Balaam's Ass

Fuller Theological Seminary

1971

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PLAYING FOOTSIE HAS GONE OUT OF STYLE

On March 17, Dr. Hubbard met with a group of thirty Fuller students who were scheduled to dialogue with faculty and trustees on Thursday, March 25. Students expressed uncertainty regarding their contribution to this forthcoming discussion. Many said they were reluctant to share their grave frustrations with the power center of the seminary. Dr. Hubbard responded by urging that students ought not to feel it necessary “to play footsie with the trustees.” At the conclusion of the student dialogues last Thursday afternoon, it became quite apparent that students had not played footsie with anyone.

The Thursday afternoon dialogue session began at 2PM. Mr. Bill Pannell, a recently appointed black trustee, presented a short devotional. He emphasized that a Christian must carry on his duty with humility and integrity. The race for fame, glory and success stands as a singular mark of the world’s systems. Mr. Pannell asserted that Christians should seek the quiet places away from the aggrandizement and vanity of human desire.

Following a short introduction by Dr. Munger, the assembled coterie viewed a thirty minute video tape of students expressing the effects of FTS on their personal faith. With the exception of the School of World Mission students, all the responses were critical, although occasionally seasoned with a positive comment. Gripes ranged from the oppressive nature of the language program to the lack of personal devotions in various classes. Immediately following the tape, the conclave dispersed into small groups of roughly seventeen people. Three trustees, five faculty and eight or nine students composed the five separate groups. A trustee in each group served as a recorder of the various topics encountered. After an hour, the groups returned to the chapel where each trustee recorder reported the content of his group’s discussion as the concluding note of the afternoon.

How should the afternoon dialogue be assessed? A number of observations are in order:

(1) Dr. Hubbard, Dr. Munger and Rev. Stedman are to be commended for their initiative. It’s about time that students representing a cross-section of the seminary be included in dialogue with faculty and trustees. For too long, decisions affecting students have been determined by leaders who think they understand the frustrations and problems of studenthood. There are few structured situations in the seminary which encourage students to communicate their dissatisfaction.

(2) There is a crisis at FTS. Although the criticisms by students included a wide diversity, many, if not all, were related to the lack of concern for personhood at Fuller. Psychology students complained about the stress resulting from the required B average in theology courses. Theology students objected to the lack of heart and personal sharing in many classes. Others strongly questioned the weighty emphasis on Biblical languages.

(3) Students are pleading for seminary education that deals with both emotions and the mind. Objective, disciplined scholarship can’t replace the warmth and sensitivity of a faculty member willing to discuss personal issues. Yes, faculty are in a double-bind. They must produce books and teach. Students don’t
expect faculty psychologists, but they do hope for an education
pervaded by the love and spirit of the Christian faith.

Faculty may consider the student complaints petty and immature,
but I challenge them to expose their disagreement through dia-
logue. Students may view faculty as rigid and unreachable, but
I challenge them to share their opinions through encounter. The
passivity and stultifying silence of the seminary pose the great-
est obstacle to an educational experience which ought to reflect
the passion and wholeness of Christ.

--D.L.T.

#!&* COMPLAINTS #!&*

As Martha warned Christ at the tomb of Lazarus, "By this time he
stinketh," so we warn all who would avail themselves of the men's
room on the second floor of the library, "By this time it stinketh."

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CROSSING THE STYX

A lone candle flickered in the cave, illuminating the sunken eyes
of a small circle of men. The feeble light revealed not images of
humanity, but shadowy forms. Distorted and grotesque beings hovered
around the quivering candle. I heard anguishing cries for help, then
screams reverberated through the chamber.

In the dim light cast on the wall, I discerned rib-like niches where
humans were sitting encased in stone like mummies of ancient days.
Men having emaciated members, hands and feet disfigured: ingrown
forms seeking release. No light was seen in their dark eyes: no
emotion breathed from their pallid faces. They sat like shades
waiting to be conveyed over the river Styx.

On their brows were inscribed lines of unread suffering which I read
like the tombstones of poets who write their own epitaphs. They
appeared as men having waited long for the expected messiah, but
having lost all hope, only possessed a dim recollection of deliver-
ance. A piercing shriek overcame the silence. Then I heard a
feeble voice from a niche in the wall haltingly say, "We must open
the door and help them." In reprisal, one of the men seated around
the candle bellowed "We cannot open the door; They will contaminate
us." Another from the wall answered, "But the bomb was dropped years
ago." Retorting, the elder reminded his student, "Our holy books
teach us not to question the decrees of the elders."

As the commotion subsided, I listened, hearing the elders mutter to
themselves, "We are the light of the world. The world will someday
extol our efforts to preserve the truth." Viewing this scene of
futility and corruption, I lamented of my existence. 0 that this
noxious cavern were the belly of a sea monster, so that we would be
vomitted out of this chamber of horrors, as Jonah, who even in dis-
obedience, was delivered from his doom. 0 that we would be cast on
clean white sands, feeling the bright warmth of the sun, and the
refreshing sea breezes again.
My phantasm was shattered at the sound of droning lecturers. The elders had commenced to teach their students. Some received the lectures heartily while others did with more reserve, but all gave their masters due reverence. Again a blood-curdling scream pierced the cavern interrupting the lecturers. Twitches of fear registered on their faces, but they continued their discourses. The screams became more frequent and increased in intensity. Wailings and anguishing cries for help permeated the chamber. Students began to squirm and leave their niches. Their masters yelled for order, but they could not still them. The students grasped their masters by their tattered regalia, casting them to the ground and trampling on them as they struggled to the door. Chaos and confusion reigned. In the midst of the turmoil and disorder, the cavern convulsed, the walls lurched, and the ceiling shook, while the niches spasmodically ejected their remaining occupants. Through the cataclysmic upheaval, the students continued to press toward the door of freedom, and finally overcoming their masters, they thrust open the door. Caught up in the emotion of their triumph, I rushed headlong after them, through the door of deliverance.

The intense light blinded our eyes: as freed men we groped together in the noonday sun. Falling on our knees we gave thanks to God, weeping in joy for our deliverance. Embracing our brothers and being reunited with the world, we sought to care for those in need.

--A.E.T.

OUR BIRTHRIGHT--

Balaam's Ass was born in the midst of struggle and agony at FTS. Until its birth we attempted to control and subdue our bitterness. Now we have no choice. Our inner turmoil pushes us forward. If we alone had experienced this dissatisfaction, we would remain in a paranoid quietude, but many of you have expressed the same anguish. The time has come -- we must speak out. Balaam's Ass exists as a mouthpiece for seminarians that seek a community pervaded by a Godly humanness and a Christ-like renewal. If you wish to join us in challenging the present denial of personhood at FTS, Balaam's Ass offers a channel for your thoughts and expressions.

The Editors

"Power concedes nothing without a struggle, it never did, it never will...Those who profess to favor freedom yet deprecate agitation, want the ocean without the roar of its mighty waves...The rain without the lightening and thunder."

--Frederick Douglass

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WARNING: Arcing may be hazardous to your health.
THEOLOGICAL RELEVANCE AT FULLER SEMINARY

The church has abdicated its position of leadership...it is no longer the initiator or prime mover of social reform (Will D. Campbell, Race and the Renewal of the Church, p. 3).

During my two years at Fuller Seminary, I have been appalled at the lack of Christian social concern and social action. There is presently not a single required course in the seminary curriculum which deals with these vital issues. I realize that several weeks are devoted to this area in the only required course in ethics; and I know that students may take an elective seminar in social concerns for one hour of credit!

We presently have no courses which deal with the church's role and responsibility within the urban situation, yet well over half of America now lives within metropolitan areas. This trend is obviously increasing. The projections indicate that by the 1980's less than two percent of the population will live on farm land, as compared to 30 percent in the 1940's. Sociologists are describing huge megalopolises before the end of this century which will stretch from San Diego to San Francisco and from Boston to Richmond, Virginia. The tragedy of this is that while the population of the city increases the positive social impact of the church is decreasing. "And church leaders, whether they be prominent laymen or the professional clergy, have relatively little influence with political and business leaders who organize and direct the city. It is not just the steeples that are obscured in the modern city; the whole institution of the church as a part of the city is peripheral to the mainstream of its life (George O. Younger, The Church and Urban Power Structures, p. 17)."

Since the death of Mr. Morgan, Fuller Seminary has been without one of its most outstanding prophetic voices. We now have no course in Church and State or the Church and Race Relations. During the past quarter in a theology course, the professor stated that one of the most pressing problems of the church today was its internally and externally poor record in the area of racial understanding and reconciliatory action. Yet this pressing problem was dispensed without further treatment or discussion in less than two minutes. I was grateful that this subject was mentioned in a core theology course, yet I was very disappointed that it was not examined more extensively and that it is not presently treated in a full course at Fuller Seminary. As Will D. Campbell has said, "(racism) has plagued the church for ages and is today the most serious issue it has to face (p. 17)."

While technology advances, knowledge and cities explode, and change occurs at an exponential rate, Fuller Seminary looks to the past, burying its head in the sands of historical and reformed theology. Obviously these are of some import, but to build a curriculum which is to prepare men and women to minister in the 20th century almost entirely on history, tradition, languages and intellectual minutia is absurd, if not blatantly sinful.

--D.L.S.