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Alumnus in Residence Brings Message of Mission

By Robert O. Smith, M.Div. Junior
Managing Editor, The Concord

The mission statement of Luther Seminary says that it exists to “educate leaders for Christian communities, called and sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve God’s world.” Recently, most of the focus has been on the “mission” of the mission statement, with the seminary being encouraged to produce leaders for congregations with a well-defined, Christ-centered mission.

Pastor William Bartlett of Lutheran Church of the Cross (LCC) in Laguna Hills, Calif., spent most of last week discussing the character and content of mission as it relates to the church and the women and men who are being trained to serve it. This year’s Alum in Residence, Bartlett graduated with his MDiv in 1976.

Re-instituted in 1998, the Alum in Residence Program aims to provide an arena to share and discuss the seminary experiences that are most beneficial to the kinds of ministry experienced in today’s world. “The Alumni Council is strongly behind this effort,” said Wendell Freirichs, professor emeritus of Old Testament, of Bartlett’s visit. “We want to help the seminary make good on its promise to the church that we will provide mission pastors.”

Bartlett, speaking to students and faculty who attended a noontime forum, expressed appreciation for the relationship shared between the seminaries and the greater church. “I love the connection between the parish and the seminary,” he said.

This relationship is demonstrated in the opportunity ELCA students have for intern-

ship. “The ELCA internship program is unique among the denominations,” Bartlett said. “It keeps contact between the seminaries and the communities and benefits congregations that can’t afford to hire an associate pastor.”

It benefits students in a number of ways as well. “There is a sort of unconditional love given by the congregation to an intern,” he explained.

“The congregation gives the intern permission to be more experimental so you can try things before your first call.”

A Congregation in Mission

LCC is a textbook example of a successful mission congregation. Under Bartlett’s leadership, it has experienced phenomenal growth.

With a current roster of about 1650 members consisting of roughly 800 households, LCC gains around 150 to 200 net members per month. Bartlett expects to lose roughly 10% by attrition such as relocation and death. That membership is regained before the net figures are counted.

Bartlett doesn’t attribute this growth to any particular aspect of his ministry. “I don’t do anything unusual,” he said. “I concentrate on doing the usual unusually well.”

The most obvious characteristic of LCC is its commitment to discerning the will of Christ in every aspect of its ministry. Every January, all church structure at LCC is dissolved. The leaders of the community come together and ask, “What is the Lord calling us to be and do in this place?” Nothing of the church’s previous activity is perpetuated unless it is in line with discernment of Christ’s will.

The cuts brought about by this process at times have been controversial. “The most significant cut was a preschool program,” Bartlett said. “In eight years, not one child or family came from the preschool to the church.”

This seemed to be a good sign that the preschool wasn’t fitting with the mission of LCC. So they closed it down for a year. “During that time we created a very intentionally

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Semper Eritis: Things that make you 'Hmmm'

By Emily Jensen and Mike Matzek
M.A. Senior and M.Div. Senior, respectively

Welcome to spring—it's good to be back, especially after our last column's commentary on our beloved denomination. We come to your from our perennial office in the corner of the cafeteria. Profound thoughts abound where wafers of fish and potatoes roam...our first thought being, "Is anyone really out there? Does anyone read this newspaper anyway?" We could sacrifice goats in the middle of a pentagram in the cafeteria, write you a detail-filled commentary, and still the only objection would be that it held up the line.

So far this year, we have insinuated that H. George Anderson sold us down the river for 30 pieces of Ecuemnalism, advocated the dissolution of the ELCA and suggested that maybe seminary education is not the best way of educating future pastors. And do you know what we have had in the way of a response? We have had one person asking if she can get in on the pool of when Mike is going to pop the question. This is sad.

We couldn't get in trouble if we tried. Just to prove it, we are going to advocate the most unpopular in your face stuff that you know is true, but don't want to admit it things in this column. Stuff that everybody knows but nobody is willing to say.

First, the ELCA is morally bankrupt. Our leadership cares more about unity and appearing on the cover of Christian Century and being loved by thrirfer swinging peaceandjustice (remember, peaceandjustice is pronounced as one word) liberal mainstream establishment than any real cause. We wonder when they will ask for and take seriously the thoughts and concerns of the people in the pews.

Secondly, this seminary is missionally bankrupt. We are more concerned about chasing our theological tail and getting our chasubles tied in a knot than we are worried about reaching the lost children of God. Last time we read the Bible Jesus said something or other about going and making disciples. We will check again, but we don't recall anything in there about gunnelling up with other sinking canoes and getting our ingry correct.

Third, there is no point number three. (Three is the sacred number of the Trinity and we don't want to go there.)

Fourth, we are only tolerant of people like us in a left leaning liberal sort of way. As long as you say 'tolerance' in meaning a certain thing, mainly that certain things that the Bible says are sins, aren't really sins, you can get away with a lot. After all, if you don't like what someone says, brand them with a mental illness, it worked for the Nazi's after all. Nobody here but us wrong thinking 'phobic' fundamentalist reactionaries.

Five, five wounds of Christ—don't want to go there either.

Six, you are still reading. Good for you! For that we simply give you that Scofield Bible that we promised several months ago. By the way, Mike is now engaged so the pool on the date is rather mooth. Sorry, Corrie.

Seven, the number of completion. So we will end here. This was not meant simply to make everyone mad. This is our way of saying that there are some serious issues that need to be discussed in this church. Are we simply bound together by the pension plan, or are ships passing in the night? We need to decide who and what before the big tent comes apart at the seems. We make a much more powerful witness if we are united in Christ then if we are divided by refusing to agree to disagree. We realize that the issues that cause tension are ones of significance. However, how can we be united on the centrality of Christ alone if we are divided on the points that are not core to our Christian belief? (Emily) am Presbyterain by background—the PC(USA) church has some of the same hot issues as the ELCA which are threatening to divide that church. I was told by a professor on this campus, however, that maybe the Presbyterians are farther along in this struggle than the Lutherans because they are willing to talk (even yell) about these troublesome issues.

Where does this all leave us? We don't know and nobody will know until we try to talk about it instead of staying in our homogenous little cliques and not speaking to anyone else. So, we do honestly want to hear from you all about this.

As usual, please remember that the views expressed in this column are not necessarily those of the authors, the Concord, Elian Gonzalez, his father, anyone in Little Havana or anyone with an ounce of sanity. Please direct any comments or letters to The Concord or Concord@luthersem.edu.

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Paula Cole Comes Out with “Amen”

By Robert O. Smith
Managing Editor, The Concord

Although it wasn’t much of a secret, the Indigo Girls came out quietly on their sixth album, “Shaming the Sun”, and let us have it, along with a scathing critique of the Church, on their seventh album, “Come on Now Social”. And now, Lillith Fair touring partner Paula Cole, braided armpit hair and all, has come out on her third album, “Amen”.

While both announcements were met with general disapproval, there was one major difference between the two. The Indigo Girls—singing “It’s alright if you hate that way / Hate me ‘cause I’m different / Hate me ‘cause I’m gay”—were proclaiming that they are lesbians. On the other hand, Cole—singing

_You may see me as a fool, yes, a charlatan, an egotist,_
_But I’d rather be this in your eyes,_
_Claiming that I am nothing but a coward in His_—
came out as a Christian. It seems that American culture, in its diversity, finds both to be equally controversial.

Both groups—“Amen” is actually a release of the newly formed Paula Cole Band—don’t seem to have made their announcements out of concerns for commercial appeal. With “Shaming the Sun”, talk abounded regarding the Indigo Girls’ promotion of the “gay agenda”. Does Cole have some secret ambition to push the “Christian agenda”?

A 1990 graduate of Boston’s Berklee College of Music (where she studied jazz vocal styles), Cole has released two previous albums, “Harbinger” and “This Fire”. The second went platinum, scored two hit singles—“Where Have All the Cowboys Gone?” and “I Don’t Want to Wait”—and earned seven Grammy nominations. She captured the Best New Artist Grammy in 1998.

The various influences available at Berklee are evident on “Amen”. Ranging from rap (“Rhythm of Life”) to funk (“I Believe in Love”) to the heart-wrenching “Be Somebody” (with Tionne Watkins from TLC), Raw musical talent, apparent as it is on “Amen”, is not, however, the criterion in the fickle world of popular music. Image is the important thing and, as an image, “Christian” just doesn’t cut it.

Judging from listener reviews of “Amen” on Amazon.com, Cole’s conversions didn’t win her any new fans.

“Amanda” from Tucson, seems to have said it best when she wrote, “I didn’t expect an album called ‘Amen’—especially coming from Paula Cole—to LITERALLY be filled with God-speak.” That, by the way, was a one-star review.

She should have read the comments from “Laura”, who also gave the album just one star: “Perusing the lyric booklet, I was surprised by the strong religious bent to this album. If you’re like me and don’t like Christian music, take a clue from the song title ‘God is Watching Us’ and avoid.”

I don’t like Christian music. Growing up in the buckle of the southern Bible Belt during the era of Stryper and Petra along with a little early DC Talk, I don’t have much tolerance for it. Aside from some John Michael Talbot and a bit of Bach, I don’t have much in my collection that could be labeled “Christian”.

But I do own all three Paula Cole albums. Like “Amanda”, I was surprised by the content of the lyrics on “Amen”, but rather pleasantly so. As a Christian, I was pleased by Cole’s avoidance of vague spiritual platitudes in favor of many references to concrete religious traditions (WARNING: she does not limit herself to considering only Christianity in a positive light).

Any hopeful, positive reference to a concrete religious tradition now seems, however, to be an amble basis for charges of simple naiveity. Why in the world would you talk about God if you were trying to be serious? It is interesting to note that both “Harbinger” and “This Fire” are filled with as many Christian themes as “Amen”. The sin of “Amen”, however, is that these references are positive.

Once again, “Laura”: “The entire album is composed of watery ballads about God’s love… The theme of each song is basically the same and the lyrics are childishly simple.”

A commentator from New Jersey, “Stuart3”, agrees, saying “Lyrically the album suffers a bit from her recent religious conversion. I’m glad she found God, maybe one day I’ll find him myself. But over the course of 9 songs it just grates a little.”

The “grating” aspect of the album is complimented by a complimentary assessment. “Jasmine” put it this way: “Too many songs on this album are dragging, simplistic, and preachy.” Chicago reviewer “Scott” took it even further, demonstrating that religious conviction seriously mars an artist’s integrity: “The originality and spark that marked her last two albums has been replaced by a vapid, polished, overproduced and preaching list of songs.”

Preaching, along with being constitutive of the Christian life, is, of course, the cardinal sin of our age. Generally, we don’t like to be confronting with a watching God, especially one who, as Cole sings in “God is Watching”, is concerned with social justice: “God is watching us play our ghetto wars / God is watching us play our games.”

This isn’t self-congratulatory Christian music. This music poses a challenge that happens to be concretely religious.

With “Amen”, Cole is not “showing off” a religious side for commercial benefit. Throughout the album, instead, she discusses the madness of our social ills, especially the maddening realities of racism and sexism. Throughout, she discusses the hopelessness of religious conviction and the violent hatred and antipathy that adherence to truth inspires.

Such antipathy, however muted, is evident in these comments from a reviewer in eastern Virginia: “I’m glad for Ms. Cole’s religious conversion, but she’s fallen into the trap of her newfound faith and written a very didactic album that becomes grating unless...

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Theses for a New Millenium

Donovan Riley
M.Div. Middler

Editor's note: This column continues Mr. Riley's offering of 99 theses for the contemporary Christian community.

Control through Administration

"The Church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ, and by having all the bishops equal in office and diligently joined together in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, works of love, etc. So St. Jerome writes that the priests of Alexandria governed the churches together and in common. The apostles did the same, and after them all the bishops throughout Christendom..." (Luther)

What Luther was attempting to state at this point in the Schmalkald Articles was that anyone or any office which attempts to exalt itself over and against God is the real and true Antichrist inasmuch as that person or office attempts to exert its authority and influence over and against the whole of the Christian church for the sake of its own status and privilege.

Through the contemporary machinations of bishops and councils our fidelity to the body of Christ is being exploited piecemeal for the sake of "church control" and the benefit of "common unity." This is merely the age old way in which the structure of power is maintained by those who have assumed prescriptive dispensational authority in the church. What then becomes of the Church is that we are made irrelevant by the constant pressure of "common church control," otherwise known as "heterogeneous orthodoxy.”

Thus...

47.) Church control through paying full-time people or withholding funds for their support stifles the prophetic voice that condemns the sins of the rich.
48.) Church control over pastors has largely silenced their public criticism of the denominational system of which they are a part.
49.) The dependence of the clergy upon their salaries has tended to make them servants of their members' comforts.
50.) The financial vulnerability of most clergy has led them to become cautious in condemning the real sins and prejudices of their members.
51.) Control over pastors and missionar-
ies has diverted their energies from creative approaches in pastoral care and mission in order to fulfill the institutional expectations of their paymasters.
52.) Denominational mission boards are not necessary to carry out mission work at home and in foreign fields, as can be seen from faith missionaries who receive support from individuals and congregations.
53.) By using stipendary missionaries administered by boards, we have, in effect, discouraged the natural mission work of traveling Christian lay people, who in New Testament times were able to begin self-sustaining congregations.
54.) Denominational mission boards have often taken away from single congregations and small groups the thrill and excitement of doing their own mission work.
55.) Clergy and missionaries can accept their salaries as gifts freely offered, but ought neither to expect them nor be governed by them.
56.) The sooner clergy can find other work to fall back upon, if need be, the happier their ministry will be.

If, as Paul says, "We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth," then we must strongly assert that, "it is patently contrary to God's command and Word to make laws out of opinions," therefore, it is apparent that because of this notion human ordinances have multiplied beyond calculation while the(pure and true) teaching concerning faith and righteousness of faith has almost been completely suppressed.

I ask you brothers and sisters, "If we are dead with Christ why do we continue to burden our consciences as though we were alive?"

Final Scriptural Authority

Who is it that claims final authority in expounding the Scriptures?
Who behaves as though s/he were lord over all the church
Ask any Christian, "Do you believe that you are baptized? Do you believe that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ in both kinds? Do you believe that our doctrine is true?" What will we receive by way of a response?
Perhaps certain wise ones will reply, "I believe, but because the bishop has not approved..."
Shall we not leave these people to their own god, for they have demonstrated that they are unwilling to give all honor to God? When will the external preached Word of God take its right and proper place at the head of the church?
When will we live accordingly to that Word?

Notes from the Parish Nurse

By Lydia Volz
Parish Nurse, Luther Seminary

This month I want to discuss Stress and Spirituality and ways to reduce our stress response. We may have stress related to problems in relationships, spiritual well-being of loved ones, demands of work and study, finances and health. God's word reminds us, "...Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace because they trust in you." Is. 26:3

Stress refers to physical, psychological and spiritual responses to demands. It isn't the demands themselves, as much as "believing in one way and living in another." It is the distance between what we value and what we do. When people and activities that are important to us receive little of our time and energy...we feel STRESSED! Our faith can help us to creatively live with our values, rather than in opposition to them (Acts17:27-28).

The following are suggestions for living lives characterized more by peace and wholeness and with less stress.

--Renew yourself and feed your spirit. This is the most effective Stress Buster! (Ps 105:5; Rom 12:12; 2 Cor 4:16; Titus 3:5)
--Embrace the present. Avoid obsessing on what needs to be done next or what went wrong yesterday, so you can fully appreciate God's presence next to you (Lk 10:38-42)
--Live a grateful life. Thankfulness breeds contentment.

--Stand like a mountain...flow like a river. Use God's perspective in judging which situations require strength and which call us to 'ride the waves' and flow with changes (Ex 14:13; Ps. 93:5; Ps. 46:6; Is 66:12).
ELCA News

Council addresses clergy numbers

The ELCA Church Council has reviewed a draft of a report on the supply of clergy in the ELCA. “The problem is not so much on the supply side but on the demand side,” said the Rev. Joseph Wagner, executive director of the ELCA Division for Ministry.

The number of ordinations has been “stable” in the past decade, said Wagner, with 325 to 350 each year. The number of retirements each year has been similar to the number of ordinations, he said. A growing number of small congregations which are unable to call a full-time pastor is having an impact on the demand being made for ELCA clergy, said Wagner.

While the total number of ELCA congregations fell from 11,120 to 10,862 between 1988 and 1998, the number of congregations reporting an average weekly worship attendance of 50 or less rose from 2,058 to 2,329.

The number of ordained ministers serving in congregations dropped from 10,125 in 1989 to 9,583 in 1998. The number of ministers being added to the roster of ELCA clergy was almost equal to the number of ministers retiring or dying in each of the years from 1990 to 1998.

Much of the decline can be attributed to resignations and removals, said Wagner. When discussing solutions, he suggested changing the “three year rule” for roster removal to a longer period of time. In dealing with the demand for clergy, Wagner suggested “yoking” congregations — having one pastor serve two or more congregations. He also recalled that synods can authorize non-ordained ministries and that a minister could work part-time for a congregation while earning a salary from a full-time job outside that congregation.

The Rev. Karen Soli, council member, Virginia, Minn., said many new pastors are unable to serve smaller congregations because they must repay large student loans. She asked if the ELCA could look into creative methods of helping, such as by buying the loan and allowing the minister to repay the loan at a lower interest rate.

Many small, rural congregations have nowhere else to go, said Steve Koenig, council member, Elwood, Neb. “The problem is that many of our rural congregations have been ‘family congregations’” which do not welcome new members, he said. Koenig suggested training rural pastors to “open” rural congregations.

Upcoming Events

Here are some upcoming events of interest at Luther Seminary.

Quilters and Authors

Jeff Brumbeau, author of acclaimed children’s book “The Quiltmaker’s Gift” (www.quiltmakersgift.com) will visit on Saturday, May 6, at 10 a.m. in the Old Campus Center. Families are invited to hear the author, have books signed, make quilt blocks before or after the event, and view quilts on display by the Country Peddler quilt store.

Race, Church and Change Award Presentation

Vivian Jenkins Nelson, co-founder, CEO and president of INTER-RACE, will receive this year’s Race, Church and Change Award, given annually by Luther Seminary.

Nelsen will receive the award and deliver a message on Tuesday, May 9 at 10 a.m. in Luther Seminary’s Chapel of the Incarnation.

May 17 Syttende Mai Celebration

Come worship at 2 p.m. and celebrate the anniversary of Norway’s constitution at the historic Old Muskego Church. Old Muskego Church was the first structure built by Norwegian immigrants in America dedicated exclusively to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Originally located in the heart of the Muskego settlement in Wisconsin’s Racine & Milwaukee Counties, it was dismantled in 1904 and moved to the Luther Seminary campus. Lefse will be served on the lawn following the service.

Theses

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in faith rather than the words passed down to us from distant councils and earthly authorities? For if the truth be told: 57.) Denominations are unable to exercise control over doctrine despite confessional, constitutional, and/or hierarchical provisions. Instead, they find the greatest disputes over doctrine and practice precisely in those denominations that seek to enforce such provisions.

58.) Even though confessional and constitutional commitments do not guarantee pure doctrine or even unity within a denomination, it is certain that they effectively split the Christians, who may share a common faith but belong to different denominations.

59.) In a rapidly changing world of diverse cultures, where concepts and words have different meanings, and problems differ, every few years confessional and constitutional commitments are out of date.

60.) Control through enforcement of confessional and constitutional commitments too often precludes honest and effective dialogue between Christians of different denominations at a local level.

61.) Denominational control over fellowship with other Christians clearly omits Christ’s own criteria of judging prophets by their lives (Matt. 7:16-20), and neither a church convention nor a faraway bishop can decide that for us.

62.) Costs incurred in propagandizing councils and conventions are clearly wasted funds much better given to provide opportunities for the poor.

63.) Control through the political interpretation of confessional and constitutional commitments robs the church of the sweetness of the Gospel and replaces it with bitter battles over human definitions.

64.) Control through confessional and constitutional commitments clearly takes doctrinal decisions away from the common people and places them into councils and conventions where politics are supposed to answer questions that only the Holy Spirit can resolve (John 14:26).

65.) Confessional statements and church decisions can and should be honored as witness to the faith of the dead and the living. Such confessions, however, become evil when they are appealed to as law and used for church control.

66.) New confessional and creedal statements should be continually drawn up by Christians crossing denominational lines as joint testimonies to their common understanding of God’s Word.

“Those who thus put their reliance on the church, contrary to the plain Word, are very silly. It’s as if one were to say, ‘I’d like to love the son, but I must first kill the mother.’ They attribute more to the church that is created than to the Word that creates. But, thank God, we have the testimony that we are not heretics but only schismatics, and they are to blame for our separation.” (Luther)
Christian program that is now a seamless part of our ministry,” Bartlett said.

There are several aspects of LCC’s ministry that contribute to its growth. First is the preschool. Every month, 50 to 75 new members are gained through preschool involvement.

Another important tool for outreach is the church’s newsletter. “Less than a third of your members are there any given Sunday and it’s important to stay in contact with them,” Bartlett said. The newsletter is mailed out to prospective members and the parents of preschool children as well as members.

Worship style and content is another important aspect of LCC’s missional approach. While many churches, in an effort to attract new members, offer different styles of worship each Sunday, Bartlett sees this approach as potentially divisive within a community. He notes that the same bulletin is used at all five weekend services.

The second Sunday of each month is designed specifically for what have come to be known as “seekers.” These are the “FRAN” services—an acronym for Friend, Relative, Associate, Neighbor—for which members are encouraged to invite guests.

Bible studies have had an important effect on the LCC community. “The greatest impact on evangelism has been the Wednesday evening Bible study,” Bartlett said. “Eventually at work you’re going to say something like, ‘Last night at Bible study, we...’ and, oops, you just witnessed to somebody.”

The Luther Community

After the noontime forum, Bartlett answered some questions regarding his impressions of the Luther Seminary community. “Luther is a good faith community,” he said. “Whenever I come to Luther, I have a passion for what it could become.

“There is a potential here for living a life together in Christ,“ he continued. “It ought to have the same atmosphere of the love of Christ that you can feel in a congregation.”

The discussions of CCM that have flavored much of the discourse on this campus in the past few months aren’t a matter of great concern for Bartlett. “My concern regarding CCM is more practical,” he said. “What is the motivation driving the dialogue with churches that are dying instead of churches that are growing? Let’s talk to the people at Saddleback or Willow Creek to see what they’re doing and learn from them.”

Asked what he thinks is the defining characteristic of those churches, Bartlett answers quickly, “Intentionality and design,” he said. “There is a persistent pursuit of reaching others with the Gospel in whatever form that takes.”

In short, Bartlett thinks that the current denominational and inter-denominational arguments in mainline churches are taking energy away from mission: “Our mainline churches are sitting on a farmhouse porch sipping tea while the barns are burning.

“My biggest concern is 1 Corinthians 2:2,” he contended. “That’s our message. Whoever will proclaim that is sufficiently one in Christ for us to do ministry with them.”

Bartlett is encouraged by Luther’s current direction toward mission-oriented ministry. “I would love to see a passion for preparing pastors for mission,” he said. “There has been a tendency in the ELCA to lose sight of the central message of the Gospel in pursuit noble but lesser things.

“What we talk about is what we value,” he added. “Lately, I haven’t been hearing much of the core value of knowing Christ and making him known.”

This lack of a missional approach to ministry is of course not limited to Luther.

“We have gone through a rough period in our ELCA history,” Bartlett said. “Just after the merger, we had a period of arrogance that brought on a period of repentance. Now we’re in a time of contrition when we are sensing what the Gospel mandate really is.”

Bartlett has a clear idea of what that mandate contains. “Christianity started out as a relationship, a relationship with Christ,” he said. “After that, it moved to Greece and became a philosophy and then to Rome where it became an institution. Then it went to Europe where it became a culture and on to America where Christianity became an enterprise.

“We need to get back to the relationship.”

The Concord is looking for writers, copy editors, and basically everything else for next year. Please contact us if you’re interested in a position!

Amen

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you share the intensity of her beliefs.... A beautiful voice and fine production is only half the battle of a good album; you also need to have something compelling and universally appealing to say to all you listeners. One topic—God—doesn’t cover that.

As Christians, we must decide whether or not this one topic—God—does indeed cover everything and whether we, along with Paula Cole, will be willing to preach this truth ... not just to each other but to secular audiences as well.