

# FORUM LETTER

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## To follow Jesus Christ



Christian holiness is not (as people often imagine) a matter of denying something good. It is about growing up and grasping something even better. Made for spirituality, we wallow in introspection. Made for joy, we settle for pleasure. Made for justice, we clamor for vengeance. Made for relationship, we insist on our own way. Made for beauty, we are satisfied with sentiment. But new creation has already begun. The sun has begun to rise. Christians are called to leave behind, in the tomb of Jesus Christ, all that belongs to the brokenness and incompleteness of the present world. It is time, in the power of the Spirit, to take up our proper role, our fully human role, as agents, heralds, and stewards of the new day that is dawning. That, quite simply, is what it means to be Christian: to follow Jesus Christ into the new world, God's new world, which he has thrown open before us. — N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006)

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## Traveling in a strange land



An outsider's perspective might well prove valuable to any discussion, but an outsider's attitude likely will not. The editor asked me to write this piece on the proposed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America social statement on sexuality with the idea that a view from the outside might be more helpful than yet another argument from the inside. As a pastor in the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, I disagree with aspects of the ELCA statement, of course, but my purpose here is not to rehash familiar arguments. I hope that my admittedly severe criticism and debatably good humor will be received as one LCMS perspective offered on request, not attitude injected merely to be troublesome.

The first thing I noticed reading the 33-page document called *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* was just how much of an outsider I really am to this discussion. For me, exploring this ELCA document was less like visiting Canada than it was like visiting India. For all we have in common, the LCMS and ELCA have grown apart so fast and furiously that my expedition into this study did not cover the familiar-with-a-twist ground I expected; I found it almost entirely foreign territory (which is a shame).

## Conscience-bound nonsense

This sense of foreignness grows partly out of predictable differences between the LCMS and ELCA. Little things like the paper's clunky repetitions of "God" to avoid masculine pronouns or the use of Luther's *Other Small Catechism*

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(in which he apparently wrote, “. . . and each of us loves and honors his or her spouse”) struck me as strange, but I expected that. The sense of foreignness, though, goes deeper.

For example, this study is supremely confident about the authority and applicability of the social sciences – an authority about which many in the LCMS would remain steadfastly skeptical. Where I would expect discussion of chaste and decent behavior, this paper discusses “mature and healthy” behavior. While the paper addresses at great length the necessity of protecting the weakest and most vulnerable among us, it never addresses abortion.

The whole section about both sides of the homosexuality debate being “conscience-bound” struck me as a complete abdication of the point of the paper. An LCMS paper would simply dismiss as nonsense the idea that two mutually-exclusive positions could both be conscience-bound by the Word. The further I went in the paper, the more alien it seemed. Finally it got to the suggestion that the church needs a liturgy for divorce. “What God has joined together, I hereby put asunder in the name of . . .” Toto, I don’t think we’re in Missouri anymore.

The issue of “conscience-bound belief” will matter greatly to efforts within the ELCA to walk together after August, but the topic is so large and the differences between the ELCA and LCMS in this regard so profound that I will not try to cover it here. Rather, I want to focus on four issues: the elevation (bordering on idolatry) of trust, the sociology-driven point of view, the smokescreen of “complexity,” and the manifest lack of literary merit.

### Whatever this is . . .

Perhaps I should cover that last point first since it will help introduce the statement to those who haven’t read it. If beauty is truth and truth beauty, then surely it is not without doctrinal consequence that these 33 pages of prose are an aesthetic abomination. A student at Valparaiso University who turned this paper in for Christ College freshman seminar would receive it back the next day with a polite but firm, “Whatever this is, it will not do.” (Trust me on this. I know.)

The statement reads as though the committee had been assigned to write a 35-page paper but realized the night before it was due that they only had

about eight pages of material. Most of it is filler – long sentences that ought to be short, useless paragraphs inserted seemingly out of nowhere, background information that goes without saying (e.g., line 79: “As Lutherans, we believe that we are justified by grace though faith”), and all manner of irrelevance and redundancy. The stylistic obesity exacerbates the general incoherence of the paper.

### Word count

Here are a few examples of the prose to give the reader the flavor of the document. “It is therefore in the midst of daily life in the world that we are called to the vocational task of serving the neighbor.” (69) Called to the vocational task? To what other kind of task might one be called? And “in the midst of daily life” is clearly a phrase somebody on the committee fell in love with, because it reappears just as meaninglessly in several other places. “God has created human beings as part of the whole creation and with the intention that we live actively in the world.” (112) Glad we tackled the sloth issue. “Criminal statutes prohibiting abuse and molestation contribute to the protection of children and youth.” (803) You can almost hear them counting the words to see how much more they have to write.

Or this: “The deep interconnectedness of the body with the mind and spirit suggest [*sic*] the complexity of such situations.” (389) The deep interconnectedness of subjects and verbs suggests they really ought to agree. “Harming another emotionally, physically, or spiritually, including through the misuse or abuse of power, is a profound injury. It is also a betrayal and violation of the shelter and trust that are intended within the marriage relationship.” (546) Questions abound. How might one harm another without a misuse (or abuse) of power? Isn’t it just a grammatically awkward tautology to say that harming another is a profound injury? What does “intend shelter” (a conundrum sloppily hidden by the passive voice in the second sentence cited) really mean?

Or take heed of this one: “. . . we need to be honest about sin and the finite limitations of human beings.” (387) Finite limitations? Did anyone even proofread this? Here at *Forum Letter* we hear grumbling if we miss some grammatical nuance of a Latin phrase. Perhaps this study will give our complainers some much needed perspective.

### Camouflaging the problems

The bloated prose serves the obvious revisionist agenda of the writers. It offers a sort of soothing rhetorical mood lighting, giving the appearance of reasonableness to statements that wouldn't stand up to scrutiny in decent light. In the first line of the paper the dangerously crisp and accurate word "asked" gets replaced with the less edgy "invited to answer the question," and the puffy literary judgment that prefers the latter phrase dominates the whole document.

Once you've read dozens of sentences like "As human beings, we participate in creation's work that continues even now in fruitfulness and productivity" (184), glanced over the same irrelevant sentence in multiple contexts (e.g. 68 and 190), noticed that you've read this paragraph already (e.g. the paragraphs beginning at 66 and 273), become accustomed to such startling constructions as "cascading consequences result" (383) or "When this commandment is violated, many things are adulterated" (251), and once you've been soothed by the ubiquitous extra words, such as the *theological* in "The Lutheran theological understanding of God's salvation" (133), it becomes ever easier to glide right over highly disputable points without noticing. For example, "Promiscuity and sexual activity without a spirit of mutuality and commitment are sinful because of their destructive consequences for individuals, relationships, and the community." (252) Whence came this "spirit of mutuality" with the power to justify what would otherwise be sinful? It doesn't say. But the verbiage nearly camouflages such problems.

Or perhaps more significantly, take this paragraph:

This is why this church opposes non-monogamous, promiscuous, or casual sexual relationships of any kind. Indulging immediate desires for satisfaction, sexual or otherwise, is to 'gratify the desires of the flesh' (Galatians 5:16-19). Such transient encounters do not allow for trust in the relationship to create the context for trust in sexual intimacy. (1012)

*Non-monogamous* is totally out of place in that paragraph. Nothing in the paper explains why polygamy belongs with promiscuity and casual sex in the category of "transient encounters." Manifestly, it does

not; it is a completely different topic. A better category for things like polygamy would be "committed, loving, life-long, mutually-consenting, adult sexual relationships unsanctioned by Christianity." But that would ruin the revisionist mood. The answer? In a barrage of meaninglessness, simply define non-monogamous relationships as transient encounters and move on.

### In trust we trust

But enough. We could go on all day looking at similar examples of nonsense in this paper. As Merlin famously said in C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*, "Qui Verbum Dei contempserunt, eis auferetur etiam verbum hominis." ("They that have despised the word of God, from them shall the word of man also be taken.") On to other issues.

"In Trust We Trust" would not be an entirely unfair title for the statement. My nagging sense of foreignness became clear when I realized that everything was upside down. For the task force, trust is an end and not a means. Trust does not serve to build up our relationships with God and neighbor; those relationships exist to build up trust. Trust, not human sexuality, is the all-consuming subject of the statement. A Christian presentation on sexuality that says literally nothing about holiness proceeds from the get-go as though God had said, "Be trustworthy, because I, the LORD your God, am trustworthy."

In Section II, entitled "A distinctly Lutheran approach," after two paragraphs that should have been deleted, the paper both begins and effectively ends with these words: "Central to our vocation, in relation to human sexuality, is the building and protection of trust in relationships." (72) All the task force's conclusions are right there in that premise. The paper treats trust as not only central but exclusive of any other end or consideration. Trust=good. Period. "Fidelity to promises blesses all who depend on this trust within and beyond the marriage." (535) This illustrates trust in trust. Instead of depending on God, a spouse or a public vow, we are to depend on trust itself.

But trust is the act of willingly depending on something. You can't willingly depend on trust. The practical upshot is that in this statement, marriage is not something defined by God that requires trust to function in a God-pleasing way. Rather, trust is required and given by God, and marriage is one so-

cially constructed way of safeguarding it. It follows that we can define marriage or any other relationship however we want as long as we're safeguarding trust.

### Sociologists discussing Lutherans

The whole paper also adopts a curious point of view. The section on "A distinctively Lutheran approach" merely adds "As Lutherans, we believe that . . ." to the beginning of several sentences, even if the sentences say nothing distinctively Lutheran. It doesn't sound like Lutherans discussing sexuality; it sounds like sociologists discussing Lutherans. "Lutherans are not reluctant to live confidently within the difficult, complex, and ambiguous realities of daily life. Lutherans understand that active engagement in the world is integral to Christian identity. They [leave it to an ELCA task force to refer to Lutherans as "they"] are able to remain secure in Christ in the midst of confusions, lack of clarity, and struggle that God's calling entails." (105) And it goes on and on like that.

Given that this paper was by Lutherans and for Lutherans, why this affected detachment and objectivity about what Lutherans think and believe? Why not just say x instead of "As Lutherans, we believe that x"? Beyond the allure of sounding like scientists announcing their findings instead of task force members revealing their recommendations, the rhetorical advantage of this approach is that it allows assertions to take the form of observations. Assertions confront. They're dogmatic, and, even worse, debatable. Observations, on the other hand, are safe, non-confrontational, and – most conveniently – uncontestable.

And these assertions/observations are clearly aimed at anticipated conservative complaints after August. *Oh, you're not confident amidst these ambiguous realities? You're not secure amidst these confusions? That's okay. To each his, her, or its own. You're just not Lutheran, that's all. Not that there is anything wrong with that.* There seems to be sufficient insecurity afoot for the task force to feel it necessary to announce in every possible way that, absolutely, no matter what, we're Lutheran. But at the same time they want detached, authoritative objectivity about Lutheranism. No matter. If any group can deal with the creative tensions inherent in paradoxical goals amidst daily life, this task force can.

### Complexity indeed

Lastly, as might already be obvious, the task force seems to have a vested interest in advocating for complexity, ambiguity, and general messiness. To their credit, they practice what they preach. Complexity is everywhere in this paper. But that's OK because, "as Lutherans, we are the inheritors of a rich theological tradition that assists us in discerning how to live faithfully in a complex world." (58) Never mind that the footnote on page 7 notes: ". . . at one time some Lutheran theologians objected to the democratic developments in modern states on the grounds of the divine right of kings, defended the legitimacy of Hitler's regime, or rejected the ordination of women as contrary to nature." (Nice ecumenical touch, there, comparing rejection of women's ordination to opposing democracy and supporting Hitler. But I digress.) The task force seems awfully confident that their Lutheranism, unlike the Lutheranism typical of other Lutherans, will help them navigate this complex, rapidly changing world of human sexuality with faithfulness unscathed. "Stick with us and you'll be just fine," they seem to say to anyone who might be nervous about the project of redefining marriage and traditional morality. "Trust us."

### No answers offered

For all their confidence, though, they offer no concrete answers to any relevant questions. In all the situations and scenarios related to sexual behavior in which genuine guidance about right and wrong might be helpful, the task force only offers the general rule that trust is good and hurting people is bad. One notable (sort of) exception is, "All people who have contracted a sexually transmitted disease have an absolute responsibility to inform their sexual partners and all who are at risk." (1127) No qualifiers there. No acknowledgment of how hard or humiliating some people might find this harsh law. No reminder to reassure those who fail in this absolute responsibility that they are still God's forgiven children. No mention that such a duty applies "amidst the complexity of daily life in the world." None of that. On this burning question, anyone spreading STDs will encounter clear, unambiguous – nay, prophetic – condemnation. And the ELCA will not tolerate sexism or the international child-porn and sex-slave industries, either. No sir (or ma'am). On every-

thing else, though, this Ode to Complexity finds it tough to say a word.

“Therefore, this social statement seeks to assist this church in discerning what best serves the neighbor.” (329) Fair enough. OK, you caught me red-pen-handed in a moment of editorial mercy, perhaps inspired by the statement’s conclusion, entitled “The necessity of mercy, always.” No, the real sentence goes on “. . . in the complexity of human relationships and social needs in the midst of daily life.” Sigh.

In any event, the 2009 Churchwide Assembly ought seriously to consider handing this paper back with a polite but firm, “Try again.” Or not. In truth,

the statement is simply too poorly done to be easily fixed. It would need to be drastically shorter, clearer, and less obviously on one side of the central issue if it were to be of any use at all in assisting the church to discern anything about sexuality or about itself. Maybe just voting it down, then thanking and dissolving the task force is the best solution.

But again, that is an outsider’s take. And having explored this social statement in some detail as an outsider, I can only take my leave by saying, “There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home. . . .”

—by Peter Speckhard, associate editor

## The state of matrimony

by Brett Jenkins



Christian marriage is on the front theological burner these days, largely because of the pressure on both church and state to recognize (and, in the case of the church, to bless) so-called “gay marriage.” One thing that makes this such a thorny problem is that the “Christian concept” of marriage we are trying to defend is an already-eviscerated thing; in the minds of our laity (and many clergy) marriage is primarily a contractual affiliation whose purpose is to fulfill romantic longing and provide a context for sexual pleasure.

In other words, most people—based on their own experience and that of friends—can see how having sex randomly would create chaos. Equally, they recognize within themselves the desire to be valued for who they are, not merely the various ways they can give and receive the friction necessary for orgasm. They are therefore willing to embrace the need for a societal construct that provides a context for sex.

### Will you cohabit with me?

This is why the “sexual revolution” was nothing of the kind. Cohabitation replaced marriage so quickly as acceptable in the eyes of society because marriage had already come to be seen by vast numbers of Westerners as an institution whose purpose was adequately fulfilled by cohabitation. Put bluntly, if marriage is merely a social construct, one whose primary purpose is a chaos-reducing context

for our romantic and sexual self-expression, not only is cohabitation an acceptable substitute (witness all the language about “cheating” in pop music and movies when no marriage is present to be “cheated” against) but so is any similar construction that offers a chaos-reducing function to the gay community. Indeed, with such a view of marriage, in what way is a gay relationship fundamentally different from a heterosexual one?

One bit of popular culture from about a decade ago gave us a quick glimpse of a very different view of marriage, one from the liturgy of the Edwardian-era Anglican church. At the close of the 1996 BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice*, we see the protagonists—two couples properly chastened by experience and repentant of their sins of pride and prejudice—gathered before the altar of the Lord to have their unions consecrated. The priest solemnly intones:

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honourable estate, instituted by God in the time of man’s innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and His church . . .

The providential and eschatological purposes of marriage are clearly outlined liturgically. No

“individual vows” here because the estate into which the couple is called transcends not only the boundaries of their own emotions but their individual relationship. Far from being a societal construct of any type, marriage is “instituted by God” and is a lived rather than Scriptural typological lesson for our faith.

### A word of law

Next in the on-screen liturgy comes a word of law to the couple about what the profound implications are of God’s institution of marriage for us human beings and our salvation. Now, for the first time, as those purposes are outlined by the priest, the camera shifts away from the protagonists to other minor characters in the drama that has just unfolded before the viewer:

[Marriage] therefore is not by any to be enterprised lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy man’s carnal lusts and appetites, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God, duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained. First, it was ordained for the procreation of children. Secondly, as a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication.

As each of these soteriological provisions is recounted, the camera falls upon a couple who ignored this particular aspect of God’s provision, and now is suffering the natural law consequences of doing so.

As the priest’s admonition turns to a word of Gospel, the camera returns to the protagonists, who have “learned their lesson well” and who are entering into the married state for the correct reasons.

Thirdly, for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity, into which holy estate these persons present come now to be joined.

### I really, really love you

Part of the problem we are having making the case against the ecclesial recognition of homosexual partnerings is that only the last portion of this early liturgy remains sacrosanct in the minds of the vast majority of those who call themselves Christian – and here I would include many if not most of

those who style themselves “traditionalists.” Marriage was ordained by God “for the procreation of children”? Aren’t proscriptions against birth control a Roman Catholic thing, and don’t we all know that even Roman Catholics just pay lip service to it? Wouldn’t my marriage be better served by my spouse and I spending a few years “getting to know each other” and having fun?

Marriage is “a remedy against sin”? Well, certainly *random* sex has its negative consequences, but how can we call what two people who really, really love each other do together “sin”? Isn’t it in church that we sing, “love consecrates the humblest act”? On that note, since it is love (not God) that consecrates the humblest act, how can we include under the umbrella of the “adversity” alluded to in this liturgy “falling out of love” with one another? Surely, God does not expect people to remain in loveless marriages?

Of course, that final category is the dicey one, and the point at which the whole cloth started to unravel in the first place (though some have made a persuasive case that the technological development of “the pill” was the grease that accelerated the societal gears in this regard). What I mean is this: Back in the 1940s C. S. Lewis was lamenting the fact that even amongst mostly right-thinking Christians – people like my grandmother, who could no more have contemplated a “blessed” gay union than she could a cube in the fourth dimension – “they were in love” was an acceptable explanation (if not a completely sufficient excuse) for nearly any behavior. Bonnie and Clyde achieved semi-folk hero status in this way, despite the trail of blood their rampage left behind them.

### Voluntary affiliation

I do not mean to say Christians should indefinitely remain in a marriage that is beyond repair, but I would say that rather than counsel people to do the hard work of entering into spiritual mentorship and pastoral counseling when a marriage is in trouble, churches and pastors have found it expedient simply to “turn a blind eye” to couples’ pain, exercising neither a prophetic nor a pastoral office vis-à-vis divorce. I am quite sure there is a point beyond which any relationship is irreparable on this side of the grave, but in failing to exercise fully the ministry of the Word that both chastises and heals

us, the church has given tacit permission for the “contract of voluntary affiliation” view of marriage to become normative, even amongst confessing Christians.

It would seem to me that deciding whether a marriage has reached “the point of no return” is something a couple should be *required* to do in conversation with a pastor of the church just as we require them to enter into the estate of marriage in just such a way. In this regard I have to give credit to the Roman Catholic concept of annulment (though I can see how it could quickly devolve into a Tetzelian scheme for filling a diocese’s coffers).

As for how to reverse the tide, I think we need to be tackling this in confirmation instruction. Confirmation, according to most church constitutions, is when people take on “adult responsibility for their

faith,” the latter usually being construed as having a vote at the annual meeting. Although we would still typically be getting to the party a bit late if confirmation was done in seventh and eighth grade (some studies have found the average age of first exposure to internet pornography in the U.S. is 11), we would be ministering to people at a point of great pastoral need. As important in the long term, through the typology of Christ and His Church inherent in liturgies such as the one recounted above, we would be building a fundamentally sound Christology in the minds of our people, one that makes clear the eternal significance of the act of marriage.

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## Omnium gatherum



**Stunning** • Planned Parenthood of Indiana offered gift certificates for Christmas.

These could be used for any of PP’s goods and services, including abortions. If you ever felt a little queasy about the Festival of the Holy Innocents interrupting the celebration of Christmas, perhaps this helps explain it. Me, I’m still reeling from a bumper sticker I saw a while back: “Choice: What a beautiful right.”

**Vatican II** • It makes me very happy when people tell me of worthwhile events, even ask overtly for a plug, far enough in advance that our readers will actually learn about it before the fact. The Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology presents their annual ecumenical conference with the theme “Vatican II: Its Continuing Challenge to All Churches.” It takes place in Washington, DC, June 8 through 10, and features, among others, distinguished ELCA theologians George Lindbeck (who is the keynote speaker) and Michael Root. Sounds like a good continuing education opportunity to me. For more information, visit [www.e-ccet.org](http://www.e-ccet.org).

**Banff Commission** • It’s not worth debating as to who’s in the worst situation, but one could make a case that the societal pressures against orthodox Christianity are even worse in Canada than in the U.S. But there are impressive responses among our Ca-

nadian friends, as well. Under the leadership of Ascension Lutheran Church in Calgary (K. Glen Johnson, pastor), an international gathering of theologians met in Banff last year to discuss the critical issues facing the contemporary church. Now the papers from that meeting have been published by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau – including contributions by James Nestingen, Robert Benne, Patrick Henry Reardon and others. You can (and you should) order your copy through [www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org).

**Popular culture** • Waiting at an airport recently I picked up a special “Collector’s Edition” of *U. S. News & World Report*, entitled “Secrets of the Bible.” It was, as you might imagine, not worth what I paid for it, but I always like to see what popular culture is saying about things Christian. It wasn’t only about the Bible; one section was “Mysteries of Christianity,” with an article by Bart Ehrman, “Why Must We Suffer?” My thought was, “Why must we suffer yet another article by Bart Ehrman?” Then there was the article in a recent *Newsweek* about how Pope Benedict is pandering to conservative Catholics, written by that great and sympathetic authority on all things religious, Christopher Hitchens, author of *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. In that same issue, however, was a very thoughtful piece by Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary, on the controversy over gay marriage. Wheat with the chaff.

**ELCA Lutherans for Life** • Pro-life issues are not currently very popular among the more fashionable set in ELCA professional ranks. Indeed, an individual who is an ELCA rostered leader or otherwise a church professional may feel isolated in his or her pro-life concerns. Lutherans for Life is an active group, but its strong LCMS flavor sometimes makes it awkward for ELCA Lutherans to take part. There are, however, a good many pro-life sympathizers among the ranks of ELCA professionals, and Pr. Ron Yarnell, an ELCA pastor in Pleasant Hill, Iowa, thinks they may take comfort from knowing that there are others. To help bring such folks together, he has founded what he calls the Pro-Life Network of ELCA Rostered Leaders and Church Professionals (PLNELCARLCP – no, just kidding). For more information, e-mail him at roneyarnell@hotmail.com.

**Mea culpa** • In the previous issue, I identified Larry Bailey as a teacher at “Our Savior Lutheran High School,” but it turns out he really teaches at “Our Saviour Lutheran High School.” My spell-checker, being solidly American, prefers the former, but it and I stand corrected.

**FL in the archives** • Due to an interesting chain of events which we won’t detail here, the first ten years or so of *Forum Letter* (1972-1981) are now accessible on line at the ELCA archives web site. Those were interesting years in American Lutheranism, and if you’re the sort of person who likes to browse through old periodicals, you might find it kind of fun. We have been given to believe that some more

recent issues are going to find their way there soon (though not recent enough that you’ll decide you can cancel your current subscription). To access these things, just go to <http://archive.elca.org/archives/> and click on “Archives catalog.” Once at the catalog, use the search feature to find “Forum Letter.” You’ll find what you want in Box 6. (Be patient in downloading; the files are large.)

**Requiescat in pace** • I was saddened to learn of the death at age 87 of Robert E. A. Lee. He was “the man” in Lutheran television and film production for decades. He had a prominent part in the creation and production of such films as “Martin Luther” (the 1950’s version), “Question 7” (a lesser known but still very powerful film about Christian conscience in conflict with totalitarian government), “The Joy of Bach,” and perhaps most significantly, “A Time for Burning.” The latter film, a documentary which chronicles one Lutheran pastor’s efforts to deal with racial tension in his community, was nominated for an Academy Award in 1966, and in 2005 was selected by the Library of Congress for preservation in the United States National Film Registry as a film that is “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.” I have used it, now forty years after its production, in seminary classes in American church history, and it is always a highlight of the course. If you’ve never seen it, you should; it’s available from Netflix. Bob Lee was a poet, a musician, a gifted man in so many ways, and also a fine Christian layman and a dear family friend. He will be missed. —roj

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