perhaps Camus is brutally on target with his statement that there "is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide." Given the knowledge that our struggle cannot be resolved (and our task cannot be completed), is there any meaning and/or value in the commitment of participation? Maybe we should choose total withdrawal, i.e. death. Has our existence been undermined by the removal of a goal which is wrapped in illusion? I think not. Once again, however, these questions surface when we divert our attentions from the struggle which defines us to a goal which disillusion us. Let us consider our existence, and that which gives it meaning, from the reality of participation, rather than from the illusion of completion. After all, the struggle of participation is the only firm reality we can stand on.

Ron Parks

A LETTER

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those of the LTS community with whom I have come in contact. As an F&M student living in Richards Hall, I first felt a bit uncomfortable living with virtual strangers. That feeling was not to last long, however. My "big brothers" on the hall and the "People of God" took me under their wings and made me feel more than welcome here.

President Glasse - I am glad I have had the pleasure of meeting you, and I thank you for taking an interest in me.

Verna, Nancy, and Lorraine - I know some of the Richards Hall residents have given you some trouble throughout the year, but I thank you for all you've done for us. Nancy - I especially enjoyed our chats at breakfast.

Jay, Victor, Jeff, and Dick - I'm glad I met you all, also. Dick breakfasts were never more fun, even if I did get abused verbally now and then. Jay - that's a good trick you have - supposedly clearing the drains in the girls' room, when anyone could walk in!

John-Christian - I wish you nothing but the best in the future - that you may someday attain the state of perfection that I have... or is that asking for the impossible?

Bruce - I hope you get a parish in the Alps - for obvious reasons.

Scott - I hope you find the time to enroll yourself in a spelling class - third grade might be a good place to start.

Jeff - Maybe some day you will get to live in a real town - or - is it too much to hope for -- even a city!

But getting down to the nitty-gritty now -- Barb, Ron and Jeff - I'll put it simply. Thanks for your friendship, advice, and support. I appreciate it more than I can say. Scott, especially - thank you for your sensitive ear and all the abuse it took from me. Good luck in the future, everyone!

THE ED VICE COLUMN

Dear Ed,

I've been candidating at a number of churches who are looking for a pastor. The last one, after hearing my trial sermon, voted to call me 25 - 1 with 150 abstentions. What kind of salary should I ask for?

Overwhelmed.

Dear Overwhelmed,

Congratulations! You've got a job! With that outstanding vote 25-1, you can start high. Ask for a starting salary of at least \$1500 plus housing allowance. You can be confident - they want YOU. Only 1 didn't. Good luck.

Ed.

LAST CHANCE

Next week I will be publishing the final edition of the Seminarian this year. If you haven't contributed it's not yet too late. Next week's issue will have to last through final's week, so we need to have plenty of humor.

Next week's issue will also be my last as editor (hold the applause, please) and the announcement of next year's staff will be made.

Staff for this issue of the Seminarian has been me.

Don Mason