

A Flap and a Flutter from a Belfry

by strannikov

Belfries and steeples attract bats, so it should surprise no one to learn that seminaries, while not themselves belfries or bat colonies, do attract modest numbers of batty figures. This is a risk and a price, the inevitable cost and unavoidable hazard intrinsic to the cultivation of human anthropology even with specimens exhibiting pronounced nycteric sensibilities.

Seminaries do not breed bats, that is, they only attract them, often only for a semester or two, before freeing them to flap and flutter their way back to the prosaic madneses of everyday life they were permitted to escape for so brief a spell. Seminaries do not collect bats, either, they manage only to domesticate modest human battiness just prior to returning the specimens they attract to fly loose upon the general human population treading and groaning through this vale of toil and sin. Even less can seminaries be said to offer any cure for human battiness, and anyone habituated to the greater and even the less exotic madneses and battiness of mundane life would not be able to miss it or mistake it for some other affliction, the symptoms may only be less or more obvious depending upon the case at hand.

Any faults that seminaries may be said to inflict upon the world, in other words, can only seldom be imputed to the bells themselves.

After our visit to Phoenix and following our inspection of the Grand Canyon, our seminary octet continued its twelve-thousand mile sojourn across the country as a quintet. (Almost from the outset, I desire to point out that I had remained behind in our touring van complaining of the onset of vertigo, this was corroborated by each of the four who returned from the rim of the

canyon.) The Arizona police and the Park rangers conducted their investigation with prompt professionalism and, under the circumstances, charitable courtesy, as their probe did not long detain us from continuing our pilgrimage to seventy-odd parishes and cathedrals across the country. The lead investigator conceded that our brother seminarians' falls would not have been much impeded had the three been wearing their cassocks at the time.

The five of us remaining donned our cassocks to sing suitable lamentations and hymns and offer requisite prayers for their repose at the bottom of the canyon until their bodies could be retrieved and returned to our seminary chapel, where prayers for the repose of their souls would be duly offered in our absence. The police put the tragedy down to "death by misadventure", as the three had been aping for the camera of our choir director plainly beyond the protection of the warning signs and the safety of the knee-high demarcation of white-painted chain.

The providential aspect of this tragedy, if I may be bold to claim it, consisted in the fact that our choir director (our octet/ quintet's other designated bass voice) survived and that the three departures consisted of the weaker baritone and both of the second tenors: we thus were able to continue our tour without appreciable loss to our vocal quality or imbalance to our group's performance, since I'll concede readily to being the weaker bass (I'm actually a bass-baritone). An additional benefit to be claimed was that one of the tenors who perished had also served as the seminary's cook, so the five of us straightaway began offering prayers for a worthy successor.

It is true that I was driving our touring van when the unfortunate accident occurred which claimed the lives of the other four survivors of the Grand Canyon mishap, but I confess here for the first time that suspicions of the choir director's guilt in fomenting the earlier mishap were dawning on me by the time we reached Grand Junction, Colorado. He had been the one with the camera, after all, the digital frames of which proved conclusively

that the three unfortunates had clearly strayed beyond the posted warnings and safety barriers. Our surviving baritone had begun blubbering by the time we'd left Moab, Utah, that he felt that perhaps the survivors had unjustly egged on those three clowns: this confession prompted the surviving tenors to sob that they had in fact pushed the cook over the edge, whose spill sadly took with him the other second tenor and the second baritone in his fatal descent. Providentially, their actions had not been recorded on the choir director's digital camera, but this new revelation produced in my mind sufficient unease and provoked wonder as to whether I myself would ever make it out of Colorado alive, since in my previous year at seminary I too had worked in the kitchen.

I honestly can't say whether the brakes failed before the steering or vice versa.

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