



# TABLE TALK

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## THE PREJUDICE OF FAMILIARTY

In this, my last message as acting president to the seminary community through Table Talk, I want to share words written by Katarina Schuth, O.S.F., a member of the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools, as inspired by a homily by Daniel Harrington, S.J. The message is one I covet for all of us here at Gettysburg

Several weeks ago I attended a worship service where the Gospel for the day was Mark 6:1-6, on the rejection of Jesus by the people of his own town. Focusing on the attitude that was current when Jesus was ministering in his home territory of Galilee, the homilist called our attention to an attitude that he identified as "the prejudice of familiarity." The people of Nazareth knew Jesus and his family from many years of daily contact, and assumed that they knew all there was to know about him. Because they were so familiar with him, they could not accept him as teacher and prophet. I was affected by that homily and began thinking about ways in which my life and work and that of my colleagues might be tainted with this subtle prejudice.

How easy it is to conclude that people will never be more or different from the way we've always known them! We might find ourselves secretly (or not so secretly) asking "What do they know anyway?" or "Who does she think she is speaking out like that?" or "What gives him the notion that he has anything worthwhile to contribute?" These negative attitudes can operate on many levels, personal and professional, in our relationships with colleagues in our own institutions and in our interactions with those from other schools with whom we cooperate.

At home--faculty, administrator, student--these labels are typical and in many ways necessary to describe roles and functions that help us organize our tasks and fulfill our responsibilities. The problem is when "the prejudice of familiarity" sets in: faculty can begin to think of administrators as ungrateful and thoughtless, and students as naive and immature; administrators can see faculty as uncooperative and self-centered, and students as demanding and inconsiderate; and students can label faculty as archaic and egotistical, and administrators as preoccupied and out-of-touch. If these attitudes are not examined and challenged, one group expects little of the



others, and opportunity for creative response is foreclosed. Potential for conversion is not allowed.

Outside our own institutions there is plenty of room for the same callous attitudes to prevail. In our various cooperative ventures, we can take for granted the ecumenical efforts that were forged with great enthusiasm and hope. We can assume that "they" have little to offer us, or that "we" are giving more than we are getting from our relationship. We can expect others to bring to meetings the same old complaints, the same old interests, the same old stories.

Fortunately, this Easter we are reminded again that we have been redeemed. The grace of the season suggests that we take on a fresh perspective, observe with new vision, walk in new light. We have a chance to see what we have never seen before. Is it not a good time to reexamine our relationships within our schools and among them? We can be imaginative and thoughtful as we approach others in worship and work. Our schools can be "models for ministry" when we use the many opportunities before us to demonstrate right relationships. Our interaction might even cause others to say, "See how they love one another!"

Springtime is a good time to take a fresh look at our old attitudes and habits, and renew our commitment to appreciate and reverence each other.

J. Russell Hale  
Acting President

Dear Editors,

What are we, mince meat? In the February 28th issue of the Lutheran (p. 29), I and everybody else who is currently studying at ELCA seminaries in the U.S. were called "average." Now I don't believe that I am going to be the next Luther, but I do think I have some talents. To say that all the good ones are going into other fields is wrongheaded and ridiculous. Also I don't think it will do too much for recruiting. Yes, seminary enrollments are down but we don't need to attack the ones that are there now.

The seminary may not be turning out the quality of candidates in some people's opinion as they used to. To lay the responsibility only on the students is wrong. Lord knows our educational system in both public and parish education leaves much to be desired in some areas. I too was a victim of poor public school education, not an excuse just fact. But I have desire, compassion, some brains, and affirmations that this is indeed what the Lord has called me to do. My point is ordained ministry is both a head and a heart calling. The seminaries might claim "look at what we have to work with." I could say that maybe they need to do a better with what they have. Maybe the seminaries and the church to do a better job recruiting. It is a two-way street: The quality of the education along with the quality of the students.

Yes course it is sad when we see good people who do not go into ordained ministry for a number of reasons. But to be about slamming the ones who are seems silly to me. I also don't believe that all the good ones are going into other fields.

Our own future president, if he was quoted correctly (paragraphs 6, 8, and 9) to me is not winning any friends. I think it is good that the laity have gained more

influence in the church. After all is their and we are the priesthood of all believers. They need to take more ownership for this enterprise. If parishes are not getting highly educated leaders, again is not just the average students but the education and educators. Lastly, he is right everybody needs to encourage more qualified people to consider the ordained ministry. Maybe Mr. Beekman will work hard to correct these problems. If he does, I hope he succeeds.

As you can tell I was slighted by this small article in a big way. I may very well be just another average Joel entering the ministry. But to remind me of this does not help anything. I am about trying to use the gifts I have been given by God to the best that I am able to be. I pray every that God will help me to do God's will for my life and use the gifts I have been given. After all that is the best I can do. If that is just average, so be it.

--Joel Arvid Bensen

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This is my last chance and last three inches to say thank you one more time to all those who contributed to "Table Talk" this year.

My greatest concern after working with the paper for a year is that our community lacks dialogue on important issues. Is there no room for dissent in the seminary process? My greatest hope is that the format developed by the "Table Talk" staff this year aids the development of such dialogue in the future.

Farewell to all those moving to new ministries this summer. Keep running the good race, take a break if you need it, but keep running, always following Jesus. To those staying or returning to the "hill", I hope your efforts at building up the community are daring and satisfying.

- The Editor