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A CALL FOR CREATIVE EDUCATION

Wendy J. McCredie

An absolute commitment to some faith statement can preclude investigation and can lead to mere dogmatism. An absolute commitment to freedom denies the commitments of the institution and the responsibility one assumes when one joins a community that affirms a shared mission.

We owe Bruce Reichenbach a debt of gratitude for so succinctly stating the radical extremes every Lutheran desiring to remain true to his/her tradition and community must guard against. These two absolutes, when they remain absolutes, stymie discussion and paralyze movement. When, however, informed faith and responsive individual freedom are in conversation with one another, the conditions for community building exist. These qualities of faith and freedom are the ones we should seek to foster in all members of our church-related college communities. Reichenbach's essay focuses on aspects of the hiring process at church-related colleges that might help us create or maintain mission-based communities of learning and faith.

Reichenbach's most important statements deal with the need to be intentional about hiring practices and with the need for ongoing development programs for faculty and staff. Each institution must decide, based on its own community and its relation to the church, what its hiring practices will be; however, as Reichenbach states, it is not in keeping with academic integrity, or with honesty, to hide the Lutheran character of the institution and the expectation for engagement with that character from a prospective employee. In order for such engagement to be as productive as possible, it may also be necessary to institutionalize "constructive and educational discussions about ways to integrate concerns about . . . faith values into various aspects of service to the college's community." These discussions should not be limited to particular constituencies of the college, but could function as means to foster discussion across sub-groups in the community. These discussions should help build community on campus. The ELCA's annual conference on "The Vocation of a Lutheran College" represents one way in which we currently foster such discussions. Individual colleges have instituted similar discussions on their campuses. It remains to be seen how effective we are in articulating for ourselves and others what we are all about. Can we reach others outside our community of believers or are we doomed to converse only with those whose conversational base resembles our own?

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It is perhaps a truism to say that Lutherans hide their light under a bushel. We remain embarrassed about "tooting our own horn." Such modesty, while admirable, does not serve us well. The ELCA-related colleges and universities have great gifts to share with the world. We are called to do so. We must, however, do a better job of educating not just our new hires, not just our students, not just our natural constituency, but all the public about the gifts the Lutheran education brings to the late twentieth century. Our mission should not be, therefore, to interrogate prospective employees about their own faith commitment and knowledge of our tradition, but to educate the world (and the church) more adequately about that tradition. Yes, we must expect all members of the community to be willing "to effectively and constructively raise the kinds of questions that both Christians and non-Christians should face:" about the institution, the church, education, and our actions in the world. We must also be willing to listen to such questions and to handle productively challenges to our own understandings.

Reichenbach states that "the entire college community should be knowledgeable committed to the college's mission." This statement contains four ideas without which colleges related to the church cannot describe themselves: community, knowledge, commitment, and mission. The questions resulting from our self descriptions go something like this: "How do we define community?" "What must we be knowledgeable about?" "What counts as commitment?" and, "How is our mission articulated and manifested every day?" Each institution must answer these questions for itself, which is perhaps one reason presentations, articles, and conference papers articulate only broad and ultimately dissatisfying generalities.

Reichenbach assumes that all members of the community should know what the mission of the college is and be able to either affirm it (if one is Christian) or to engage it productively (if one is non-Christian). Such an assumption means, first, that we must articulate our missions better and, second, that in our day-to-day business it is manifest. But, what about discussions about the mission? Can Christians also interrogate it? Can non-Christians also affirm that mission? In order for a community based in faith and learning to thrive such possibilities must not just exist, but be encouraged. If the question of mission is "off limits" for discussion, we cannot maintain the kind of free inquiry we value so deeply. If the mission is not off limits for discussion, then the community responsible for discussing it must be knowledgeable not only about the current situation of higher education, but also about its roots. It must be knowledgeable about the role of the university in the very genesis of the Lutheran church, the role of

disputation in the academic community, and the appeal of the free Renaissance human individual. Essentially, what it means is that our community must be interdisciplinary in spirit. We must look into other disciplines; we must not become perspectival in our approach, except insofar as perspectivalism serves as a heuristic measure, as a means to the end of understanding and respect.

The answer to our need for clearer definition is not to wall ourselves off from those who do not think like us, who do not belong to our conversational community. One of the strengths of the Lutheran tradition is its unwillingness to become separate from the world; we are in the world and are called to engage it. One of the ways in which the colleges have engaged the world is to respond positively and inclusively to cultural diversity. Such a response is in keeping with our mission to be communities of faith and learning. "The goal in hiring should be diversity as a means to further broaden the educational perspectives of students and provide opportunities for growth within the context of a particular community," let us add to the educational the *spiritual*, and let us hope we broaden the educational and spiritual perspectives of *all members* of the community, not just those of students.

One result of the colleges' varied responses to the culture is that we, along with other groups, struggle with our own identity politics. Intentional diversity within a community can, as it fosters discussion, provide a productive milieu in which to discover anew who and what we are and might become. Reichenbach suggests that "a college that emphasizes intentional diversity as part of its mission statement thereby provides grounds for hiring persons who can not only be creative teachers and articulate spokespersons for various disciplinary and social views, but represent and present non-Christian perspectives in ways that provide an opportunity for serious internal dialogue on the important issues that face the college." He is right. It is part of our double tradition grounded in faith and informed by the results of disputation within the academy that we should seek out and listen to people different from what we perceive ourselves to be. If we are to be true to our heritage, we must hear challenges both from within the walls of the academy and church and from the outside. Like all humans, we have difficult time with challenges that might result in change. We do however, have sustaining faith that should allow us to face challenges and take risks, not thoughtlessly, but with faith that by God's grace we participate well and for the good in God's creation.

Reichenbach makes some important statements, but we are left with little idea about precisely what mission, community, Christian values, knowledge, etc. are. "Christian faith and values should permeate every aspect of the college." Can we agree on what such values might be? Even among the different Protestant denominations we do not seem to have consensus

here. The merger of the predecessor church bodies into the ELCA was perhaps inspired by God, but it remains a human work. Within it we cannot agree on particular social, economic, sexual, ecclesiastical, liturgical, etc. values. Perhaps such agreement is fundamentally antithetical to the Lutheranness of our church. Would we say instead that critical *attention* to gospel and law, to God's all-encompassing love and our limited human roles, should be manifest in all our work?

If we cannot agree on what might constitute Christian values or how one appropriately manifests Christian faith, how can we determine precisely a "critical mass" of people manifesting such qualities? Must all members of this "critical mass" be Christians? Reichenbach seems to suggest so when he describes the "challenge of constructing a community staffed by a critical mass of persons who by their own Christian faith, hard work, creativity, courage, sensitivity and joy work with the mercy and providence of God to change lives." But his arguments for diversity within the community might suggest that it is not so much whether one is a Christian, or even a Lutheran, but whether one is informed about that tradition and willing and able to engage it well in order to build community that should be the primary criterion for inclusion in that "critical mass." Perhaps, as I suggested earlier, these qualities can only be defined within community and not in a part destined for multiple communities.

Is it true that "commitment to effectively implementing the mission statement means more than that those hired will be sympathetic working in an environment that makes such a Christian statement." It is also important that those who come to work at colleges such as ours should choose to teach and work at such an institution." However, I do not believe all of us, even all of us committed to the kind of educational and spiritual environment the ELCA - related colleges can provide, did, in fact *choose* to teach or work at these institutions because of their church-relatedness. The church-relatedness may even have been a red flag to those members of our communities who had little or no knowledge about Lutheran education; for others an institution's Lutheranness may have provided a perceived level of comfort, a bit of the known along with the greater unknowns associated with joining a new community; many more of us, perhaps, came to these institutions assuming that the specific religious aspects of the institution were (and should be) taken care of in areas outside our own academic disciplines. I hope that we were/are all wrong in some degree. It is only after working in such an institution for considerable time and educating oneself about the mission of that institution that one comes to appreciate both the ways in which we fall short of our goals and the ways in which those goals matter enormously.

In short, a college that espouses a mission that includes both being based on the Christian faith and diversity or inclusiveness, faces a situation fraught with tension. The task

is to turn the tension into creative education...

Reichenbach's phrase "creative education" attempts to encapsulate the dialectical tension inherent in our mission of faith and learning in a diverse world. This tension is perhaps analogous to the tension between the two kingdoms of Lutheran

theology. As members of communities related to the Lutheran church, we have, therefore, a faith perspective that both motivates and facilitates participation in that tension. The tension is never resolved; it does not go away. Creative education inculcates the ability to live in this tension between and with God's love and our rules.

HITTING A MOVING TARGET

Harry Jebsen

Anytime we wish to define our institutions and their missions and hiring practices we have to remember that we are dealing with several moving targets, not just the role of the faculty. We frequently memorialize a past that may or may not have existed. Those of us who are graduates of sister institutions may have a relatively fixed memory of that institution and its nuances. We fix in our minds that institution's persons and ambiance as the "role model" by which we measure other Lutheran institutions as well as our current institutions. During my years as Dean and Provost, the Vice President of Resource Management and I were both Wartburg grads and I know that if Capital people heard, "when I was at Wartburg," one more time they would have had involuntary seizures.

We must be very careful in drawing such analogies across time. The last time I visited Wartburg was to have my youngest son visit. While much was familiar and recognizable, it wasn't "my" Wartburg. Roy's place was gone, the Pub House where I met my wife was gone. Change is the norm at all of our institutions.

Perhaps in contrast to our own personal fixed views are the phrases of current mission statements which are vague and open to a broad range of personal interpretations. One university states clearly that they are "related to the ELCA," and "encourages an environment of respect for all people and diverse beliefs." With perhaps a clearer focus, TLU states that "the College provides an education in the arts and sciences which is given perspective by the Christian faith." My own institution writes that it "promotes thinking, discussion, and debate that enhances ethical, moral and religious values essential to leadership in society and the church..." Each of these statements are certainly open to interpretation by the

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individual who reads them. They were written to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

This issue may be even more vital today than ever. This summer delegates to the ELCA convention in Philadelphia consider formalizing relationships with fellow Protestants from Presbyterian, Reformed, and Episcopal traditions. Some fear the blurring of distinctions. Most of our institutions would not be solvent if we depended upon a preponderance of Lutheran students and Lutheran faculty members. We have adapted to a less exclusive environment and become part of a larger society's educational program.

Most of our colleges were founded by immigrants to insulate their descendants of German or Scandinavian backgrounds from the "contamination" of the English-based nineteenth century American social system. Immigrants sought, with an enthusiastic energy, to preserve the culture of the homeland, to provide clergy and teachers for the now Scandinavian-American or German-America congregations, to maintain a bilingualism that allowed the second generation to appreciate both the mores of the homeland as well as that of the United States. Much like the Turnervereins and Saengerbunds, the Lutheran college was an oasis in which the moral, ethical, and theological norms from Europe could be taught to the offspring.

Our colleges were founded as purposeful institutions with a specific mission. And that was accomplished unapologetically, with pride and enthusiasm. One of our colleges proudly proclaimed that, "Having truth, we pass it on." While not seen in the mid-nineteenth century as a boastful statement, the assumption of truth as something we own certainly could not be the focal point of modern Lutheran higher education in the context of the ELCA. Our institutions today are proud of change as one of the hallmarks of our existence. Goal four at Capital University states that it "must change and grow in order to better serve changing student needs."

As one reads Professor Reichenbach's article, the motto referred to above, and the goal statement from Capital, one realizes how