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Bonhoeffer and the Psalms

Visiting Lecturer Offers a Challenge

By Robert O. Smith
Managing Editor, The Concord

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has long sparked debate among people interested in the development of 20th century Christianity. What are we to make of this young theologian's contributions to ethics, hermeneutics, ecclesiology and constructive theology?

On Monday, Feb. 25, our community was invited to join this debate. The invitation—issued during an hour of Professor Mark Hillmer’s course on the Psalms that was opened to the greater community—came in the form of a lecture titled “Bonhoeffer and the Psalms” offered by John W. Matthews, pastor of Memorial Lutheran Church in Atto, Minn.

One might wonder what a pastor in Minnesota—even if he were Lutheran—would have to say about Bonhoeffer. Here’s your clue: Matthews also happens to be vice president of the International Bonhoeffer Society, English Language Section.

At the opening of his discussion, Matthews shared that, for him as for many others, Bonhoeffer has become a “conversation partner” in parish ministry. As he sees it, one of the risks of parish ministry is that one can “get bogged down” to the point that one’s “spiritual life and further studies can die on the vine.”

Matthews offered a brief sketch of Bonhoeffer’s life as a framework for understanding his writings. Often, people are unaware of Bonhoeffer’s experiences in

Bonhoeffer TALKS—John W. Matthews, pastor and Vice President of the International Bonhoeffer Society, English Language Section, discusses the martyred theologian’s approach to the Hebrew Bible.

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AF Promoting Web-based Ministry Resource

CHICAGO (ELCA) — Augsburg Fortress, the publishing house of the ELCA, has introduced a Web-based congregational ministry resource designed to help members and non-members live out their faith anywhere they have access to the Internet.

The resource, “ReadyClickGrow,” was introduced in January. It was developed through a partnership with Joy Resources, a joint publishing venture of Augsburg Fortress and Community Church of Joy, an ELCA congregation in Glen-dale, Ariz.

ReadyClickGrow can be launched from any subscribing congregation’s Web site, and it is now available to congregations for a 30-day trial period, said Bill Huff, general manager of congregational resources, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis.

“The idea is for congregations to have another reason for people to visit their Web sites,” Huff said.

ReadyClickGrow is meant to enhance a congregation’s ministry by making biblically based materials and activities available to members anytime they want them, he said. The Web-based ministry resource is a “home-centered and church-centered resource,” Huff said.

Presently, a ministry track called “ReadyClickGrow Your Family” is available through the service, Huff said.

Resources for individual users include Bible-based devotions and activities, suggestions for building a family’s relationship with God, faith conversation ideas, games, special topics and help from experts on various topics.

ReadyClickGrow Your Family also includes a separate series of resources available for leaders of family ministries in congregations.

To prepare for the unveiling of ReadyClickGrow, Augsburg Fortress conducted focus groups and demonstrated the program on selected ELCA congregational Web sites, including the Web site of Community Church of Joy.

Your comments on this and similar efforts are requested by “The Concord”

In our last issue, we were invited to an open discussion regarding the most pressing issue in the ELCA: homosexuality. Several people have responded to this invitation in public and private, in large and small ways. On pages 6 and 7, three of those perspectives are offered in hopes that more people will be called to add their voice to this important matter.
Letters to the Editor

Our issue of February 11 drew quite a few responses from our growing community of readers (and not only because it did in fact cover one event from Feb. 12)! Here are some thoughts on that issue:

We Love You, Too

Kudos on your February issue. I’ve been reading the Concord for about 10 years now, and I’m thoroughly impressed with your especially fine work. The issue includes a mix of stories of important events in the life of the seminary and the life of the ELCA, recognition of the broader context of church and culture, and a lively set of opinions on a number of issues. I am especially grateful for your reflections on the conversations over ordination in the ELCA and the graciousness of your invitation to press the conversation in your own pages and at the seminary in general. Intelligence, thoughtfulness, courage and humility abound in your writing and in your editorial decisions.

Keep up the good work.

KIRSTEN MEBUST
MDiv. alum: Graduate Special student

MDiv Senior Ben Ranstrom excited quite a few people with his thoughts on chapel here at the sem. He seems to have struck a chord with his thoughts on that most dreaded of modern innovations ... contemporary worship.

Worship Wars, Continued

Right on! I am very disappointed that very few seniors received the “honor” of preaching in chapel. Also—please do not get me started on the whole election or popularity contest—that was totally wrong and very deceitful. We all have worked very hard to get where we are at—[I] want a chance to hear my classmates, guess it’s too late. As for chapel—why go? We are doing anything of great interest—please, it reminds of “soap box” chapel at Luther College.

KRIS SNYDER
MDiv Senior

Brother Ben has some good points about worship at Luther Seminary, especially about attendance being rather poor. In addition to his concerns about using more “contemporary” worship styles, I wish to speak to the point that we have to be one of the very few Christian enclaves in the world that has “Morning” worship at COFFEE TIME [10:00a.m.] Good grief, that’s not “morning” that’s nearly noontime! It would be more reasonable to have Morning Prayer in the MORN-ING, noontime prayer at NOONTIME, and EVEN-ING Prayer in the EVENING. And, pub-leeze, we don’t need a sermon EVERYTIME! A sermon, or homily, is appropriate when we celebrate the Holy Communion; I’m just not convinced that it is needed for every prayer service. W.O.V. and the L.B.W., not to mention the Book of Common Prayer, all contain both spoken and sung liturgies of the hours—Morning, Noon-time and Evening. They are all focused on the prayer of the assembly. There’s room for a SHORT homily, but the main point is to pray the psalms—no matter what musical style is used. I like order and predictability—if I had my dру-thers, I’d like to be able to count on the praying community of my brothers and sisters at Luther Seminary assembling for prayer at the appropriate times, using several musical styles, on a regularized schedule so that I could learn new prayer forms as well as whole heartedly join in with those I know. It is my impression that one of the chief reasons for low attendance at “Morning” chapel is that at present you never know what’s going to happen—unless you come on Monday and scan the worship folder and plan your week. Speaking for myself, sometimes I get tired of never knowing what I am going to be participating in at worship. Sometimes I’ve come to pray in the assembly, only to be met with NOT ONE SECOND of silence in which to collect my thoughts and prayers. So, no matter whether the music is “contemporary” or something else, I don’t much care. I do care that we honor silence, we honor the psalmody, and we honor the power of the praying assembly as the Holy Spirit calls us together. Peace,

KEITH E.O. HOMSTAD
ObISB

I agree completely with Ben Ranstrom’s well-expressed thoughts and recommendations about chapel. I love the traditional liturgy, but I would also very much like to see and experience more “contemporary” worship styles at chapel. This would be a way for us to “learn by doing” and it would also give more students opportunities to share their gifts as worship leaders with the rest of the community. Ben’s comments on attendance at chapel also hit home. Since I have been on a part-time internship the past two years, I have not had as much opportunity to attend chapel, but neither have I made it a priority. When I started at Luther in 1998, I automatically went to chapel every day, based on my understanding of what it means to be part of a faith community. It never occurred to me to see who was going to be preaching. But then I began to hear conversations like, “Are you going to chapel today?” “I don’t know—who’s

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Silence or Suffering:
The Question of ‘Pro-Palestinian Bias’

On Feb. 12, the campus of Luther Seminary was visited by Munib Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan (and Palestine). The time he spent with us was one of the high points of my seminar career.

The night before, when Bishop Younan was taking a short break between lecturing and taking questions at Central Lutheran in Minneapolis, our presiding bishop, Mark Hanson, offered some words of encouragement for the ELCA.

Pledging moral, rhetorical, and financial support of the ELCA for the ELCA, Bishop Hanson reflected on Jesus’ charge that we, the members of his flock, will be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

To our visitor from Judea, Bishop Hanson remarked that North Americans often forget that we are at the ends of the earth. As a result, we often forget the life of Jerusalem. His pledge intended to ensure that this forgetfulness would not continue.

To many, however, such a pledge provides further evidence of the “pro-Palestinian bias” of American liberal Christianity.

Following the Tuesday morning chapel worship led by Bishop Younan, my elation—a mixture of sorrow and hope for the present situation in Palestine—was muted by one student’s negative comment regarding this apparent slant of the ELCA.

For Americans, any talk of seriously considering Palestinian claims—or for that matter, Yasser Arafat—is to go against decades of American tradition. We have uncritically accepted the politicized claims of a secular Israel for so long that our bias has become so mainstream as to no longer appear to us as a bias.

With this reality in mind, I don’t think it’s unreasonable that a few voices step forward with words and gestures of support for the Palestinian cause. To use the parlance of journalism: you call it bias, I’m inclined to call it equal time.

Lutherans have been active in Palestine for quite some time. Through the health-care and educational efforts of Lutherans detailed by Bishop Younan, we’ve made quite a name for ourselves in the region.

I didn’t realize the extent to which that is true until last year, during my internship at the Lutheran Student Center, the ELCA campus ministry at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

At the beginning of the school year, I was working the ministry’s booth at “Big Red Welcome,” the street fair for new students at UNL. A woman wearing hijab (a Muslim head covering) came up to our table.

I greeted her with the traditional Muslim greeting, “Assalamu alaikum!”

She glanced up at me, a bit shocked. “Are you Muslim?” she asked.

“No, I’m Christian.”

Her next words surprised me: “And you’re Lutheran?” I answered affirmatively. “Come, meet my son.”

Her hometown, found out, was Ramallah, on the West Bank in Palestine. She was in Nebraska to visit her son, Ahmed, who was president of UNL’s Muslim Student Association. The fact that I was Lutheran got our relationship off to a good start.

In our theological world, “bias” has become a bad word. Influenced by the culture around us, we’ve come to value “objectivity”—something presumed to be the opposite of bias.

The problem with asserting an ‘objective’ position is that it’s almost always identical with your position. Would you ever put forth anything but the most reasonable, sane, and rational argument?

And when an institution presumes its rational objectivity, dissenters might as well stay home. The established powers were utterly terrified when the phrase “preferential option for the poor” became a rallying cry for a band of priests in Central America.

We must reject this irrational position that promises to undermine our systems of existence! The explicit and implicit condemnations of “liberation theology” as unnecessarily biased continue to this day.

But is it not the bias of all Christian theology that faith be liberative?

And since when have Christians not been a biased people? Isn’t bias part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian?

Since God is biased toward us (2 Cor. 5:19)—since God has thrown God’s lot in

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(Continued on page 5)
Subject: 64 Isolated Cities, Villages, and Palestinian Towns
Date: Thursday, February 21, 2002

Dear Friends:

This is the second day for me not being able to enter the city of Jerusalem. Even though I have the Jerusalem ID, I could not reach the checkpoint. They would simply shoot me.

Tomorrow is the first day for Moslem feast. I would not be able to visit my family like I am used to every feast. Yesterday, I was trying to go to Jerusalem to borrow some money for the feast and to by toys for my children. Now I am stuck with no money and not be able to move here or there.

Now I have received news that just now the way to Rammallah Alberieh has been sheltered by Apache (helicopters). That is only five kilometers from the place I am sending you this e-mail from, Quandlania Refugee Camp.

I have to go now. But for those who want to know me more could open the website that I have together with a friend of mine whom I call my American brother: www.pimas.org. We’ve done this to bring income to Palestinian families.

Best regards,
Ali Jaber

Dear Friend Ali, family, friends, and children of God;

First, I want to know that I am sending your message and my response in this message to many people, so they will read the same words you and I composed.

I am very sad that you cannot go to Jerusalem. In addition to the Israeli government ban of your freedom of movement to buy food and toys toward celebration of your Muslim festival, and forcing you to not gather with your family, and the fact that you cannot go to Jerusalem is indeed an obstruction of international law. Jerusalem is the world’s ancient Holy city!

WE CANNOT ALLOW THIS DISCRIMINATION, APARTHEID AND ETHNIC CLEANSING TO CONTINUE! Who will the Israeli government ban next from entering Jerusalem? Will an Orthodox Jew who upholds the Ten Commandments of the Hebrew Bible and heeds God’s Word to “rule,” or care for God’s creation, not be allowed to pray at the Western Wall? If Palestinians are not allowed to enter Jerusalem, then Palestinian Christians, indeed the majority Christian populous of the Holy Land of Palestine, cannot pray or worship in The Church of the Resurrection, the most Holy site of our Faith! Who’s next? Shall Christians from Rome, Germany, Norway, China, Latin America, or the United States not be allowed to visit the sites of the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ?!

We must recognize that historically, Palestine is and always has been our ancient Holy Land! True, we are “Israel”, children of God, who believe in God. It is also true that the prophets foretold inevitable battles and wars of great bloodshed and destruction. Yet, logically, and faithfully, this does not mean we are obligated to endure nor promote such destruction of God’s creation!

Ali, I cannot imagine not being able to gather with my family on Christmas, Easter, or any weekly Sunday worship because a government’s inability to promote and live within holistic values for the whole people. Regardless of government leader’s religion, such government leadership and power is not Holy! Shall I dare ask who is really behind this evil power! To be sure, this power is not God’s!

Ali, I will pray with all of my heart, and I will encourage others to pray with our collective hearts, to seek wisdom and courage from God for us to love one another and dismantle the evil power that holds you, and all Muslims, Jews, and Christians hostage!

May the Peace of Jesus Christ, Yahweh, and Allah be with you,

Your Friend, Caryn

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Dear Mr. Dvorkin:

I have recently been made aware of the fact that one of your reporters, Linda Gradstein, has made many speeches and has received honoraria from many pro-Israel and Zionist groups in the United States. This is in direct violation of NPR policy of receiving honoraria from special interest groups. I am appalled and offended that a NPR reporter would display such bias.

Many of us listen to NPR regularly, hoping for a balanced reporting of the struggle in the Middle East. Linda Gradstein’s receiving honoraria from pro-Israel groups only raises more suspicions about the pro-Israel bias in the media reporting from there.

In a letter to the editor of the Minneapolis Tribune, printed in the December 10 edition, I wrote “In the struggle in the Middle East, for too long we have let Israel define ‘violence’ and ‘terrorism.’ Much of the US press, either because of sloppiness or collusion, has been party to this deceit. What Palestinians do to Israelis is labeled ‘violence’ or ‘terrorism.’ Yet what Israel does to the Palestinians is called ‘retaliation’ or ‘self defense.’ Israeli actions inflicted on Palestinians, such as 34 years of occupation, illegal settlements, killing hundreds of innocent civilians including many women and children, shelling residential areas and refugee camps, bulldozing agricultural lands and homes, assassinating political leaders, turning off water supplies, and refusing access to medical care, are all forms of violence and terrorism. We must condemn violence and terrorism in all its forms, including that of the Israelis against the Palestinians. There will be peace and security for both Palestinians and Israelis only when both sides are granted basic human rights and dignity.”

It is obvious that Linda Gradstein is part of the media collusion that I wrote about. How in the world can she pretend to have any kind of objectivity when she regularly has been promoted and paid by pro-Israel groups? I am disgusted that NPR has not taken steps to correct this obvious conflict of interest.

In the future, I will discount anything Linda Gradstein says about the Middle East, and I will also be more suspicious of any NPR reporting of the tragedy unfolding over there.

Sincerely yours,
Peter Sethre
The Frugal Seminarian

Tax time is coming around... but have you thought about what your taxes will be like after seminary? For those planning to be ordained, a whole new IRS world lies ahead.

Clergy Tax Primer

There is no way I can tell you “everything you need to know about clergy taxes” in this column, but here are a few things to keep in mind.

Clergy find themselves in a pretty unique situation, tax-wise. They aren’t really employees and aren’t really self-employed. Congregational employers will not be paying clergy social security tax, and rarely send regular federal and state tax withholding amounts to the government. Most clergy make quarterly estimated payments based on clergy salary, housing allowance or parsonage rental value, and payments for social security. Any honoraria received for officiating at weddings, funerals, etc., also need to be included in the year-end calculations.

Sound complicated? Well, as a clergy spouse, I know that it can be. And, from our experience, IRS employees whom you might call as a resource during tax season may not know much about clergy taxes, and any help comes with a clear disclaimer on the reliability of the information tendered. It also has been our experience that the treasurers at the congregations we have served (often a volunteer position that rotates regularly) sometimes have been confused about how clergy taxes work.

So, all is lost? No! Many resources are available to help you.

The IRS has many publications that can be helpful, even though you may have to read them through a number of times before what they’re trying to say sinks in.

Those with access to the internet can link up with Ecunet, an e-mail conferencing system, and join their meeting “Tax Issues Affecting the Clergy.” Several knowledgeable people there can help answer questions or at least steer you to good resources.

You can join up to three Ecunet meetings free through Ecunet Lite, so any advice will be free. To sign up for Ecunet or Ecunet Lite, go to https://www.ecunet.org/conference/signup.html

Clergy Tax Law books are available to help you navigate process of completing your own taxes, or help you be prepared for whomever will assist you. Two titles often recommended are Richard Hammar’s Church and Clergy Tax Law and the Abingdon Clergy Income Tax Guide.

MDiv seniors can still get copies of Clergy Financial Resources’ handbook, “Clergy Tax Law: Short Course,” that was distributed at the recent workshop led by Mark Friese. This workshop is presented annually for graduating seniors. If you haven’t yet arrived at that point in your seminary career, don’t miss this valuable opportunity to learn the basics and ask questions! You’ll be glad you did!

Another option is to have a qualified person complete your taxes for you. Just be careful who you choose, and find someone who really understands the complicated IRS world of clergy taxes.

My bottom-line advice is this: Calculate your estimated tax at the beginning of your call and annually thereafter. Create a budget that helps you save regularly to pay your quarterly taxes. Otherwise, during your first Lent in the parish, you may have a new reason for the discipline of fasting....

Pro-Palestinian/Pro-Justice

Continued from page 3

with us (Isa. 7:14)—shouldn’t we also be biased ... and biased in particular directions (Phil. 2:5)?

Instead of objectivity, I would argue for “transparency”—when we are honest with others and with ourselves about our particular biases.

I was a Lutheran at a college street fair. Through experience, Ahmed’s mother had a good idea what my biases would be. And so she trusted me to be a friend to her son.

It is that sort of trust that people like Bishop Younan have cultivated throughout his embattled region. The public stature based on this trust has never been more important than in the 17 months that have passed since peace talks between Arafat and then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak froze.

The intifada (uprising) against Israeli occupation of Palestinian land that began in September of 2000 has taken the lives of at least 273 Israelis and 883 Palestinians.

Fear marks the lives of people on both sides of this rift.

These months have born witness to the impotence of overwhelming military force to ensure change.

Such times of suffering and despair call for clear proclamation and decisive action. Above all, it is a time for transparency: in our biases, our hopes and our fears.

Bishop Younan has provided us with such a model of Christian leadership.

As he has demonstrated, to be critical of the Jewish state is not to be anti-Semitic. It is not even to be anti-Jewish.

Kenneth Cragg, in The Call of the Minaret, has persuasively argued that one responsibility of Christians in dialogue with Muslims is to encourage them to be better Muslims.

In the current realities of Palestine, might this also constitute part of our call to serve our Jewish sisters and brothers?

Even as we ourselves need to be reminded, might we remind them of the passage of Torah that reads, “You shall not oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry” (Ex. 22:21–23)?

All are vulnerable in the current struggle.

What measures of justice—as opposed to the enticements of force—might provide peace and security for all instead of for a privileged few?

From its inception, the Christian community has been marked (however inconsistently) by its concern for those who are marginalized and oppressed.

In part, modern-day Israel was established as reparation for wrongs we perpetrated against the Jewish people.

Sadly, our contriteness has served to promote injustice within that very experiment of justice.
Coming to the Table

Indeed, I agree that the issue of deciding just how churches of the ELCA will deal in the future with well qualified persons seeking ordination - who happen to be gay or lesbian - is now “coming to dinner”. In fact, I anticipated this issue coming to the forefront when I filled out my own “Roster Information Form - C”.

This is what I wrote in answer to the question, “What are your hopes for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America?”: “It is my further hope that those congregations that are ready to call a person who happens to be living within a committed relationship (and who happens to be gay or lesbian) will be encouraged to do so.

We all grow at different rates and become ready for things at different times. No one should be considered to be a “universal peg” that can be plugged into each and every congregational situation of ministry. I believe that this is an issue to be decided on a case by case basis with congregations and bishops working together to call and ordain the appropriate persons to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.” (my paragraph 4)

I have been called to serve a rural Minnesota congregation. This is a very good fit for me where I feel as though I know many of the people although I haven’t even begun yet.

During the interview process I was asked to elaborate on this specific response I had made. My reply was that no person should have to deal with the imposition of celibacy as a “job requirement” in order to receive a call.

That is the current position of the ELCA however. Since the imposition of celibacy never works without extracting a terribly high price - witness the travails of the current Roman Catholic priesthood - and since Martin Luther himself denounced imposed celibacy, I cannot see the justice of the ELCA continuing to impose it solely upon those persons who happen to be gay or lesbian.

Celibacy, or committed relationships, must be at all times FREELY CHOSEN or we are asking for disaster. A monastic who freely chooses celibacy is unshakable in their resolve to be faithful to that vow. A non celibate person who freely chooses to live in a committed relationship with another, who also has made the exact same reciprocal choice, has the right to expect the full support from their friends, their family and most importantly, their church.

No one deserves to have their life time commitments to another person dishonored or degraded. To the extent they are dishonored or degraded - the true shame falls upon the persons and institutions who foster such attitudes. The high moral standard of the committed relationship is what is at stake here, not whether or not someone happens to be gay or lesbian.

The call committee of this conservative Norwegian Lutheran congregation told me that they liked what they heard. It is a matter of justice.

But, in this particular instance, the issue does not have to be faced head on. I’m not gay and I’m not celibate. I’m married and have been for nearly 33 years. So I and the congregation are in the exact same role as Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn.

Would the call committee make the same choice if I were gay and had been living with my partner for 33 years, had two adult children, a cat and a dog, a mortgage and a car payment? I can’t answer that with absolute certainty as YES or NO on their behalf.

I can say, based on our conversations that they would most certainly pray earnestly about it, seek the advice and counsel of their bishop, and only after that would they decide. It is my hope and prayer that they would say YES, and the only reason they would say NO was that they and I were not a good fit for me to be their pastor, not because of my sexual identity and committed relationship.

Since we are in a free country, let me present my thoughts about homosexuality. I’ll not talk about homosexuality from biblical point of view, because we are at a Seminary, and everybody knows the bible. At the same time, everybody considers him/herself as an expert in the Bible, and everybody adopts his/her own interpretation as the only valid way of reading the Bible. But as a person coming from another background and living in America for some years, let me introduce my reflections on western culture in general and American culture in particular.

First: what is the relationship between the church (or religion) and the culture? As we all know, religion and culture are inseparable. Throughout Christian history, the church has been confronted with the culture. The church was always leading the culture; and correcting it. In every culture, the church adopted some cultural principals, which agreed with the morality of Christian teachings, and refused others or tried to correct them. This is what makes Christianity timeless and not limited to any specific region.

What I see now is the opposite. I see that American culture is controlling and influencing the church. Instead of facing the culture, the church adopts and embraces the culture, and the church has become without identity or any specific characterizations.

This leads me to ask, what is the church? Or what is the difference between the church and the outside? Is the church a shelter for God’s people, or is it a sign to outsiders to see the kingdom of God, or is it the body of Christ going around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, or is it just a social gathering?

Second: how do we read the Bible? The principle “no interpretation without presuppositions” means that objective interpretation is a myth. But does this mean that everybody has the right to interpret the bible as he/she wishes? And why do we read the Bible? Do we read it as the source of our ethical principals or do we read it to justify our behavior? Do we read it as the source of our identity and as a resource for the dialogue between the church and the other in our diverse society?

As a Christian coming from another culture, I see that some communities put the cart in front of the horse. I mean that the cultural morality comes first and then they read the Bible to justify their behavior. Third: the role of sexuality in the culture. Sex like any other of God’s gifts is good when it is used with the right person at the right time; when it is misused, it is deadly. I see that the culture is driven be sexual desire.

The media, unfortunately dominated by sex, has successfully manipulated the culture. The media took sex away from the frame of marriage, and pre-marital sex became normal and acceptable. At the same time,
Joining the Discussion

We've been always here. You may choose not to see us, or pretend that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) people don't receive calls to serve your God, but we're here and called anyway. We're also in your families, the congregations you've belonged to and will serve, and your social groups. We don't all feel safe enough to tell you or even admit to it ourselves, but we are here.

I am a junior in the MDs. Master of Social Work program, and to the best of my individual and communal discernment process. I am called to ordained ministry. My self-understanding has grown and changed in the last year to include a similar call to live openly as a bisexual person. I've been learning about the individual and communal aspects of a GLBT identity while learning at seminary, but I have much still to learn. If you want to discuss the Biblical or theological considerations of homosexuality (a dehumanizing term that lets us think about a concept instead of people), we can talk about that, but this letter is about Christian ethics.

Underlying our thoughts and attitudes about the issues of ordination and blessing same-sex unions are fears that we have about GLBT people or ourselves. What are your fears? Are they based on your prejudices or knowledge of real GLBT people? For instance, many people fear that GLBT people who work with children will sexually abuse their kids. However, over 90% of child molesters are straight men.

I'm willing to listen at my fears. They come from the experiences of my friends and from news reports of what happens to GLBT people.

I'm afraid because teenagers and young adults feel so bad about their sexual attractions that they repress it and it turns into mental illness, or they can't express it and they kill themselves.

I'm afraid because people seeking love, community, and connection to God leave the ELCA (and often give up on God) because they feel rejected or even persecuted. I'm afraid because many of those who can't find love and acceptance in the church can't find it in their families, schools, jobs, or social organizations either, often influenced by religion.

I'm afraid because GLBT people often turn to dangerous sexual encounters seeking the love and acceptance they can find nowhere else.

I'm afraid because talented people with calls to ministry don't want to serve a church that ignores their calls and personhood, and yet there are many ELCA churches that have to make do without educated leaders. We also have gifts to share with the ELCA, something that's not often discussed. While we are diverse in our gifts and abilities, there are also particulars of the GLBT experience that are common to most of us. Working through challenges breeds empathy, as does regularly dealing with the suffering inflicted by the church and society.

Most of us have had to work through tough religious questions and find our own answers, which helps with helping others through such questioning. We've practiced our confidentiality in keeping secret our identities and those of our friends. We learn how to talk about taboo subjects like sex and strong emotions. Discerning our sexual orientations is spiritual process, which develops our spiritual skills. In a time when the ELCA and other churches are short on pastors, it makes sense to consider using these untapped gifts.

Robert Smith is correct -- we need to talk about this here and now. We do not have churchwide decisions to be made, and we have the power to influence those decisions. We need to talk about this as members of the seminary community together with GLBT people, both inside and outside of the ELCA. We need to talk about the Biblical and theological concerns, but we also need to talk about the experiences of GLBT people and the ethics of how we are/will be treating each other.

Jaimie Wilson, MDiv/MSW Junior

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parish ministry, a component of his biography that provides much of the background for his writings.

Bonhoeffer’s life was impacted by his experiences in America, which included his studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Much more widely known are his opposition to the Reich Church in Germany his involvement with various plots to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazi Gestapo on April 9, 1945, at the age of 39.

One of the characteristics of Bonhoeffer’s exegetical and theological work uncommon during his time was his familiarity with the Psalms. Matthews pointed out that in 1936, Bonhoeffer preached a sermon for his grandmother’s funeral based on Ps. 90.

Further evidence of what Matthews called “Bonhoeffer’s ongoing conversation with the Psalms” can be found in his personal Bible. There, next to Ps. 74—which reads, in part, “They set your sanctuary on fire, they desecrated the dwelling place of your name” (NRSV)—Bonhoeffer wrote “9 Nov. 1938.” Those familiar with German history will recognize that date as Kristallnacht, the “night of broken glass” characterized by the destruction of Jewish synagogues and stores and the first mass brutalizing of Jewish citizens.

This climate of strident anti-Semitism generally opposed Christian use of the Old Testament. In fact, Bonhoeffer’s continued dealings with the Hebrew Scriptures were dangerous, even without his later addition of overtly political acts.

Matthews short lecture focused primarily on Bonhoeffer’s small book on the Psalms, Prayerbook of the Bible, written in 1940. Matthews stated that while Bonhoeffer had an appreciation of disciplined, rigorous exegesis and historical scholarship, what he offered in that work was “a theological interpretation more in line with the needs of people living in Nazi Germany.”

Matthews noted that few doctors theologians in Bonhoeffer’s time saw much value in the Old Testament. “Bonhoeffer,” he stated, “was one of the few who appreciated the intrinsic value of the Hebrew Scriptures.” This appreciation was in direct opposition to the views of interpreters such as Adolf von Harnack and Ernst Sellin.

Many important studies of Bonhoeffer have explored his relationship with Karl Barth. As Matthews asserted, “Bonhoeffer was an unofficial but committed student of Barth.”

This relationship may help explain two aspects of Bonhoeffer’s thought. The first is what Matthews identified as the combination of Bonhoeffer’s “awareness of higher criticism” and his willingness to “voice pre-critical perspectives.” The second is Bonhoeffer’s utterly Christocentric approach to the Old Testament in general and the Psalms in particular.

According to Matthews, the Christocentric reading offered in Prayerbook of the Bible runs counter to most contemporary approaches to the Psalms. “Now, most people ask, ‘What do the Psalms have to say to me?’” he said.

“Don’t pick and choose from the Psalms,” Matthews urged the group, paraphrasing Bonhoeffer’s assertion that it is Christ who prays the Psalms with us. “The Psalms pull us outside of ourselves. They transcend time and space and take us where we have never been.”

To explain the fullness of this reality brought on by reading the Psalms, Matthews quoted from a letter Bonhoeffer wrote on July 21, 1944—the day he learned that the final attempt on Hitler’s life had failed.
Memoirs from a Jr+
A Response to Ben Ranstrom

By Michael J. Schmidt
M.Div. / MSTM Middler

Editor’s note: Be sure to look at other comments on Ranstrom’s article in the “Letters to the Editor” section.

Ben, I was quite intrigued by your memoirs, chapter 1. I was not expecting this article to address the “worship wars.” This happens to be a topic in which I would love to enter into a dialogue. I hope that we can rise above the personal remarks and talk about things in a healthy way. There are far more pressing concerns than opinions on the validity of Friday Night Fellowship.

Worship is a tricky subject. It is filled with myths, opinions, and passionate feelings. This is only magnified when one starts tossing around words such as contemporary, traditional, folk, or Gnostic. All this sort of talk does is fuel the emotions behind the opinions. I think you made some valid points in your article. We do not have a strong worship community here at Luther.

I think that the problem is in the pews and not in the leadership. We have a community that is trained to critique. Unless we can learn to let go of that, and enter into worship, we will always have a weak worship community. I have often left chapel and heard discussions about what a person would or would not have done differently. If that is the mentality, those people are not worshiping. I am not sure what it is, but I know what it is not. I think this issue needs to be addressed more deeply before we assume that Friday Night Fellowship, and the 700 Club, are taking souls from the worship community.

The topic of “contemporary” worship is often difficult to talk about. The label “contemporary” is confusing enough. I work at a church and my duties include helping plan and lead what some would call “contemporary” worship. This is a style of worship that has grown in acceptance, and is now practiced in many churches. In discussing it, people often make it sound as though worship is dependent on a medium. Whether this is the aesthetics, music, the preacher, air conditioning, or even the people present, we often confuse worship with other things. Worship simply is. Worship is not dependent on anything; that is the beauty of it. To make it otherwise defeats the whole purpose for it existing. I believe that we have things, such as the liturgy, in place to protect us from ourselves when it comes to worship.

You stated that this kind of worship takes the revival model, but that is not true on a universal basis. The revival model is a tripartite scheme comprising of music, preaching, and altar call. It is entirely possible to have “contemporary” worship that is highly liturgical. Therefore, we are left discussing music, and other peripheral aspects.

Projection screens can help to enhance the worship experience. However, experience is the key word. I fear that we sometimes use music in the same way. It is important to take time and realize that both can, and often are, used in ways that are focused on enhancing the experience. I think that it is very bold to assume that, in a community where there is a weak sense of worship, we should take such measures to bring in an experiential element. If we do not know how to worship now, how can we facilitate it in the future?

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Memoirs: Chap. II
What is the LPDR?

By Ben Ranstrom
MDiv Senior

Now that you know who I am, and that I have not only been making observations but also forming opinions while at seminary for the past nearly 5 years, I would like to share some more with you.

One this probably drives me crazier than anything else that I have encountered so far in seminary. It especially hits home because I too fell for the lie, and believed in the Lutheran Paranoid Delusion of Retribution (which will be known from here onward as the LPDR or affectionately as “lap door”).

Lap door, also known as Lutheran, is the phenomena where students and faculty are afraid of saying things which they believe to be true for fear of being exposed and punished for heresy or even worse, being black-balled from holding any meaningful pastoral call.

At any rate, the LPDR (or le pidoar in French*) follows that if you think strongly that gays should be ordained (or not) or that CCM is great (or not) and say so definitively, then your candidacy committee or bishop will somehow hear about it and you will find yourself spending the rest of your life pastoring sheep in Eastern Montana.

LPDR (El Poder in Spanish, which means, “the power”) also applies in cases where a petition is circulated and no one will sign it. Apparently, there are ELCA cardinals who are appointed to go over these petitions and put out hits on those willing to give their John Hancock.

There are several reasons why this is not the case and that we should enjoy our American free speech and boldly proclaim our objections to our heretical denomination domination. First of all, they don’t care. Second, has anyone ever heard of such a thing happening to anyone? Third, the ELCA is so desperate for pastors right now they would even take Episcopalians.

Finally, and most importantly, the real issue here is our Northern European passive-aggressive culture and our uncanny ability to be deceived by any lie of the devil. Our Christian faith is based on the fact that God was willing to tell us the truth about our selves. The LPDR (or Ol’ Peder if you’re Norwegian) is just a diversion by the devil to keep us from focusing on what we are really called to do here and in the world: telling the truth.

If you want to be afraid, don’t be afraid of the LPDR (not to be confused with the Lauderdale Police Department Reservists, but fear them too!), but be afraid of what will happen if you do not tell the truth. The church and your brethren, not upfilled by your godly rebukes will drift into full communion with the Association of Free Buddhist Temples or something terrible like that.

Or if you do not tell the truth, your friends will continue to believe the lies of the world and likely go to hell because you did not elect them with the truth. If you do not tell the truth then the seminary will persist in its milieu of intrigue and LPDR instead of openness, truth, respect, debate and forgiveness. (There is nothing to forgive if everyone is in denial and in secret.)

If you really want to be afraid think of what will happen to you

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if you follow Jesus and tell the truth. You will suffer. But at least it will be for the right reason. You will be suffering for the sake of the truth, for Jesus’ sake. There is freedom in that suffering because there is no false fear. You know that you are being hated because you are identifying with Christ not because of some other reason that people despise each other.

Therefore, I implore you, tell the truth. If you think that infants should be commended, say so. If you feel strongly about encouraging the speaking in tongues in chapel, make a case for it. If you are concerned about the drinking and drug use on campus, then say something about it. And please, make your case compelling, respectful and please avoid name-calling (you get the idea I hope). In other words, speak the truth and speak the truth in love and with conviction. Expect that others will criticize and that some may even be downright hostile, but please and most of all, just say what you need to say.

*I have no idea what le pidou means, but I hope it isn’t something dirty.

Psalms

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“By this-worldliness I mean living unre- servedly in life’s duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Geth- semene. That, I think, is faith; that is meta- nosia; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian.”

Given this understanding of faith, search- ing the Scriptures is no longer encapsulated by the task of picking Psalms and other pas- sages that meet our perceived needs. The question, as Matthews put it, is this: “Do you wish to be drawn into the world where God is?”

Do you dare accept the truth that the world does not revolve around you? That is the challenge inherent to Bonhoeffer’s reading of the Psalms.

John W. Matthews first became exposed to Bonhoeffer through a course on Bon- hoeffer’s writings taught by James Burtness, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology. Seven years after finishing his M.Div. in 1975, he completed a thesis for the M.Th. titled, “The ‘Arcani Disciplina’ in the Life of the Early Church and in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.”

What is Contemporary?

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The fact that words are often printed with- out the music is a common criticism of "contemporary" worship, and rightfully so. However, the bigger problem stems from the music itself. A great deal of the music cur- rently existing in the genre of “contempo- rary worship music” was originally intended for solo voice. In my opinion, the songs that were written for congregational singing are far too simple to be sung on a regular basis. The fact remains that when music is not printed, it is very difficult to facilitate true congregational singing. This common real- ity perpetuates the problem of the perfor- mance factor, which exists in this style of music in worship.

In closing, I would like to comment on the statements about theology in music. The reality exists that more people learn theology from singing than preaching or Bible Study. We have to be very careful in select- ing music for any worship service. I agree there is weak theology in many hymnals and songbooks. I also agree that we need some corporate laments in the "contemporary wor- ship music" genre. However, I believe the key word is corporate. In my mind, the prob- lem with the theology is that it is secularist. All of the attention is drawn to the indi- vidual and his/her relationship with God, self, or the neighbor. This is an epidemic in the “contemporary worship” community. This only adds to the “experience” factor. By adding screens to the process, we only magnify the individualistic nature of this style of worship. These are the issues we should be addressing. We, as a community, could write lament songs for worship. How- ever, if we continue to keep everything per- sonal, and individualistic, we take away any purpose for having a worship community.

I agree that we should consider the pos- sibility of “contemporary” worship here at Luther. The discussion that should take place must exist on a deeper level than screens, printed words, and theological preference. We need to look at worship, and not the peripherals.