

from the president's desk

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

There is an air of expectancy on campus this year as the presidential search committee of the Board of Trustees pursues its task of discerning the person of God's choosing to become the sixth president of the Princeton Theological Seminary. It is anticipated that the candidate will be elected by the Board at its May meeting in 2004.

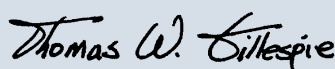
Meanwhile, our 2003–2004 academic year is full and busy. A large and diverse entering class of M.Div. juniors has settled in. Many international students from all six continents are present in pursuit of the Th.M. degree. Twenty new Ph.D. candidates are busy in their seminars and in the library. The beat goes on.

The effects of the downturn in the stock market are still impinging on our endowment, which provides 82 percent of the Seminary's operating budget. Thus, faculty and administrative positions vacated by death, retirement, or resignation are not being filled for the time being, and the amount of student financial aid has of necessity been reduced. The situation is not as critical as it is in other places, but it is serious, and we are dealing with it in a responsible manner.

On the brighter side, the contents of this issue of *inSpire* highlight the many good things that the Seminary continues to do in service to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. You will enjoy reading these articles.

With every good wish, I remain

Faithfully yours,



Thomas W. Gillespie



Letters

Edwards Celebrations Abound

I've just finished reading the latest issue of *inSpire*. It is always fascinating to learn about the faculty, students, and alumni/ae. I will be praying for the transition as the Seminary gets a new president. Thank God for the wonderful ministry of Tom Gillespie these last twenty years.

I was pleased to read the article by Darrell Guder on "Encountering Barth as a Missional Theologian." Guder has wonderful insights not only on Barth but also for how we of the Reformed faith could be about our mission in the 21st century.

I was glad that Princeton Seminary had a celebration of the Jonathan Edwards tercentenary last spring, and that you mentioned the one on October 5 in Washington, D.C.; another major Edwards conference occurred at our church October 25 and 26. (See www.firstchurch.org/edwards for more details.)

J. Jey Deifell, Jr. ('65b)
Wethersfield, Connecticut

On Pleasing Parishioners

Thank you for your articles in the summer/fall 2003 issue. I was especially interested in the one on the Engle Institute of Preaching. Somehow it seemed like a wonderful gift to share with those recently graduated pastors. There was a part of me that wished for a similar experience.

I have managed to spend 20-plus years in churches of fifty or fewer on Sunday mornings. That has been fitting for me. While I was grateful for the article and ended up with some ideas from Tom Tewell to mull over, I admit that many of the parishioners I serve would have responded, "Tom who?" The small rural church has its flavor—something I continue to learn from and enjoy.

I am constantly amazed that in such a small group of people, I hear from some when I preach an inspirational sermon that it wasn't biblical, or when I don't share "the gospel," that it wasn't quite up to par. There are those who want me to preach the text, and others who wish for, as many "contemporary churches" offer, a sermon that folks can take home and apply to the nuts and bolts of their lives. It is fun to see how the Spirit can lead in such a small but diverse body. The article also brought a chuckle and a memory: the beginning of the 1970–71 school year, when Bill Beeners pulled me aside, put his arm on my shoulder, and said, "Jeff, I think you need to take two speech classes each semester." Ah... I do think it helped in the long run.

I am thankful for my PTS days. I thank you for keeping the learning going, all these years later.

Jeff Mohr ('73B)
Clayton/Phillipsburg, Ohio

Death Penalty Story Biased?

One of the difficulties in writing about the appropriateness and application of the death penalty is that it is very hard to do so in a manner that is balanced and fair to all concerned. In the article "But I Say to You" in the summer/fall 2003 issue of *inSpire*, Sarah Griffith says that her purpose in writing and speaking of her cousin's execution by the State of Missouri is to reveal what is "intentionally kept secret and hidden" from the public.

Regrettably, some important things are also kept secret and hidden in the article. Little effort is made to explain or understand why the State of Missouri executed Kreutzer. Executions do not happen in a vacuum, and Kreutzer was not put on death row by lottery. The absence of a frank admission and acknowledgment of his crime made it difficult for me to sympathize with Griffith's story, for I could sense that something was being concealed. There had to be more to the story.

And, of course, there was. Kreutzer was executed for the rape and murder of Louise Hemphill in her home on September 2, 1992. Kreutzer did not deny the crime. Yet in the article, the reality of his crime is downplayed to the point of being largely ignored. It is dishonoring to Louise Hemphill and her family to tell Kreutzer's story without telling hers.

Griffith's loss of her cousin is significant, and I do not wish to downplay it, but it does need to be understood with reference to the greater loss of the Hemphill family, the loss of a mother and a wife, at Kreutzer's hands. Telling the victim's story would have brought a balance to this article.

Mark D. Atkinson ('83B)
Lima, Peru



I recall a paper that I wrote at PTS, one for which I was promptly given a failing grade. I tried, as best I knew how, to defend the death penalty in certain cases and situations. I still believe I was halfway right, but concede now that I was mostly wrong, and am opposed to the death penalty in *almost* all cases.

As I understand the article in *inSpire*, Paul Kreutzer was "abused and then became an abuser." His cousin speaks of the "issues that surrounded Paul's case." One is left to believe that Paul Kreutzer was put to death because of these "issues" and "abuses," and we are given a picture of a young child to reflect upon.

The rest of the story is far different than what one might be led to believe in the article. Kreutzer's was a willful act that left great damage and destruction. At some point, rational people have to acknowledge that there is no excuse for crimes such as these.

While Sarah Griffith may mourn for her own family, did she or anyone in her family ever do anything to express their deepest sorrow to the victim's family? They are the victims; Kreutzer was not. He got what he deserved. The victim did not deserve to die in the way she did. Kreutzer's only legitimate plea was for mercy. I am for mercy now—namely, life in prison—but I *do* know who the victim was. Please, no "they were both victims."

Robert Covington ('91P)
Kingwood, Texas

A Prison Chaplain's Perspective

The article about Paul Kreutzer's execution was of great interest to me, because I was the chaplain at the facility just prior to the execution that Sarah Griffith witnessed.

One thing that is very clear is that Ms. Griffith is a victim of crime. Her pain is apparent. I wish no one ever had to go through what she did. Unfortunately, wishing does not change reality; even if executions are stopped, there will be many crime victims and much pain.

Ms. Griffith offered one perspective, that of a family member. I wish to offer the perspective of a chaplain who has participated in numerous executions.

Executions are difficult for everyone. They are all taken very seriously by all staff members. As long as the state mandates executions, staff will attempt to perform them with as much dignity and respect as possible.

What is the role of a chaplain at an execution? I understand that in some states, the chaplain is in the room with the person being executed. In Missouri, the chaplain is in an adjoining room, typically with members of the offender's family. Often, a family's pastor will serve as their primary spiritual adviser, in which case I would serve as a facilitator.

I see the prison chaplain's situation as similar to that of a hospice chaplain. I have no power to stop the process. I can be God's representative to various people, if they request it. The chaplain also has the responsibility of dealing with those who have been the offender's cellmates for the past 10-to-20 years. A few hours after an execution, I will often return to the facility to minister to them.

A chaplain's personal involvement can become problematic. It is possible to delve so deeply into the family's pain that you become ineffective in your profession. I have great respect for the hospital chaplain who works in the oncology ward, or any who deal with death regularly. They have to find an appropriate balance between involvement and emotional distance.

There are a few issues in the article that readers might think about:

- 1.) One of the chaplains in this situation was new. This was his first execution to witness. How do you train chaplains for this?
- 2.) In our field, the term "saved" often is some comfort to the loved ones; I know comfort was the intent. This may have been one of those times that we talk when we should have been listening—a rather common trait of clergy.
- 3.) Problems might be created by allowing touching or a final meal with family for all executions. As desirable as it may be in some situations, in others it could become an opportunity for interference in the process, which could pose danger to staff. It is necessary to treat all situations the same.

Again, I feel some of Ms. Griffith's pain and pray for her and the many other victims of crime. I hope her ministry will be more sensitive and fulfilling because of her experiences. Prison chaplaincy is difficult. Keep us in your prayers.

Paul S. Powell
Bonne Terre, Missouri

Editor's Note: For more information on the Paul Kreutzer case, the following web sites may be helpful:

www.missourinet.com/capital_punish/case_notes/kreutzer_paul.htm and www.umsl.edu/~phillips/dp/kreutzerclm.html.

For additional resources on the ethics of the death penalty, readers may consult

www.plu.edu/~libr/web/deathpen.html.

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