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From the Editor

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From the Editor

What is the nature of our identity as “Lutheran colleges”? That is the question that is the focus of the pages of *Intersections*—this issue and those of the past. We know that identity is often (always?) formed in distinction from some “other.” Who the “other” is and how we relate to it changes over time, as does our understanding of our own identity. This issue comes together primarily around the issue of exploring the “other” in relation to our Lutheran colleges.

Three of the articles do this explicitly. Ron Witherup draws our attention to an anniversary that we don’t seem to have celebrated—the tenth anniversary of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” by Lutherans and Roman Catholics. His call was directed at his Roman Catholic brothers, but serves as a call to us also. If the central point of contention for the past five-hundred years between Catholics and Lutherans has been agreed upon, what does this have to say about our identity. If we are not “those folks who disagree with Rome about justification,” then who are we? This is particularly important for those of us who have significant populations of Roman Catholic students at our schools. Augustana has significantly more Catholic students than Lutheran.

In a piece that has been around for a while, Rosemary Radford Reuther helps us to see ourselves from the outside—a Catholic looking at us from inside the sauna at Holden Village. This gathering place is well known to many of us. For some, it exemplifies Lutheranism at its ecumenical best. What do we look like (or did we look like?) “huddled together on shelves... sweat pouring out like salvation by grace alone”? Sometimes we can see ourselves most clearly through the eyes of the “other.”

Ahmed Afzaal calls us in another direction. In today’s American culture, the “other” is often and easily defined as anyone identifying themselves as Muslim. Where and how do we find common ground with this “other” in our culture? Afzaal makes an interesting and important attempt to claim that the common ground should lead us back to a more fundamental

understanding of our own identity—as followers of Jesus. As a Muslim, he calls us to be more truly who we are. Only by doing that can we make the most of the opportunity to put our faith into practice.

Paul Dovre reminds us that it is not a new thing for Lutheran colleges to respond to the changes around them. He traces the changing nature of the understanding of the relationship between the college and the church, principally by tracing this relationship for six Midwestern colleges. Tellingly, he points to the growing diversity of our campuses and the attendant change in our self-understanding. This leads us, in his opinion, to one of our strengths as Lutheran colleges—“a commitment to engage in conversation with other faith traditions.” Afzaal has shown how this conversation can lead us to see and claim our identity even more clearly. Dovre shows how this is part of our very nature.

One place where our students often encounter the “other” is in the process of participating in service-learning on our campuses. Mark Radecke reminds us of the promise and the danger of such experiences. This paper (in a bit more C.S. Lewis form) was given at a Vocation of a Lutheran College conference held at Luther College. He (or rather Horatio Gumnut) reminds us that we have much to learn from those we encounter as the “other.”

David Ratke reminds us that our resources for understanding ourselves are not only from without, but that at times we could learn more from within our own tradition. He draws on the life and work of Wilhelm Löhe to better understand our work today.

In a culture which often sees the “other” as a foil to be attacked or brought into submission, the articles in this issue make a different claim—that the “other” is an essential partner in conversation who can help us to know who we are and help shape who we will become as Lutheran colleges and universities.

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