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Diversity, Integrity, and Lutheran Colleges

Florence Amamoto

When Arne Selbyg asked me to speak at this conference, he told me, "The theme for this year's conference is diversity . . .," at which point I thought, "Oh, so that's why I've been called." But that thought was stopped short by his concluding phrase: "and integrity." The first definition of integrity that comes to mind for me is "uprightness, adherence to a code of values," but I realized Arne was using integrity in its other meaning: "soundness, completeness, unity"—as became even clearer when the letter announcing the conference came out and the title had been refined to "Integrity and Fragmentation: Can the Lutheran Center Hold?" Diversity and integrity were here being opposed whereas I had been thinking of diversity and the integrity of church-related colleges, especially Lutheran church-related colleges, as being intimately connected as will become clear later in this talk.

First, a caveat: Maybe this is my literature background coming out, but I cannot help but be struck by how different this issue looks when you are inside or outside the tradition, which also made me think about how different this issue looks when you are at a college with 60% Lutherans or at a college with 4% or 20% Lutherans. I also realize that I am a sort of "inside outsider" at Gustavus and at these gatherings. I have long been interested in religion, and having grown up a sansei (third generation Japanese-American) Buddhist in California, I have spent many years thinking about the similarities between Buddhism and Christianity. One of my most vivid grammar school memories is anxiously worrying about whether I should say "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and wondering what would happen to me if I did—or didn't. In addition, my form of Buddhism, Jodo Shin Shu Buddhism, is often called the most "Protestant" of all the branches of Buddhism and, in fact, as I've come to realize, it is very similar to

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Lutheranism in its theology. Given this background, I am probably more comfortable at daily chapel than our Christian African-American students. Although I have talked to a number of people, Lutheran and non-Lutheran, about these issues over the years, I am well aware that it is my background and my experience at Gustavus Adolphus College that shape my perspective. Still I hope you will find something you can use in these remarks on diversity and integrity.

Actually, Gustavus has not had to think much about "integrity," if you use integrity to mean holding on to its Lutheran identity. The student body is still close to 60% Lutheran, and situated in rural southern Minnesota, it is still surrounded by a concentration of its historical constituency: Scandinavian, especially Swedish, Lutherans. Every year, one of my colleagues wiles away the time at graduation counting the numbers of Andersons, Johnsons, and Petersons in the program. Three years ago, perhaps inspired by Brian Johnson becoming our co-chaplain and Craig Johnson becoming our Director of Church Relations, to begin the year, we had almost a full month of Johnson faculty and staff giving homilies at daily chapel.

The chapel itself is a big, beautiful building in the center of campus. In addition, campus activity stops from 10 to 10:30 for daily chapel. Chapel attendance regularly reaches 250 while 400 bulletins are printed for Wednesday's sung morning praise service—and we often run out. The chapel is also the site of many important college functions—convocations, major speakers, Christmas in Christ Chapel, May Day, Honors Day, and Baccalaureate.

The chaplains at Gustavus have made and promise to continue to make Christ Chapel a vibrant, visible, and welcoming place. Richard Elvee, the chaplain of Gustavus for more than 35 years, has been active in making Christ Chapel an inclusive, ecumenical

space. He credits the legendary president of Gustavus, Edgar Carlson, with telling him that the chapel program should be modeled on the Swedish folk church tradition, that is, it should be the church of the community; Elvee made it so. His wide-ranging intellectual curiosity about cutting-edge ideas has also made him the ideal organizer and spokesperson for our prestigious Nobel Conference and a visible symbol of the interpenetration of the religious and intellectual life on campus. Brian Johnson, an '81 Gustavus grad, who returned to campus three years ago as Elvee's co-chaplain, continues this tradition. A gifted liturgist and musician, he also has a talent for outreach and ministry to the whole college community, but especially to the students. Brian too is interested in ecumenical issues. He spent time teaching in China, participated in an ecumenical dialogue at St. John's Ecumenical Institute, and is currently helping to edit the collection of personal statements which came out of that three year effort. He has written on apologies for the Holocaust by church bodies and has taught a First-term Seminar on Biblical stories and their contemporary reflections, in his own way, visibly perpetuating the intersection of the academic and religious. The chapel program is in good hands.

Now, you may be having Gustavus-envy, but there is a downside, I think, to all of this good news. And the downside is this: because of our majority population and strong chapel program, I'm not sure Gustavus has had to think seriously about the question Tom Christenson used to start his keynote address at last year's Vocations Conference on Christian freedom: What is Lutheran about Lutheran higher education? I do not want to minimize the value of having a majority of Lutheran students nor do I want to minimize the importance of having a vibrant, welcoming, and attractive chapel program that makes visible the religious element of the college, thus influencing the ethos and atmosphere of the place. But I agree with Tom that a Lutheran college is on shaky ground if these two elements are the only or essential ways they define their Lutheranness. So if numbers and chapel programs do not make a Lutheran college Lutheran, what does? Christenson argued:

"What makes our institutions Lutheran is a vision of the educational task itself that is informed by a tradition of theological themes or principles as well as embodied in practice We are Lutheran by means of our educational vision, a theologically informed orientation that manifests itself in what we do as we learn and teach together and our understanding of why we do it [But] this common theological orientation may not be so obvious to us, who are part of this tradition." (4) I think it is precisely the fact that theological foundation is not visible, perhaps not conscious, that people focus on things like percentage of Lutheran students or faculty or the strength or visibility of the chapel program, and why people worry about Lutheran colleges losing their Lutheranness. And well they might. I think this lack of consciousness may be the real threat to Lutheran institutions losing their Lutheranness as they become more diverse. However, like Tom, I would argue that Lutheranism is lucky, that, in fact, diversity and integrity do go together in Lutheran higher education, perhaps in a way unmatched by other church-related colleges. The rest of this talk will be an exploration of the way they do.

Another way to approach the idea of integrity is to ask what our colleges need to do, teach, or embody, to provide a truly excellent education for our students? There are many elements we could point to, including spiritual and moral development, but I think exposure to diversity must also be one of them.

Social psychologists have found that diversity benefits all students, not just minorities. As psychologist Patricia Gurin notes, college is often the student's "first sustained exposure to an environment other than their home communities"(15). Students learn more and think in deeper, more complex ways in a diverse educational environment because they are confronted by different life experiences, values, and frameworks which not only prompts learning about another's point of view but also increases awareness of their own and critical thinking about both. This is especially important because as Sylvia Hurtado, associate professor of Education at Michigan noted,

segregation in public schools is increasing, and this segregated education means students enter college “with distinct perspectives about the world, hold stereotypical views of different groups, and lack experience interacting with diverse peers”(27). Longitudinal studies have found that encountering diversity in college not only leads to increased cultural awareness, openness to different perspectives and more complex thinking, but is also linked to increased long-term social and civic development (Hurtado 27-28).

As Martha Nussbaum argues in her brilliant *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, the purpose of a liberal education is to encourage students to think critically about their lives and society so they can free themselves from traditions to live more thoughtful, conscious, and moral lives.

As Nussbaum points out, authorities and elders since the time of Socrates have always feared that this learning would lead to rejection of one’s tradition (18). But I have found that this is not true. A Jewish colleague noted in a homily last semester that she had never been more Jewish than since she’s come to Gustavus. In fact, she went to Israel this summer. (And, as chance would have it, I also had the opportunity to go to Japan for the first time this summer. With cheap fares to Norway as well, this has been a real “Roots” summer at Gustavus.) I have never been more Buddhist. Being at Gustavus has prompted me to become more knowledgeable and articulate about my own religion. Ironically, going to daily chapel allows me to practice my religion--with its lack of emphasis on liturgical practice and its emphasis on gratitude, faith, and mindfulness--in a regular way which I had not done since leaving for college. Discussions with Christian friends have deepened my knowledge of their religion, my own religion, and their many similarities, and they have prompted some thinking about the significance of some of the differences. I know they have done the same for my Christian friends. The “mature Christian understanding” and commitment many of our colleges articulate as a goal in their mission statements are more likely to come, I think, not

only in an environment where religious matters are discussed and taken seriously, but also where different systems can prompt broader, deeper, and more complex thought about faith, God, and the purpose of life.

If we want to advertise that we prepare students to take their place in our society and the world, again integrity dictates we pay attention to diversity. Economics and communications systems as well as politics--perhaps even more than politics--have made us very much part of an interconnected global village. But “the global marketplace isn’t just ‘over there.’ It’s right here,” notes Anthony P. Carnevale, in “Diversity in Higher Education Why Corporate American Cares.” He goes on to note that “by 2025, the additional 72 million members of the US population will include 32 million Latinos, 12 million African-Americans, and 7 million Asians” (1).

Carnevale argues that corporate America cares because diversity is good for business. Diversity is especially important for companies that do business overseas. Obviously some minorities are multilingual and many understand their heritage culture. Less obviously, Carnevale notes, “Employees with different values, cultures, and religious beliefs are more likely to appreciate the need to tailor products or sales approaches to foreign customers” (6). Even less obviously but more importantly, Carnevale points to research that shows that “organizations employing diverse work groups tend to be more innovative and flexible by nature,” that diversity “stimulated creativity among all the members [of a workteam] by forcing reexamination of basic assumptions and encouraging more open and frank dialogue,” and “prevented companies from sliding into ‘group think’ and from unwittingly offending potential customers or overlooking market opportunities” (6).

Carnevale ends his article by arguing: “So improving diversity on campus and in the workforce is not just a “nice” social and political goal. It is a necessity—for both social and economic reasons—that must be conveyed to elected leaders and the general public. In the twenty-first century,

the United States is well positioned to continue as the world's preeminent economy, with diversity giving us a unique advantage. To maintain our competitive edge, corporate America needs employees that are increasingly creative and agile. To meet the need, we require a pool of diverse workers with college educations to match" (6).

That last line arises from his observation that although minority enrollment in colleges has increased, it is still not proportionate to the population. America is still not the land of equal opportunity. Although Carnevale focuses on the business world, I agree that improving diversity on campus is a necessity for social as well as economic reasons. W.E. B. DuBois argued at the beginning of the twentieth century that "the problem of the color line would be the problem of the twentieth century." As the deaths of Matthew Shepherd and Isaiah Shoels make clear, discrimination still mars our landscape. Carnevale notes, like Gurin, that "students that are taught in schools with diverse faculties and with diverse students bodies become better critical thinkers, better problem solvers, better communicators, and better team players" (6), qualities he sees as making them more employable and valuable workers. But I would argue that these qualities also potentially make them better citizens, better contributors to a democracy, especially when those qualities are married to what I call an ethical imagination.

This points to what I think makes church-related colleges especially important for the twenty-first century. Many of the problems facing this country and the world—race relations, institutional racism, the environment, the widening gap between haves and have nots both here and abroad—are ethical or moral problems. Even science and technology which we have relied on for so long to provide solutions now raise ethical questions of their own. Where is a student more likely to be encouraged to see and think about the ethnical dimensions of their personal, career, and civic choices than at a church-related college?

And among all the major Christian denominations, Lutheranism, I think, is particularly well placed not

only to embrace the cultural pluralism that is so characteristic of our nation and important for our future, but also to put its support of pluralism in a theological frame. As Richard Hughes explains in his introduction to *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-first Century*:

"Lutherans insist that the Christian lives simultaneously and inevitably in two kingdoms—the kingdom of this world (nature) and the kingdom of God (grace). . . . Lutheranism acknowledges the world as it is—deformed and estranged from God—is nonetheless God's creation and therefore worthy of study and understanding on its own terms. . . . The task of the Christian scholar . . . is not to impose on the world—or on the material he or she studies—a distinctly "Christian worldview." Rather, the Christian scholar's task is to study the world as it is and then to bring that world into dialogue with the Christian vision of redemption and grace. This theological vision is the great strength of Lutheran higher education for it enables Lutherans to take religious and cultural pluralism with a seriousness that often escapes other Christian traditions" (7).

The reason Luther's paradox of the two kingdoms is so supportive of pluralism (and the life of the mind), Hughes explains in more detail in "Our Place in Church-related Higher Education in the United States," an expanded version of a talk he gave at the 1997 Vocations conference (and elsewhere including Gustavus), is not only that we live in both kingdoms simultaneously but God lives in both. To quote Hughes, "In Luther's vision, God employs the finite dimensions of the natural world as vehicles which convey his grace to human beings. As Luther often affirmed *finitum capax infiniti* or, the finite is the bearer of the infinite" (8). But this fosters genuine conversation because of Luther's insistence on human finitude. The understanding that one's knowledge is always fragmentary and incomplete leads to the impossibility of Lutherans absolutizing their perspectives and the need for constant critical rethinking of their own ideas—and to be in dialogue with others. As Richard Solberg in his article in Hughes' *Models* notes:

"All people, both believers and unbelievers, are members of God's secular kingdom and serve as His

agents in ordering and governing it. . . . In the fulfillment of their roles as citizens and servants, entrepreneurs, professionals, or peasants, [Christians] are free to join hands with anyone, Christian or not, who desires to improve and enrich the human condition. . . . [Education's] purpose, grounded in the Creed's first article, is to foster the capacity to learn, to enhance and enrich people's lives, and to equip students to make human society what God intends it to be" (76).

Academic freedom, intellectual inquiry into all areas, the welcoming of all in this task of studying the world and improving the human condition—all of this has a base in Lutheran theology. In fact, Hughes ends this article asserting his view that Lutheran colleges and universities occupy a special niche in the world of Christian higher education in the United States because they can claim:

"To offer a first class education where the life of the mind is nurtured, where all questions are taken seriously, where critical thinking is encouraged, and where a diversity of cultures are valued, and that these virtues all grow from deep and profound commitments to the Christian faith." (9)

However, as both Hughes and Solberg point out, none of this is automatic. Hughes points out the twin pitfalls of rigid codification of Lutheran thought as a result of accentuating Lutheran interpretations of the kingdom of God, on one hand, and rampant relativism and secularism, as a result of accentuating the world at the expense of the Kingdom of God, on the other ("Our Place" 9). Solberg asserts that "the most serious critique one could level at Lutheran higher education in America is that it has failed to fulfill the educational challenges implicit in its own theology," resulting in "quietism with respect to social action" and limitations on free inquiry and critical judgment (80).

At Gustavus the combination of free critical intellectual inquiry, religious welcome, and service and its foundation in Lutheranism has been reinforced by the leadership of key Swedish Lutheran figures in our history like Eric Norelius, our founder; Edgar Carlson, legendary president;

and Herbert Chilstrom, trustee as well as first bishop of the then newly formed ELCA. Learning more about Lutheranism in general and Gustavus's history in particular has helped me feel at home there, to identify and love it in ever deepening and informed ways as I could see that my belief in ideals of critical inquiry, diversity, and service were supported both by Lutheranism and Gustavus's heritage, at least as I understood them. And it has allowed me to be more articulate about what Gustavus is and its value to prospective students and their parents to be able to talk about what makes Gustavus distinctive, including its Lutheranism.

But the learning process has been piecemeal, a result of a bit of luck and my own interest. I was a representative to the first of these ELCA Vocations conferences. I can't tell you how relieved I was to learn more about Lutheran theology and to see how much it supported my own beliefs, values, and educational goals. This Conference has been very effective in generating a group of faculty and administrators, Lutheran and non-Lutheran, who are better informed and excited about working on church-relatedness on campus. My learning about Gustavus's Swedish Lutheran heritage had been even more fragmentary, which is one reason I asked Brian Johnson to make a presentation on it as part of the series I set up as a participant in the Rhodes Regional Consultation on the Future of Church-related Colleges this past year. Not surprisingly, it was the best attended session, drawing twice as many students, faculty, and administrators as the other two presentations. This phenomenon was repeated throughout the Rhodes Consultation. People want to know what makes their institution what it is.

I am trying to get Religion professor Garrett Paul who gave a wonderful presentation on Lutheran concepts and higher education and Brian Johnson to write up their Rhodes talks because I feel it is important for new and prospective faculty to get this information—especially because if there is anywhere where diversity is growing quickly at all of our institutions, I suspect it is in the faculty. Certainly at Gustavus, THIS is the place where Gustavus is in danger of losing its "Lutheranness," at least in

numbers. I suspect that most of the new faculty who are not Lutheran come, as I did, with little knowledge of Lutheranism. They are more likely to be familiar with the Puritans if they remember their American history, or Catholicism or Fundamentalism if they watch the news. So religious means restrictive. No wonder they are a little apprehensive about teaching at a church-related college and don't think of going to chapel. I believe that an introduction to Lutheranism and the history of the college and what that means for the life and values of the college can do much to allay new faculty's fears and integrate them into the college community.

This education and integration is important not just for the new faculty but for the college. Although the regular "chapel crowd" at Gustavus includes a group of Lutheran faculty, administration, and staff, half the core comes from other religious traditions—Catholic, Episcopalian, Moravian--and this Buddhist. The homilists come from an even wider range. This diversity keeps the chapel program vital and stimulating; it contributes to the on-going pursuit of truth and spiritual development on campus. The real enemy is less diversity than indifference. Perhaps church-related colleges, as was suggested at the Rhodes Regional Consultation's final meeting, need to be less apologetic about their church-relatedness in hiring. I don't think this necessarily means hiring Lutherans, but I do think it is important for retaining the institution's Lutheranness to have a core of people who are interested in the college's church-relatedness and who can articulate their understanding of its Lutheran heritage.

The Lutheran understanding of the importance of conversation in intellectual and spiritual development not only supports the mission of our colleges but breaks down the problem I had been having with a hospitality model which was prominently mentioned at the Rhodes Consultation's final meeting. Perhaps I should not have been surprised that it was Mark Schwehn who defined hospitality in a way that emphasized the equality and importance of both host and guest, suggesting that it is possible at times for host and

guest to exchange places and that certainly host and guest are equally apt to learn from each other. That equality of host and guest, the blurring of the dichotomy, the belief that both host and guest have something important to say and that conversation and sharing of views is central are particularly Lutheran and not necessarily shared by other Christian denominations, as I know from experience.

This understanding of Lutheran education and the role of diversity in it and its articulation may be particularly important for those colleges where Lutheran students and faculty are a minority and where the chapel program has been weakened--because the danger of fragmentation and the loss of Lutheran identity is very real in such places. This understanding can place diversity in a context that can build community and create more vital, dynamic educational and spiritual development opportunities by actively encouraging dialogue. However, this understanding of Lutheranism, Lutheran education, and educational excellence also challenges schools like Gustavus, where the percentage of minorities is still low, to make diversity a higher priority.

Can a Lutheran center hold at our colleges as the faculty, student body, and society become increasingly diverse? I hope so—it is certainly something worth working for. Increased diversity does create the risk of fragmentation and loss of Lutheran identity. I think it is important to hold on to that Lutheran identity because too often loss of that identity leads to a loss of the spiritual and moral realm which is part of the "value added" of church-related schools. But the Lutheran theology (in addition to educational excellence) that calls us to value diversity also gives us the theological basis to keep diversity and identity in creative tension—and conversation. I have always felt that comparison was an especially good teaching tool. It not only helps us expand our horizons but also sharpens and deepens our understanding of ourselves by making visible what was invisible through familiarity. I realize that this issue of diversity and identity looks different depending on the historical and theological background of the college and the personal

background of the person viewing. But whatever the situation, the issue of identity and diversity raises the possibility for campus discussions that can revitalize, sharpen, and deepen the vision of our identities and missions as Lutheran colleges.

It is my belief that Lutheran colleges have a special contribution to make to the twenty-first century, producing citizens and leaders with the critical understanding of the complexities and paradoxes of life, with a well developed spiritual and moral dimension, and with an appreciation of the limits of any individual's understanding and the value of different points of view. It is often said that schools reflect the society around them. I think the tension created by diversity and church-relatedness in Lutheran colleges has the potential to stimulate the conversations that will help mold the leaders society will need to create a better tomorrow.

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