

2000

## Full Issue, Number 10, Fall 2000

The Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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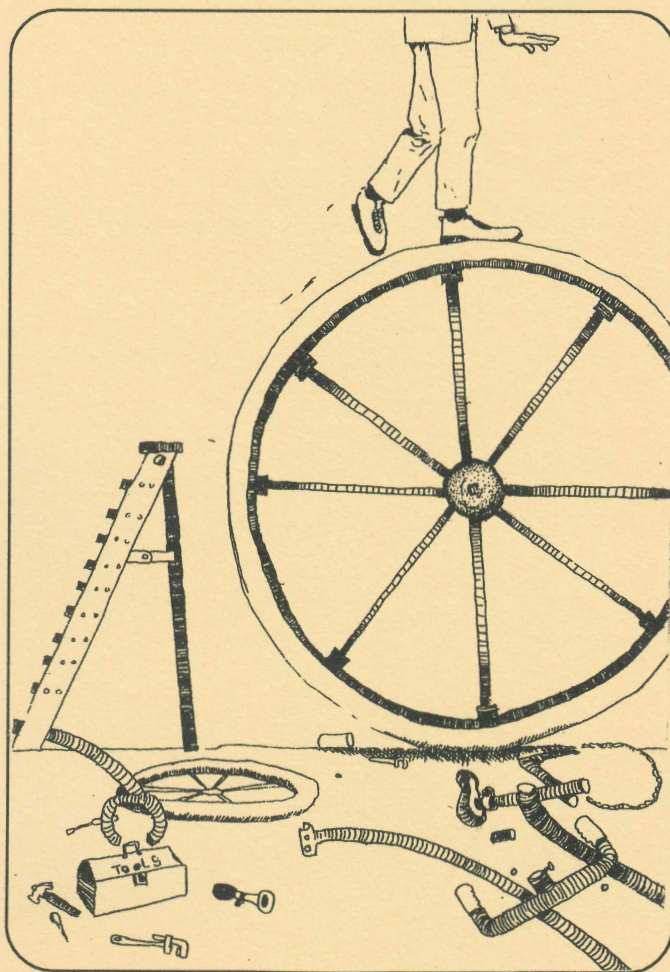
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# INTERSECTIONS

faith + life + learning

NUMBER TEN

FALL 2000



For clarity, Ed found the most essential part of his bicycle,  
he then discarded the superfluous pieces.

## SPECIAL ISSUE

*Papers from the St. Olaf College 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference:*

**“CALLED TO SERVE:**

**FAITH, UNDERSTANDING, ACTION”**

# INTERSECTIONS

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**INTERSECTIONS**

**FALL 2000**

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*Sponsored by the*



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## PURPOSE STATEMENT

This publication is by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-eight colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is published by the Division for Higher Education and Schools of the ELCA. The publication presently has its home at Capital University, Columbus, Ohio which has generously offered leadership, physical and financial support as an institutional sponsor for the inauguration of the publication.

The ELCA has frequently sponsored conferences for faculty and administrators which have addressed the church - college/university partnership. Recently the ELCA has sponsored an annual Vocation of the Lutheran College conference. The primary purpose of INTERSECTIONS is to enhance and continue such dialogue. It will do so by:

- \* Lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities
- \* Encouraging thoughtful dialogue about the partnership of colleges and universities with the church
- \* Offering a forum for concerns and interests of faculty at the intersection of faith, learning and teaching
- \* Raising for debate issues about institutional missions, goals, objectives and learning priorities
- \* Encouraging critical and productive discussion on our campuses of issues focal to the life of the church
- \* Serving as a bulletin board for communications among institutions and faculties
- \* Publishing papers presented at conferences sponsored by the ELCA and its institutions
- \* Raising the level of awareness among faculty about the Lutheran heritage and connectedness of their institutions, realizing a sense of being part of a larger family with common interests and concerns.

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## FROM THE PUBLISHER

From its inception, this journal has been published in order to contribute to an ongoing discussion of why there is such a thing as Lutheran higher education. Many people wonder why the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America still sponsors colleges and universities, and many wonder why colleges and universities still choose to maintain a relationship with a church.

Some of the answers to these questions have been presented at the annual conferences called "The Vocation of a Lutheran College," and then those presentations have been given wider circulation by being published in Intersections.

But the discussion does not take place only at those conferences. Last year St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, celebrated its 125 years of existence by publishing a book, Called to Serve, edited by Pamela Schwandt, available from St. Olaf's college bookstore, with many excellent articles about these questions. The college also hosted several other events, and I had the pleasure to attend a conference where the Lutheran identity of the college and the relationship between the college and the church was discussed. Those presentations led to some interesting discussions, and at the end of the conference some other participants suggested to me that the presentations deserved wider circulation. I agreed, and so it was decided to publish an issue of Intersections that was not based on the "Vocation" conferences, but dealt with the same theme as the "Vocation" conferences.

Both the conference and the book take the specific history of St. Olaf as the point of departure. But in both,

many arguments are made that would apply to any Lutheran college, and the theology and educational perspectives behind the presentations have general relevance. Therefore, we hope that you will find that the articles in this issue help clarify what it is about our church related colleges that make them excellent institutions for the higher education of students of any faith, and excellent examples of how the church should respond to the needs of the people.

September, 2000

Arne Selbyg

Director for Colleges and Universities

ELCA-DHES

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## FROM THE EDITOR

At several points in the addresses that make up this issue the authors refer to the St. Olaf 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Volume, *Called to Serve*, edited by Pamela Schwandt and co-edited by Gary de Krey and L. DeAne Lagerquist. This volume contains some fine essays on the Lutheran character of higher education and the vocation of the Lutheran Church College. Two essays in particular make important contributions to this ongoing discussion: "What Does It Mean To be Lutheran?" by Walter Sundberg and "The Lutheran Tradition and the Liberal Arts College" by Darrell Jodock. But what interested me most about the St. Olaf volume were the numerous biographies of persons who found their vocation at St. Olaf. For many people the story and the reality of St. Olaf is the story of Lars Boe, president; F. Melius Christiansen, choir director; Ole Rolvaag, novelist and teacher of literature; Emil Ellingson, chemist; Agnes Larson, historian; John Berntsen, superintendent of buildings and grounds; Arne Flaten, artist; Howard & Edna Hong, Kierkegaard scholars; etc. As one reads these short biographies it becomes clear to what degree the life of an institution like St. Olaf is the committed life of the people who work there. In this economics shaped age, in an age when ever more services are "outsourced", we are tempted to think like a personnel director, and to suppose that an employee is merely a place holder, the person who is hired to do X for Y amount of time for Z dollars. The stories of these people show clearly what a thoroughly inadequate view that is. What a different place St. Olaf would have been without the choral tradition of a Christiansen, without the sculpture and person of Arne Flaten, without the scholarly discipline of Agnes Larson and the Hongs, without the inspired leadership of Lars Boe, without the long-term care of John Berntsen, and so on and on. It is truly unimaginable. We are inclined to say, "but that's what St Olaf is."

So *Called to Serve* is aptly named. This book is a study in the meaning of vocation for it details concretely the ways in which persons and community and purpose and needs and gifts are co-creators and co-realizers of each other. Kristine Carlson, St. Olaf alumna and now Lutheran pastor in Minneapolis, concludes her short contribution to the volume with this reflection:

*We Lutherans assert that 'the finite is capable of bearing the infinite.' . . . this is important for our understanding of vocation: that who we are, what we do in the ordinary, daily events of our lives, conveys Christ. This is the perspective on vocation I began to see at St. Olaf.*

Reading this volume we begin to see it too.

Tom Christenson, Capital University

## FAITH, UNDERSTANDING, AND ACTION

*Originally read as part of a presentation including the St. Olaf Cantorei and Paul Manz, organist*

Paul J. Dovre

### FAITH

It is the celebration of the one-hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Saint Olaf College which provides the context for this concert and the conference which will follow beginning tomorrow.

So in this setting of contemporary music, full of energy, emotion, and precision--let me draw you back to the words and music of an earlier time, the mid-1800's, in a story told by the late Lutheran educator and theologian T.F. Gullixson. It is the story of an immigrant woman leaving Wisconsin with husband and family for the western frontier. The first day out with team and wagon they crossed the Mississippi River and made evening camp on the Minnesota side. Sitting by the campfire, Gullixson wrote, "her gaze did not waver while night came swiftly on. She held the contour of the eastward bluffs, for they were symbolic of all that had been" of former homes in Norway and Wisconsin, homes with the certainty of family, pastor, church, school, physician, and neighbor. And "sleep would not come; she must look out; she must look east." Finally sleep came and soon after the dawn, the haze lifted off the river. "Soon the eastward bluffs" stood clearly in view again, but now her back was toward the east--she was looking west and awaited only the road ahead. In her heart was the song "Where God Doth Lead Me I Will Go." The west wind carried promise--new land, new opportunity, new friends...and it also carried uncertainty. There would be no home, no school, no pastor, no doctor. But there was a song in her heart and so she turned her face to the west wind.

Not many years later five immigrants would gather at the parsonage in Holden: B.J. Muus the pastor, Harold Thorson the business man, and O.K. Finseth, K.P. Haugen, and O.O. Osmondson--all area farmers. They turned their faces to the west wind as they laid plans to begin a school amidst uncertainty about funds, facilities, and faculty. And, born amidst churchly disagreement, there were ecclesiastical

uncertainties as well. But there was a song in their hearts, a song of faith and hope. Founder B.J. Muus provided the lyrics, "May the triune God in whose name this cornerstone is laid, be the foundation of this school to all eternity."

Tonight and tomorrow and all the tomorrows to come, it is our turn to face the west wind and find our song. The west wind favors us in many ways--favors us with prosperity and friends and reputation beyond what Muus and his fellow founders would have ever imagined. And likewise the west wind carries challenge as the prosperity of the day does not extend to all whom we have been called to serve; the pragmatic paradigm of the day calls into question our commitment to matters of the spirit, and the morality of the day challenges our call to love the neighbor, to be reconciled with the enemy, and to care for the homeless.

But we press on in the face of the west wind, for like the pioneer woman at the river's edge, we sing a song of faith. Tonight that text is supplied by a 13<sup>th</sup> century monk Venatius Honorius Fortunatas and the music by John Ferguson:

Faithful cross, true sign of triumph,  
Be for all the noblest tree;  
None in foliage, none in blossom,  
None in fruit your equal be;  
Symbol of the world's redemption,  
For your burden makes us free.

Yes, and with Paul Manz we will "rise and shine," for Christ has entered and in Him, we are centered--so we too turn our face to the west wind.

### UNDERSTANDING

From the beginning Christians have sought to demonstrate the place of education in the life of the believer. Jesus set the example and his disciples followed his lead. Perhaps the best-known axiom on the subject was rendered by the

11<sup>th</sup> century monk and bishop St. Anselm when he said, "Faith seeks understanding." The founders of the Lutheran church, Martin and Phillip, were educators before they were reformers, they simply could not imagine a church without literacy and understanding. And so, when the pioneers who established St. Olaf went about their founding work, it might be described as a congenital condition. And the composers of your college song had it just right when they described St. Olaf as "founded in faith to render light."

And we might add that, then as now, the college was to render light about both faith and life, for God gave us the gift of curiosity--curiosity about God and creation. Who is this God who expected of us so much, who despaired over us so much and who, ultimately, loved us so much? And we seek light about questions of life, of the earthly kingdom, which is to say questions of vocation. How then shall we live? We believe, confessionally and therefore congenitally again, that all of these things--faith and life, the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms--all of these things hold together.

With such gifts, such commitments, we face the west winds which often produce whirlwinds of conflict over truth and proof, over science and faith, over art and life, over impulse and virtue. While scientific determinism is under siege, pragmatism still has an inordinate power in shaping the agenda of the church, the academy and the culture. And post-modernism has created its own cyclone of confusion.

The challenge of the west wind for St. Olaf college is to live out a conviction expressed in the words of the late Harold H. Ditmanson who wrote "The Christian faith has a universal relevance to every aspect of human life. It is interested in science, history, literature, psychology, art, and politics. It has something to say about all of them, though it does not claim a technical authority within these spheres. It is concerned with every aspect of human relationship, personal and public. It is concerned above all with the interior life of each individual, the deepest level of one's being." These are words of understanding which follow naturally for those who believe that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

And a further challenge of the west wind is to do all of this well. Piety is no excuse for incompetence. The founders of St. Olaf and their progeny understood that. Muus put it this way, "I emphasized when I worked for the school that Christianity is honest. It avoids all humbug." And when Lars Boe started building the great faculty of the '30's and '40's, he knew what quality required. So did his protégé E.O. Ellingsen when he built a chemistry department that would rank among the top 25 in the nation in the production of chemistry majors. John Berntsen embodied the standard in his care for the grounds and facilities and historian Agnes Larson gave voice to the prerequisite of academic excellence when she said, "The only thing that can possibly make St. Olaf what it should be is an able faculty." And when F. Melius Christiansen was asked how the choir produced such fine music, he replied, "We work! And again we work."

And, make no mistake, it wasn't easy. Lars Boe, in a beleaguered moment, said, "Just why the Lord has given us such large opportunities and so little money I cannot understand. I will be very interested in finding out in the hereafter."

In the face of the west wind, our quest for understanding is an expression of vocation, occasioned by faith. In the composition of John Rutter the musicians voice our petition, "Open my eyes and I shall see! Incline my heart and I shall desire: order my steps and I shall walk in the ways of Thy commandments." And in our antiphon, with Brokering we celebrate the vocation of this Lutheran college: "Earth and stars, classrooms and labs, loud-sounding wisdom--sing to the Lord a New Song."

## **ACTION**

Consistent with the fortissimo which we have just expressed, it may be observed that as creatures of the Midwest, this college and most of us have always been interested in where the action is. The woman at the river's edge a century and a half ago, the founders in the Holden parsonage, the early faculty and their students too--the west wind stirred them to action. "Fram, Fram, Christmenn, Crossmenn", "Forward, Forward, Men (People) of Christ, Men (People) of (the) Cross." As Lars Boe put it, "St Olaf is not a college; it's a crusade." Faith was the motive,

understanding was the modus, and action was the consequence. And not just action anywhere--action in church and culture, in the professions and in politics, in commerce and community. For faith, we know, is not a hothouse enterprise. Christ began by freeing people from their oppression, then taught them through parable and dialectic, and subsequently challenged them to take up their beds, to sell their goods, to care for the poor, to preach to the nations...to save the world!

The founders who established the college exemplified this formula. In the face of their west wind, many had dealt with the issue of slavery in church debates and political campaigns. In addition to building a school in Northfield, they built fine communities throughout the region. They were stalwarts in the political, cultural, and religious life of the day. They made some action calls with which we and they might disagree in hindsight, but they did not shrink from their calling and it was noble work.

And in our time the west wind calls us to action. Still twenty percent of the children in this country live in poverty, still in this new century the United States leads the nations of the world in homicides among children, still in some nations of this world homicidal violence toward women is condoned, still in this century religious wars rage on, still in this century a whole generation of one continent is being decimated by AIDS. And in closer places, still practices of civility are in short supply, virtue is defined individually, the environment is a tertiary issue and the gluttony of our consumption surpasses understanding.

And in the face of these ill winds, where is the faith? Where is the hope? Where is the action? It is the faith of things which are secure but unseen. It is the hope of the resurrection come alive in us. It is the action of redeemed people called to a new life. So, in the text of Ralph Vaughan Williams we bid God:

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:  
Such a Joy, as none can move:  
Such a Love, as none can part:  
Such a Heart, as joys in love."

And after the crescendo of Vaughan Williams comes the reality of John Tavener, reminding us that we live under the sign of Adam, where our best action and intention may be subverted, where death and despair are partners in dialectic with life and hope. So in many respects, the text and music of Tavener are a dirge. This music, written on the occasion of the death of a 16-year-old girl to cancer, brings us face to face with the realities of a relentless and biting west wind. But then, at last, at the open grave, God bids us, "Come and enjoy the crown I have prepared for you," and the dialectic is reconciled in both text and harmony. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

So in the new millenium as in the old, all in this company are called--one by one and two by two--to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves.

Called to teach and heal and help.  
Called to invent and encourage and endure.  
Called to pray and proclaim and praise.  
Called to mediate and meditate and multiply.  
Called to renew, to restore, to reconcile.

In the face of the west wind we stand with Muus and Thorson, with the farmers Finseth, Haugen, and Osmondson, and with their considerable progeny. We sing different music in these days, but we are stirred by the same song of faith. So Fram, Fram, Christmenn, Crossmenn!  
Forward, Forward, People of Christ, People of the Cross!

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*Paul J. Dovre is the former president of Concordia College.*



## TOWARD AN ADEQUATE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Robert Benne

My connection with St. Olaf College has been long and varied. It goes back to the early fifties when I heard the St. Olaf choir sing at the Municipal Auditorium of Fremont, Nebraska. As a junior high student I was mesmerized by the quality of the choral music and the magnetic dignity of the director, who may have been the great F. Melius himself. Later on my major professor at Midland College was a graduate of St. Olaf. He taught us to love the immigrant literature of the Great Plains, including books written by another St. Olaf figure, O.E. Rolvaag. When I embarked on seminary teaching at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, many of my colleagues and students were St. Olaf graduates. Just recently I was honored to have been asked to write a chapter in the *Called to Serve* volume, which was produced as a companion piece to this conference. Finally, I am including St. Olaf among the six schools I have studied in preparation for a volume entitled *Quality With Soul—Thriving Ventures in Christian Higher Education*, which should appear in early 2001 under the Eerdmans label. In that book I have attempted to discern why and how six schools—St. Olaf, Valparaiso, Notre Dame, Baylor, Wheaton and Calvin—have maintained a rich relation to their religious heritages. The fact that I included St. Olaf in that list is a signal of my continuing admiration for St. Olaf as a genuinely Christian college.

I.

What have I learned in my study of those six schools? Why have they maintained a close connection with their sponsoring Christian heritage? How have they done so? Those are questions to which I set out to find the answers.

I have far too much material to share with you in this brief space.

Let me give you the bottom line: These colleges maintained their “soul”—their lively connection with their sponsoring heritage—because a sufficient number of persons on their boards, administrations, faculties and

student bodies had confidence that the Christian account of life and reality was relevant—even paradigmatic—for all aspects of the college’s life...both curricular and extra-curricular.

It is a fairly rare occurrence that such confidence reigned among those key groups. The large majority of church-related colleges and universities were secularized by the vast and various forces that we cannot afford to get into now. At bottom, other accounts of life and reality overcame the Christian account and provided the organizing rationale for the educational process.

This is not to say that those who presided over the secularization process were faithless or unbelieving people. Far from it...many were well-intentioned, sincere Christians who thought they were doing the right thing. While they had faith in the Christian account for their private lives, they did not have confidence in its capacity to shape higher education on the institutional level.

Before I go any further, it is important to spell out what I mean by “the Christian account of life and reality.” I am indebted in my thinking on this subject to Paul Griffiths, who wrote a very interesting book called *Religious Reading*, where he outlines what he means by a religious account.

A religious account, he thinks, is dependent on a living religious tradition if it is to be persuasive. This religious account is believed and lived by the persons who participate in that living tradition. As a belief system it is articulated in a vision and as an ethos is expressed in a way of life.

A religious account—a Christian account—is envisioned and lived as comprehensive, unsurpassable and central.

It is comprehensive because its vision encompasses all of reality. It provides the umbrella of meaning under which

all facets of life are gathered, valued and interpreted. It does not leave the understanding of our life and world to completely secular sources, though it certainly draws on those sources. While Christianity's comprehensive account does not claim to have all the relevant data and knowledge about life in this world, it does claim to offer a paradigm in which that data and knowledge are organized, interpreted and critiqued. In other words, if Christianity is taken seriously, its comprehensive account must be given intellectual and lifestyle relevance in the central educational tasks of the college. The Christian account is not relegated to the "gaps" in the life of a college, much as some Christians operate in their personal lives with a "god of the gaps," not a God of all life and reality.

A serious Christian account is unsurpassable—it cannot be replaced by another account without giving up the Christian account itself. It is claimed to be a vehicle of ultimate truth, though its adherents ought to be aware that they are humanly fallible in their reception of that truth. Its core vision and ethos persist through time; there is a "there" there with which to contend in the educational enterprise.

Finally, the Christian account is central—it addresses the essential and inescapable questions of life and reality. It conveys a Christian view of the origin and destiny of the world, of nature and history, of human nature and its predicament, of human salvation and of our conduct of life. From a more existential viewpoint, it addresses the key questions: Who are we? Where did we come from? Who or what threw us into existence? How can we be saved? What can we believe? What ought we do? For what can we hope?

While I have cast my interpretation of the Christian account in dominantly intellectual terms for the purposes of this paper, it is certainly more than that. Any living religious tradition possesses an account that is lived, not just believed. It is embodied in a way of life, an ethos. Elements in that ethos include the practices of worship, music, celebrations of holidays, Sabbaths and seasons, hospitality, justice and fairness, the marking of rites of passage, particular habits of mind and heart, and morally-ordered ways of living together. Christian life together certainly involves service to others. For the Lutheran

tradition the idea of vocation is central—all humans are called by God to exercise their gifts in service to others through specific kinds of roles.

It is obvious that a specific religious vision and ethos—a religious account—cannot be publicly relevant in a college without persons who carry them. If a religious tradition is to make its vision and ethos effective in the school it sponsors, it needs a critical mass of person who bear the DNA of that tradition. It needs them as board members, administrative leaders, faculty, staff, and students. It is no doubt possible to have those who are not participants in the tradition to know it, respect and even further it, but it seems unlikely that they can embody it in a way that committed participants can. It is also perhaps possible in principle to have a generically Christian college without relation to a specific Christian tradition, but in reality such a phenomenon is as rare as truffles in the dessert. We come to the Christian faith through particular traditions; schools maintain their Christian identities through voluntary accountability to specific Christian traditions even though they may be capaciously ecumenical.

My focus here is on the vision dimension of the Christian account, particularly as that is articulated in a theology of Christian education. Sometimes—perhaps often, for rhetorical purposes—a vision of Christian higher education is not expressed in the technical categories of theology, but nevertheless it needs at some time to be articulated in those categories if there is to be an effective conception of the relation of faith to secular learning. Further, this theological articulation of the vision is employed to define a college's identity and mission, to gather a theology department in which its members gladly carry that vision on behalf of the school, to help construct a coherent liberal arts curriculum, to elaborate a justification of the school's ethos, and very importantly, to provide a Christian intellectual tradition with which the whole school in its many departments can engage.

Now that I have made clear what I mean by a Christian account, I want to work toward an adequate theology of Christian higher education. One way to do that is to identify theologies that are not adequate to the task.

## II. INADEQUATE THEOLOGIES OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

### 1. Pietism

If one ploughs through the copious literature on the secularization of church-related higher education, some religious orientations show up time and time again as culprits. One of these is often called “pietism,” which means an orientation to the Christian faith that focuses on internal states—emotions, affections or virtues—which have little to do with the center of the educational enterprise, the mind. Now I think pietists have gotten somewhat of a bad rap from Burtchaell and others. Pietists do have a belief structure. They want it to be simple, orthodox and unadorned with a lot of intellectual accretion. They want integrity, simplicity and as much agreement on basics as one can reach. All those are admirable traits. But pietism does have the liability of a-intellectualism, if not anti-intellectualism. Perhaps the former is more common. Pietists often do not see that the Christian faith makes intellectual claims...truth claims.

Serious pietists have not let their colleges secularize completely though. Rather, they often fasten on the extra-curricular facets of college life and create a “Christian atmosphere” for the faculty and students. I have said “serious pietists” because most appeals to Christian atmosphere by church-related colleges are bogus. They are desperate appeals to some vague reality that is only a figleaf to cover their nakedness. But some efforts are very serious. Wheaton and Baylor, for example, for many years followed what has been called a “two-spheres” or “add-on” or “value-added” approach. Curricula were pretty much like any secular school—except for the Bible and religion courses—but extensive efforts were made to bathe the students in a Christian ethos, many times with great success.

But the problem with this is that huge areas of human life—the intellect and the relevant knowledge of daily life in the world—are left untouched by Christian truth claims. At its worst this leads to a bifurcated life for the students; Christian people cannot live as whole people in the world. Moreover, this “add-on” approach can dissolve quickly, first by the departure of a critical mass of religious people

from the colleges, but more likely by a secularization that overtakes extra-curricular life as pervasively as it took over intellectual life. If the crucial areas of curricular life can best be shaped by secular understandings, why not extra-curricular? Serious pietists may have answers to that question but less serious ones capitulate rather easily.

### 2. Liberal Theology

By “liberal theology” I do not mean those sorts of theology that take modern thought forms seriously; every decent theology must do that. Rather, by liberal theology I mean those that accommodate so eagerly and completely to modern thought forms that they give up the substantive content of the Christian theological account. I went to a Divinity School that at one time was dominated by this sort of theological liberalism. In the case I am talking about, Christian substance was surrendered in order to fit Whiteheadian process philosophy, or in other cases, to fit the “empirical” philosophy of Henry Nelson Weiman. If the incarnation or sin or judgment or salvation through Christ didn’t fit with the preferred philosophical categories, well, too bad for the Christian account.

The irony of a goodly share of such liberal theology is that it set out to revise classic Christianity enough for it to become credible and persuasive to a new generation but wound up allowing the new generation’s criteria of credibility to supplant Christianity in favor of a rival view of the world. The essence of such liberal theology is its tendency to transform biblical, doctrinal and ecclesial sources of the Christian faith into a religious and moral philosophy decisively shaped by the leading philosophies of the day. Usually such theology is overwhelmingly concerned with progressive moral imperatives—enlightened social ethics—so that it tends to reduce religion to morality.

Liberal Christians in the leading church-related universities wanted to adapt to an age of rationality, science, and practical progress fueled by American ethical idealism. Most of them over time crossed the line in which American/Enlightenment idealism replaced the Christian vision as the organizing vision of life. When that took place, it was no longer necessary to rehearse the Christian account or to staff a university with confessing Christians.

Those who actually believed in the Christian account either left or became very quiet.

The elite Protestant colleges followed this trajectory rapidly; the others more slowly. But in them the theological accounts became thinner and thinner until they were left with vague talk of “values.” After a time in which American idealism has been in eclipse, such idealism is making a come-back in the movement to enshrine “service” as the centerpiece of extra-curricular student formation. Since there is nothing left to integrate a curriculum, service becomes a unifying, up-building theme beyond mere competence to justify and dress up these schools’ ethical tone. Interestingly, though, many secularized church-related colleges cannot find the gumption to justify their service efforts in Christian terms, which would be embarrassingly narrow to them. So they again rely on more generic American civic ideals.

Other forms of liberal theology have come to the fore, however. In their continuing efforts to remain relevant, mainstream Protestant colleges often lurch heavily toward recent intellectual and social currents, or what has come to be known as left-wing political correctness. Following mainstream Protestant churches, these colleges commit themselves to the mantras of diversity, inclusiveness, multiculturalism, and to ecological and feminist ideologies as correctives to, or sometimes surrogates for, the classical Christian vision. Having lost interest or confidence in communicating that Christian vision, they accommodate instead to much more “with it” elite liberal cultural imperatives. Unsurprisingly, the more militant adherents of these imperatives use them to subvert or marginalize the Christian vision itself. Catholic colleges can take similar paths when they automatically conflate left wing social and political causes with their traditional “peace and justice” concerns. Then the “proper” socio-political opinions and actions take the place of Catholic formation.

### **3. First Article Theologies**

Third, I would like to point out the inadequacies of what I call “First Article” approaches, for want of a better name for my category. By First Article I mean the First Article of the creed, which confesses God as Creator of the world. I realize the problems of using this language, because

genuine First Article theologies would draw on Christian doctrines of creation, human nature, sin and history, but the inadequate ones don’t. Rather, they use “First Article” approaches to evacuate the Christian vision of intellectual content and they wind up in the same place as the pietists—with a “two spheres or add-on” approach to Christian higher education.

One variety of these approaches was adopted by the Lutheran Church in America as an official theology, but one doesn’t have to be a Lutheran to adopt it. Merrill Cunningham, a well-known patriarch in Methodist higher education, follows this path. Essentially, it declares that all truth is grounded in God and therefore all genuine quests for truth are from God and please God...as well as serve the creation. It does not make any critical judgments about which quests for truth are indeed genuine, nor does it insist that pursuers of truth confess that the ground of their inquiry is God. Thus, the educational process goes on the same as in a secular school. But, if that is the case, why have a church-related school, except for perhaps a few religious adornments here and there? Methodists must certainly ask themselves that question now and then.

Another variety is more self-consciously Lutheran. It evacuates intellectual content from the Christian vision by giving education over to autonomous reason. It does this by a distorted use of two-kingdoms theology that in fact separates Gospel and Law, the Left and the Right hands of God. The separation takes place in this way. The Gospel is narrowly construed as the doctrine of justification. This Gospel is preached in chapel and taught by the theology department. But it is not the full-blown Christian theological account of life and reality...it does not have much intellectual content.

Then secular learning is relegated to the realm of the Law, where autonomous reason holds sway. But since no intellectual content is given to the Gospel—or the Christian account in its larger sense—there is no basis from a Christian point of view to engage the proposals put forth by autonomous reason. This is a peculiar type of Lutheran quietism in the educational realm. We have proven we can be quietists in the political realm, but now we show our versatility by bowing down before the secular authorities in the intellectual realm.

When we do this, we of course then hire “the best available faculty” without regard for their religious convictions or their interest in the serious engagement of faith and learning. Lutheran theology can then be used as an instrument of secularization.

#### **4. Reactionary Theology**

The final sort we can dispense with quickly, because it is unlikely to be a temptation at ELCA colleges like St. Olaf. This fourth type could be called “triumphalist” or perhaps “reactionary” theology. Theologies of this sort are rigid, defensive and closed to genuine engagement with contemporary secular thought. Covering their own fear of inadequacy, they appear triumphalistic in that for them biblical or theological truths simply trump whatever the world offers. Fundamentalist schools operate this way. Some Missouri Synod-controlled schools appear to have tendencies in this direction. Schools under sway of these theologies exhibit neither theological vitality nor genuine faith/learning engagement. While there may be a few individuals sprinkled about our ELCA colleges with this orientation, it is scarcely an institutional danger. However, it is easy to get lumped with these few folks if you really insist on the public relevance of the Christian intellectual account. Secular persons—or even mildly involved Christians—often have no other model in their minds for the faith/learning engagement than the fundamentalist one. If you insist on intellectual content for the Christian account, they think you are a bible-thumping fundamentalist.

#### **MARKS OF ADEQUATE THEOLOGIES OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Well, if those theologies are inadequate to the task of shaping Christian higher education, which ones are more adequate? In the following, I want to give the marks of adequacy in general and then make some comments about particular kinds of adequate theologies.

Such a theology has confidence in the comprehensiveness, unsurpassability, and centrality of the Christian account of life and reality in its efforts to shape Christian higher education.

#### **COMPREHENSIVENESS**

In order to have this confidence in the comprehensiveness of the Christian account, this theology draws upon the whole Christian narrative as it is elaborated in the Bible and in trinitarian Christian theology. Only this large vision will provide the kind of light we need in order to see the truth and falsity, possibilities and limits, in the many smaller secular sources of light that are part of a modern college or university. Further, a theology confident in the comprehensiveness of the Christian account will draw upon the vast stores of wisdom the Christian intellectual tradition has built up over the millennia. Christians have thought seriously and persuasively about the origin and destiny of the world, about human nature and dignity, about the meaning of history, about the meaning of our own personal lives in that larger story, about human longing and fulfillment, about the Christian meaning and conduct in everyday life. Christians have thought about the public dimensions of our visible lives, not just the mysterious and ineffable dimensions of our private existence. A Christian college has to employ a theology that is public and comprehensive.

Two caveats here. Not everyone on a faculty can be expected to master the vast wisdom of the Christian intellectual tradition. Certainly a number of persons in the theology department should have this capacity...and the willingness to use it on behalf of the college. Others, however, do need a solid lay knowledge of Christian theology, enough so that they can relate their own fields of inquiry to their Christian convictions in a meaningful way.

Second, I do not mean by comprehensiveness an arrogant overconfidence that the Christian account has all the answers. Christianity possesses wisdom and insight, not a lot of hard knowledge, and there is much to be filled in by secular knowledge. Some of that “filling in” will complement Christian wisdom, but some of it will create dissonance if not indigestion, to mix metaphors. There will be much room for mutual critique and, sadly, for irresolvable differences in some cases. But the point I’m making is that this larger Christian vision has to be given genuine intellectual status in the Christian college.

## UNSURPASSABILITY

Here, a college must employ a theology that confidently flows from the classical core of Christianity. The core of Christian religious and moral belief is articulated in the Ecumenical Creeds, the Small and Large Catechisms. The core is the Apostolic Tradition, the Great Tradition, Mere Christianity. It is this that is unsurpassable and finally non-negotiable. A Christian college must have a critical mass that actually believe in its truth.

But a creative theology that engages the world of learning must be able to extend and apply meanings from that core, must be able to draw out implications that have not been thought of before, must find the flexibility within it to engage secular proposals that seem to have little obvious relation to it, and must even be able to submit the core itself to scrutiny.

Yet, if a college allows some other account—the Enlightenment or a commercial—to supplant the Christian, then it no longer has a strong rationale to remain church-related.

## CENTRALITY

An adequate theology has confidence that the Christian account is central, it addresses the essential issues and values of life and reality. Let me give you an example. Glen Tinder, a distinguished Christian political philosopher, argues that the Christian view of human nature is definitive for western politics. In Tinder's parlance "the exalted individual," is a translation of the Christian teaching about each person being created in the image of God and about each person being redeemed by Christ. Humans are, as he puts it: "sacred but not good." This dual definition, he argues, is at the center of western politics. It means that each life is irreplaceable, has rights, cannot be treated with impunity and has a dignity far beyond utilitarian calculations. Yet humans are fallen; they have a propensity for idolizing themselves.

Without this background Christian teaching and its ontological grounding in God, Tinder fears politics will become either cynical—judging humans on the quality and intensity of their lives (as is happening now in the

West)—or idealistic—looking for messianic ways of saving humanity (as happened in both Fascism and Communism).

That's enough. You see the richness of Christian wisdom about human nature. But I could relate that wisdom to psychology, to sociology, to literature. The Christian account deals with the truth and goodness of crucial matters.

You will notice that up to this point I have talked about the Christian account in general. I have not added many denominational nuances. That is because I want to emphasize that being a Christian college means adhering to the general—shall I say "universal"—Christian account before we get to our Christian differences. We share so much on this level that it is a mistake to emphasize our differences, which do not amount to much when we compare them with a secular approach. We should not carp about each other, engaging in the narcissism of small differences when so much more is at stake.

But finally let us get to those differences. After my study of the six schools, I know there are real differences in vision and ethos. Each tradition has a different way of relating faith (the Christian account) and learning (secular knowledge). Those differences are based upon deep differences in the way that each relates revelation and reason, grace and nature. Notre Dame is simply different than Calvin. The former sees natural and revealed truth converging but, as its mission statement says, that natural truth is "subject to critical refinement." Reason, even for the Catholics, is not autonomous.

Calvin sees reason as far more fallen. Secular approaches to truth must be subjected to worldview analysis, critiqued and then transformed toward genuine Christian knowledge. Wheaton and now Baylor are intrigued by the Calvin model, though they entertain other faith/learning models. But even in the Calvin model things are not as tidy as the theory makes them seem. There are loose ends. Sometimes faith and reason seem to lead in opposing directions. Professors at Calvin and Wheaton and Baylor simply do not trump secular reason on the basis of revealed truth. There is far more conversation than that. The actual process on the ground level is not that different from what

goes on at Notre Dame or Valpo or St. Olaf.

Lutherans—those at both St. Olaf and Valpo—have a wonderful theological tradition at their disposal, one that takes into account the difficulties of both the Catholic and Reformed models. But we often misuse it. We separate the two kingdoms. At some other times we use “paradox” as a lazy excuse for not engaging in faith-learning conversation at all. We declare paradox at the very beginning of the educational process and then let everyone go their own way...that’s the easy way out. But it leads to secularization very quickly. No, Christ and culture in paradox means that we engage the Christian account with secular learning in a serious and extended conversation.

We should seek for as much overlap as possible, engage in as much mutual critique as needed to draw us closer together, and in some cases, finally declare that for the moment we see no way of resolving the conflicts of faith and learning, but because we as Christians believe that God is One, someday the full truth will be revealed to us.

May St. Olaf College continue to engage in such a conversation for at least 125 more years. That will certainly be one of the most important ways that St. Olaf can serve its students and through them the world.

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## EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

David J. O'Brien

I begin with the announced purpose of our gathering:

*"This conference will promote discussion among individuals from institutions affiliated with a range of traditions on the significant topic of vocation. In view of the recent and on-going interest in the role of service in higher education--both as a part of and alongside conventional classrooms--and in view of many colleges' stated mission to prepare their students for 'lives of service' (St. Olaf Mission Statement), careful reflection upon this topic is both timely and timeless...The organizers endeavor to extend ongoing discussions of the intersection of faith and learning by considering ways in which the call to serve is activated in the midst of higher education."*

I found this theme of vocation affirming, as for thirty years I have always made reference to it when discussing "education for justice and peace" with colleagues in Catholic higher education. In my own reflection in Called to Serve I wrote: "I think the concept of vocation, so richly expressed in essays in this book, may hold one of the keys to a renewal of civic responsibility among Christians." I should have added "I hope so."

I went on with a Catholic explanation:

"A pastoral strategy emphasizing lay vocation was widely discussed among Catholics before and during the Second Vatican Council but somehow was blurred in the post-conciliar church. I have attributed this to a combination of restorationist resurgence within the church and evangelical impulses arising from our post-immigrant, middle-class culture. For the former, vocation becomes once more formal service to the church's internal life. For the latter, service to the larger community is overwhelmed by counter-cultural piety grounded in cultural alienation. Our common desire, Lutherans and Catholics, to find a third way between sectarianism and cultural surrender, requires us to resist segmentation inherent in these impulses and to explore affirmative ways of renewing ideas of stewardship, the common good, and vocation."

### JUSTICE AND PEACE

I want to suggest a few ways in which we might think about this theme, but first a bit of background about the place of justice and peace education in Catholic higher education.

1. The Catholic church in the last generation has developed a solid theological foundation for an integrated social Gospel. Its texts include the works of theologians across the globe, the pastoral statements of individual bishops and episcopal conferences, the many encyclicals of John Paul II, even the catechism of the Catholic church. The "option for the poor," the insistence that "action on the behalf of justice" is integral to Christian life, the provision of a positive and economic and social role for government, trade unions and other popular organizations, and the affirmation of active non-violence, even among those who cling as well to just war categories, all these are now staples of Catholic self-understanding across the globe and across almost the entire, and conflicted, theological spectrum.

2. Nevertheless, Catholic social teaching remains "the Church's best-kept secret." I would argue that the church suffers today from a polarization about Catholic social teaching between evangelical radicals and conservative accommodationists. The first group, often heroic in their commitment to peace and social justice, ask in each situation, "what would Jesus do?" They speak easily of nonviolence and the option for the poor. They are at their best in questioning the integrity of the church and pricking the conscience of its members, from the pews to the chanceries. They carry on their fight most often with comfortable accommodationists who recognize few serious defects in American institutions or American policy. Solidly grounded in American experience and in modern social sciences, they have worked hard for the last twenty years to persuade the Vatican and the American hierarchy to be more appreciative of American political institutions, free market economic policies, and, until recently, cold war



strategies of military deterrence and third world interventionism. Convinced that, however flawed, American ideals and institutions are the best available, they seem to spend far more energy fighting what they take to be threats from the left, at home and abroad, than proposing ways to resolve outstanding problems. Most of all they want to keep religion confined to the religious sphere of church, family, and personal life, and persuade bishops and popes to confine their remarks about politics and economics to general moral prescriptions and make specific recommendations only on matters of family, sexuality, and personal morality. For lay people grown weary of the sometimes "ain't-it-awful" tone of preaching and teaching by social gospel enthusiasts, the comfortable accomodationists probably seem a reasonable alternative. The best-kept secret remains secret because it is presented by evangelical Catholics under a guise that makes it so demanding that it negated lay life, or, when presented by accomodationists, it is so modest that it makes no real difference. Until a third way, at once demanding and responsible, emerges with greater clarity, the rich, vital body of Catholic social teaching, will likely remain too little known.

3. Catholic colleges and universities almost without exception incorporate themes of justice within their mission statements. Most remarkable perhaps are the twenty-eight Jesuit institutions that have made their own the language of the service of faith and promotion of justice, education of men and women for others, and the preferential option for the poor. All take great pride in their rich programs of community and public service, and along with their peers in higher education, they are moving rapidly into service-learning. Recognizing the need for deeper reflection, many institutions are experimenting with service retreats for spiritual formation. Worried about an exclusive emphasis on service inattentive to questions of justice, many colleges and universities are responding positively to Campus Compact's calls for civic assessment and citizenship training as an intellectual and political focus for community service.

4. Catholic social teaching, while generally available, is by no means fully incorporated into curriculum. On Catholic college and university campuses, it remains a well-kept secret. The most significant academic expression of

religious commitment, beyond courses in theology and religious studies, are courses in professional ethics. This is good, but not enough. For one thing, the ethics involved are usually personal and professional. They speak less about the institutional settings within which such decision-making takes place, and rarely address the politics of decision-making in business, law, medicine, or in society at large. Unavoidably, there is often a negative character to the discussion, as it usually gives more attention to avoiding evil than to doing good. One learns how to draw the line over which one cannot step without losing integrity. Even when drawn further, to do good, the good is usually personal, involving legal or medical assistance or efforts to hire minorities and women. Less is learned about how to transform sinful social situations, such as class-biased justice and medical system, so that it might become easier to be good, to use an old Catholic Worker phrase. Still less is heard about the organizational and political commitments that might be required to make justice a reality. A second problem is that ethics is often philosophical, not theological; it tends to separate value questions from meaning or faith questions. In the process, decision-makers (including professors and students) are abstracted from communities of meaning and value, churches, parties, movements. Detached from communities of meaning, dropped into structure which are simply given, the abstract person finds that justice is a matter of choosing the best available option. Goodness becomes just another art of the possible, in an age of shrinking possibilities. The world transforming goodness of a Gandhi, a John XXIII, or an Oscar Romero, in contrast, arises from faith, from powerful convictions about meaning; in the absence of serious reflection on such matters, that is on religion, one tends to adapt to changing historical circumstances. Perhaps that worked humanely when everyone believed that somehow things were always getting better. In light of the Holocaust and other human being-made tragedies, defeatist meanings (after all, what can I do?) easily fill the void left by the fragmentation of knowledge and the decline of public dialogue. The gap between the claims of education and the realities of culture enlarges, the chasm between sophisticated technical knowledge and helplessness in dealing with questions of public life becomes all but impossible.

5. Thus I would argue at our schools, and I suspect at

many of yours, there are two significant gaps. One is the gap between institutional mission and available programs. This gap is a matter of will, of campus leadership, and of academic culture. The other gap is between the problems of society as widely understood (global economic disparities, environmental disintegration, post-Cold War violence) and available programs of action. This gap is political, a matter of developing organized efforts to confront, and resolve, the great issues confronting the human family. If we rest comfortably with the first gap, between institutional professions about citizenship and discipleship and available academic programs, we risk hypocrisy. If we rest comfortably with the second gap, between our analysis of the movement of history and available political options, we risk cynicism and irresponsibility.

6. There is also a wider concern about the intellectual content of faith amid contemporary forms of personal piety. Father Bryan Hehir, the architect of so much modern Catholic social teaching, worries about this:

*"Whether it's at Georgetown or Harvard or other places I have taught, I meet Catholic students who are profoundly pious, genuinely generous, and often, and often utterly lacking in any sense that there is an intellectual dimension of faith that should structure their life beyond their prayer and their generosity: a way of joining the fabric of the best of the empirical knowledge they have with a vision that is wider than empirical knowledge but not alien to it."*

Thus, there is a close connection between efforts to bring justice and peace education into the heart of the curriculum and simultaneous efforts to renew Catholic intellectual life and engage issues of religion and culture. The latter sometimes takes the form of interdisciplinary Catholic Studies centers or programs. There can be no useful Catholic contribution to public dialogue in the absence of Catholic intelligence. Justice and peace on and off campus, if it is to be serious, therefore begins not with students but with trustees, administrators, faculty, and professional staff. I suspect the same can be said for Lutherans, evangelicals, or other religious groups.

## **PASTORAL CARE, SOLIDARITY, AND VOCATION**

I want to offer three broad comments on this situation that I hope will be of use. One has to do with the pastoral sources of the problem, the second with one key to a more effective response, the concept of solidarity, and the third with the need to be realistic in speaking of vocation and citizenship.

### **PASTORAL CARE**

Perhaps the high point in recent years of Catholic engagement with American public life came with the publication of two pastoral letters in the 1980's, one dealing with nuclear weapons, the other with the American economy. The first was widely discussed because of its careful moral assessment of nuclear deterrence at the height of the nuclear arms race. The second was widely discussed but received a less positive response, perhaps because it challenged important assumptions regarding our renewing economy. And neither made its way fully into the every day pastoral and educational ministries of the church.

One reason may be that in both pastoral letters the final, pastoral sections, were far less compelling than the theological and policy sections. The pastoral on nuclear weapons ended not with an appeal for civic education and political action but with vague pleas for moral reflection and prayer. The cutting edge of the pastoral challenge was conscientious objection (including the possibility of renouncing employment in defense work), important in itself but hardly adequate to the peace making imperatives arising from the letter. The 1986 economics letter, in its draft form, echoed Vatican II's insistence on the lay vocation. But that theme narrowed in later drafts, replaced by counter-cultural calls for family life resistant to the perils of consumerism.

I think these problems arise in part from failure to think through the nature of the audience. Another set of comments would be needed to address working class, minority and immigrant communities. Here I speak of the Catholic professional middle class. Just as Catholic colleges and universities, once marginal to American academic life, are now comparable in quality and approach

to other private and public institutions of higher education, so many lay Catholics, descended from European immigrants, were once outsiders and are now insiders, once on the margins of American life, now at its centers. Like the schools, lay Catholics wrestle with professional, political, and religious obligations. As the schools are tempted to concentrate religious responsibilities in campus ministry and Catholic theology, lay people are tempted to confine religion to church, and leave its meaning to experts. And those who advocate a justice-seeking and peace-making vision for Catholic higher education may have placed too much emphasis on its religious justification, too little on its meaning for professional life, work, and for public life, citizenship.

The architects of contemporary Catholic education tried to address the new laity by building strong theology departments as part of their drive for academic excellence. They decided that they would no longer try to hold Catholics back from the dangers of secular, pluralistic America, but would accompany them on this new journey to the center of our culture. They dreamed of "bilingual Catholics", making their personal appropriation of the Catholic tradition while learning to operate effectively in the marketplace and civic center. A new generation would enrich America because they were Catholics, and enrich the church because they were Americans. So far achievement of that dream has been limited, in part because theology itself took an academic, not a pastoral, turn. The way beyond those limits, I want to suggest, is to recall the church's historic promise in the United States to accompany its people as they journeyed from Europe to America, from margins to mainstream.

Recently I heard a learned group discuss a phrase from a talk by Patricia Hampl: "placing ourselves in the world to be of use." It is an excellent phrase to think about as we discuss Christian education and vocation--placing ourselves in the world to be of use.

Placing ourselves in the world, in our case the American world: and what a world it is, alternately exciting and scary, in some ways Pope John Paul II's "culture of death," in other ways still the world's great democratic experiment. Most of all it is now *our* world in ways it was not yet their world for our parents and grandparents. Its qualities are

qualities we have helped to form, its future is in the hands of its people, among whom we must count ourselves. We are insiders now, not outsiders, and we bear a full share of responsibility for this world in which we live and work and in which our students are placing themselves. Others may turn away from that world, and place themselves in cultures of opposition, subcultural communities defined by their distance from and opposition to that world. We at St. Olaf and Holy Cross have made a different choice, to acknowledge that this world is ours, to accept responsibility for it, to exercise our responsibilities through research and teaching, to accompany the next generation as it places itself within our world.

Placing ourselves in the world to be of use. Of use. All Americans want to be useful, all of us want to believe that the work we do and the families we form and the lives we lead are useful, that they contribute to the common good. Some among us believe that beyond that hope is the need for decision: to face the world honestly, to assess its need and decide how we can appropriately, competently, be of use. That is what is meant by "faith and justice" and "men and women for others"--how to place ourselves in the world, to be of use to the human family, and especially to be of use to the poor. It is a matter of commitment, compassion, and, so important for us scholars and teachers, competence. We wish, then, to accompany, and empower, men and women as they place themselves in the world in ways which are genuinely useful, to themselves and their families, to our communities, local, national, global.

Fulfilling that vision is no easy matter. Middle class Americans tend to leave religion in church, while the pace of life often pushes conscience to the edges of awareness. The segmentation between academic, social and spiritual life, between theology and philosophy and the other disciplines and professional schools reflects, indeed perhaps sanctions, the segmentation of middle class culture. Many faculty and professional staff are devout, active in their parishes. As one report said of many Notre Dame faculty:

*"Their faith is for them and other Christians on the faculty a private matter. Their beliefs and commitments bear the same relationship to Notre Dame as they would to any corporation that was their employer. The Christian life*

*informs their personal relationships and conduct, but it is completely unconnected with their professional lives as teachers, scholars, and researchers."*

John XXIII got it right 30 years ago, "Indeed it happens too often that there is no proportion between scientific training and religious instruction: the former continues and is extended until it reaches higher degrees, while the latter remains at an elementary level. P.h.D.s at work settling for pabulum and platitudes at church.

The architects of Catholic higher education, like thousands of people in ministry today, inspired by Pope John and his Vatican Council, dreamed of bilingual Catholics, able to live their faith in the marketplace and civic center, and able to interpret their culture in terms of their faith. So far achievement of that dream has been limited, those limits evident in lay Catholic life, on campus and off. It is, first of all, a pastoral challenge.

## **SOLIDARITY**

After surveying justice education, a Task Force of the American bishops headed by Archbishop James Roach, retired leader of the diocese of St. Paul, suggested that it might be a good idea to think through the basic foundations of Christian social teaching. For one thing, a century of Christian and Jewish social movements have had limited impact. For another there may be a need to widen our imaginations if we are to overcome the bonds created by our cultures' extreme individualism. Jesuit David Hollenbach, for example, has suggested the need to reconsider the orientation of our best efforts in liberal arts education. Catholic education has always been a humanism, he suggests, an education grounded in an understanding of what it means to be human, and what are authentic human goods. Hollenbach insists that this humanism has always been a bit optimistic, focused on human potential and accomplishments, a bit embarrassed by human failings. At the end of this bloody century, however, we cannot affirm humanism without a recognition of evil.

The message of Catholic renewal, with its preoccupation with victims, violence, and injustice, is that we, all of us, need to be honest about our world and our vocation. Faith

is not easy to affirm, justice is far from achieved. Many persons lack the resources to face harsh realities, and fatalism and self-destruction soon follow. Hollenbach poses the question: "The question of the university today is whether it has any grounds for its hope to uncover meaning that can sustain a human life and guide the vast energies of its scientific, political, economic, and cultural undertakings. Or is it simply a way of coping with life, filling the time between young adulthood and death with activity that is perhaps interesting but ultimately pointless?"

So there is no time and no space for the easy slogans of liberal arts education; humanism has to be tougher. "The challenge of Christian humanism remains central to the identity of the catholic universities," Hollenbach writes. "But today that humanism must be a social humanism, a humanism with a deep appreciation not only for the heights to which human culture can rise but also to the depths of suffering to which societies can descend. There are strong currents in American life today that insulate both professors and students from experience of and reflection on these sufferings. A university that aspires both to be Catholic and to serve the common good must do more than include nods to the importance of social solidarity in its mission statement. It must translate this into teaching and research priorities, and actualize these priorities in day-to-day activities in classroom and library."

In Christian terms there is no Easter without Good Friday. Human suffering is part of the equation. If you are looking for a specific difference for identity, it is not simply humanism, the goal of many of our fine American colleges, but this specifically Christian understanding that to be human means to face the reality of sin and fight against it with the weapons of love. So ours seeks to be a liberal education, to be sure, but one that faces reality without flinching. The slain Jesuit educators in El Salvador placed on the table are realities we would like to avoid. Having these questions constantly placed before our attention, incorporated into our professional work, would make us different.

Another word about solidarity, a word about ourselves as Body of Christ, and understanding of church less and less familiar to our increasingly evangelical people. There is a

basic level of self-consciousness, an imagination of the meaning of life, at which the orientation to justice and peace, to full humanity, is grounded. It is a spiritual matter first of all. In America our imaginations are so profoundly individualistic that we can only think of being "for others: through some kind of enormous personal sacrifice, as if it were something other than the way to our fullest self-realization, as the great saints of our times tell us. But there is another way of imagining ourselves. Catholics call it solidarity, rooted in the doctrine of the mystical Body of Christ. The church is Christ in history; its members constitute His living presence, all the time, and not just when they are in church. And they do so as sacrament, signifying, and in some mysterious way already embodying, God's intention for everybody: unity with one another in the very life of the living God, which is love. In the reality of ever-expanding interdependence is embedded the hope of a single human family. That aspiration, Pope John Paul II once told an audience of intellectuals gathered at Hiroshima, is no longer a "vain ideal" but "a moral imperative and a sacred duty." Is that not an appropriate context for our continuing search to define our mission and identity, and to locate and appropriate understanding of vocation?

## VOCATION

In my comments in *Called to Serve*, and in my earlier remarks, I referred to the concepts of vocation and citizenship as keys to the renewal of responsible liberal arts education and most assuredly of Christian liberal arts education. But I would be less than honest if I did not make clear, after years with so few significant achievements in this area, that I think we need to face directly the challenge that poses for us, as Christians and professionals and citizens, and not just teachers of young people.

First, in the world I come from, vocation is a real problem. When students leave Holy Cross, or St. Olaf's, fired by deepened faith and awakened social conscience, where are they to go to find Christians like themselves, to find the kind of community of shared faith, mutual support, and common commitment they enjoyed on campus, or on a summer or overseas project. Will they find a community of conscience and commitment on the graduate or law

school campus, in the workplace at 3M or Dow or Price Waterhouse? Will they find it in your congregation, or mine? Where will they turn when they are asked for the first time to share in a project of limited or negative social benefit? Will they find congregations of faith and friendship, and pastoral care appropriate not just to acts of mercy and justice but to a lifetime oriented toward service to the human family? To whom will they turn when they realize in their hearts the enormity of inequality and injustice, the massive, systemic irresponsibility of our emerging global marketplace? If they have married well and can turn to the beloved, God has been very good. But after a century of multiple social gospels, can we say that the piety and culture of our local churches nourishes courageous conscience and an informed ability to read experience in light of faith?

And of course I pose these questions in the perspective of commencement as students enter this complex world, but the question is really ours, isn't it? Have we found such congregations of conscience and commitment? If we answer yes, need we not ask why, then, are we so comfortable?

Citizenship is no easier. Reread Martin Luther King's first book, and his last. The young minister schooled in Rauschenbusch and Neibuhr, in a social gospel of love disciplined by a clear analysis of power, confronting the realities of racism in Montgomery. Sadly he had only thirteen years. In his last book the commitment to loving service burns brighter than ever. The problems, seen now in what he calls the "world house," are more complicated and intractable than he imagined in the days of the bus boycott. Power is now power with a capital P, as in *Power and Principalities*. And he is gravely worried, in part because the political options available in 1967 are so inadequate to the problem. His call to action is clear, but sober and modest.

So you and I issue our invitation to engaged citizenship. And we nod at one another and turn to do our civic duty. But where do we go, and what do we do? In this year's presidential election? In the GOP or the DFL? In our trade union or professional group, the AAUP, or ABA? In the civil rights movement or the peace movement? Yes, there are Bread for the World and Habitat for Humanity and

Greenpeace and thousands of International Non-Governmental Organizations. They help us do our duty, but do they touch our work, do they give direction and hope in our lives? Are they adequate to the level of our responsibility?

Paul Dovere asked us so beautifully last night to “turn into the west wind,” to take up the legacy of hope so alive in today’s anniversary celebration. You and I are here, following two, three, four generations of poor, immigrant, marginalized outsiders who chose the burdens of self-government and personal responsibility. In the end they gave us these gifts of material security, education, respect, access to power. And what is the quality of the political culture we are making by our choices every day? What is the feeling in our hearts, and the look on our face, when talk turns to the United Nations, to the Congress, to the presidential elections? And how do we feel, how do we really feel, about our fellow Americans? Can they be trusted with self-government? Can we? And, in the end, who is really responsible for the public life and global actions of this last, great, much-loved superpower?

Citizenship, indeed!

That is a terrible set of questions to conclude the opening speech of this happy conference. I really am sorry. I ask them not from cynical defeatism but from a version of the question we heard last night from that crusty old Norwegian a half century ago. Why did God give us such a wonderful vision of what our church, and our church’s colleges, might be--for me the vision of John XXIII and Vatican II--and so little wisdom about how to bring that vision to life in engaged and committed congregations and a vital, dynamic democratic civil society? We have great work to do, work of genuine importance. And in that work we truly need each other. From now on let us shape our struggle for integrity together, in genuine solidarity, in this our “world house.” Thank you for the invitation to be with you and enjoy, even for these few hours, an experience of solidarity and shared vocation. Our time together proves that many still want to turn to the west wind, and the Christian-inspired dream that formed this wonderful school still lives.

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## THE LITERATURE OF SPIRITUAL REFLECTION AND SOCIAL ACTION

Shirley Hershey Showalter

It is a great honor to be here with you tonight. St. Olaf College has earned a distinguished place in American higher education, not only for excellence in the liberal arts, but also for abiding identity and attachment to its founding denomination. Let me add my words of congratulations to those already spoken, not only for 125 years of ever-expanding educational excellence but also for the way in which you are choosing to celebrate this year -- with a conference, a book, and new mission and identity documents.

Since this is an after-dinner speech, I'd like to begin with a few words from Garrison Keillor, whose humor often revolves around religion, especially the particular blend of religions in this region. Here is a Keillor excerpt called "Singing with the Lutherans": "I have made fun of Lutherans for years—who wouldn't if you lived in Minnesota? But I have also sung with Lutherans and that is one of the main joys of life, along with hot baths and fresh sweet corn. We make fun of Lutherans for their blandness, their excessive calm, their fear of giving offense, . . . , their lack of speed, and also their secret fondness for macaroni and cheese. But nobody sings like them. If you ask an audience in New York City, a relatively "Lutheranless" place, to sing along on the chorus of "Michael Row the Boat Ashore," they will look daggers at you as if you had asked them to strip to their underwear. But if you do this among Lutherans they'll smile and row that boat ashore and up on the beach and down the road!

"Lutherans are bred from childhood to sing in four-part harmony. It's a talent that comes from sitting on the lap of someone singing alto or tenor or bass and hearing the harmonic intervals by putting your little head against that person's rib cage. It's natural for Lutherans to sing in harmony. We're too modest to be soloists, too worldly to sing in unison. And when you are singing in the key of C and you slide into the A7th and D7th chords, all two hundred of you, it's an emotionally fulfilling moment. . . .

"I once sang the bass line of "Children of the Heavenly

Father" in a room with about three thousand Lutherans in it; and when we finished we all had tears in our eyes, partly from the promise that God will not forsake us, partly from the proximity of all those lovely voices. By our joining in harmony, we somehow promise that we will not forsake each other. I do believe this: people who love to sing in harmony are the sort of people you could call up when you're in deep distress. If you're dying, they will comfort you. If you're lonely, they'll talk to you. If you're hungry, they'll give you tuna salad!"

When I got this Keillor passage over the internet a few months ago, I dropped it into the St. Olaf file because it reminded me of the year I spent as Senior Fellow in the Lilly Fellows Program in the Humanities and Arts at Valparaiso University. I was there long enough to glimpse the difference between the Missouri Synod and the ELCA and the difference between German and Norwegian ancestry. Like all denominational differences, these seem larger to insiders than to outsiders. The reason the Keillor quote connected so well to the year at Valparaiso was that it led directly to a memory. It was a pleasure that year to introduce Goshen College professor of music emerita, Mary Oyer, to the Fellows. She led us through a rich array of hymn traditions, all the way from Amish singing from the *Ausbund* to African and Cheyenne music in the *Mennonite Worship Book*. To extend Keillor's image one could say that if you ask Mennonites and Lutherans together to "row the boat ashore," we not only row it up the beach and down the road, but we might even start to levitate.

We not only share a love of hymn-singing, but we also share the other history Keillor enjoys making fun of—the potluck dinner with its famous menu. How is it, then, that we differ? To answer that question we need to go back to the sixteenth century. Here's how Walter Sundberg described it in his essay, "What does it mean to be Lutheran?," in *Called to Serve*: "In the earliest years of the Reformation, Luther found himself in conflict not only with Rome but also with "radical reformers" who taught

that the true community of faith is made up of believers who experience personal conversion. These reformers taught a wide variety of doctrines, the effect of which was to exhort Christians to make a self-conscious commitment to Christ that expresses itself in outward behavior. Some insisted that Baptism is for adults, not infants, because only an adult can make a responsible decision for Christ. . . . Some stressed that moral discipline is not only the fruit of faith, but the necessary proof that faith is genuine. Luther argued that the general effect of these teachings is to bind faith to certain works. These works become the “angels” of authority” (6).

Today’s Mennonites were one group of the radical reformers in this description. We were Anabaptists, who dared to baptize each other as adults and thereby challenged the authority of both church and state. We expected that conversion would result in a life of obedience to the cross, even unto death. For thousands of Anabaptists, who fled Catholics and Calvinists and Lutherans alike, this sense of radical commitment led to martyrdom, a fact that has shaped our community as much or more than theology.

If we were 16<sup>th</sup> century disputants today, heresy hunters, we would each be advocating for one horn of a dilemma—to vastly oversimplify, let us call these the horn of grace and the horn of discipleship. Mennonites have maintained that discipleship is different from “works righteousness” and have their own terms of derision for the opposite problem--“cheap grace.” The signs of conversion most highly valued historically have been pacifism, service, and community—all ways of submission of the individual to the will of the church and the welfare of others.

Yet the Mennonite Church, like the ELCA, is undergoing great change. You and your Catholic brothers and sisters and have signed the 1999 Augsburg Accord, after three decades of ecumenical dialogue, indicating that the reciprocal condemnations both groups made of the other in the sixteenth century no longer apply to the crucial doctrine of justification.

Our church is attempting to unite both Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church beliefs, practices, and histories at the present time. We are much more diverse theologically, ethnically, and socially than we were in the mid twentieth century. The attempt to unify

has heightened some of these differences, and yet it also calls us back to founding principles, to the distinctives of our faith.

If you read the essay “Keeping the Faith: Integrity with Your Heritage,” with Keith Graber Miller as first author, you have an outline for the elements of our tradition: radical break from both Catholicism and Protestantism in the sixteenth century resulting in persecution. Persecution leads to loss of intellectual leadership and isolation. Higher education re-emerges in America when the church, partly under the influence of both progressivism and revivalism, begins to recognize that it will lose the youth of the church if they leave the farm and the small town to go off to the city for an education. One person described Goshen College in its early days as the place which was needed so that Mennonites would not go to the University of Chicago. But it was also a place filled with hope that Mennonites might make a special contribution to education. John S. Coffman’s 1904 essay, “The Spirit of Progress,” traces a line of radical Christian thought from the medieval Waldensians to the present day Mennonites and urges the next generation to extend this spirit into the future.

Coffman’s essay tracing a Spirit throughout Time was a method that later leaders would also rely on. Since we have a history of persecution and no highly developed creedal tradition passed on through propositional truths, we pass the torch from generation to generation largely through stories and songs and a few central images. We are a people of narrative.

For us, church history has been as influential than theology or even biblical studies in shaping our identity. In Mennonite colleges, where the study of Anabaptist history and Mennonite history has ignited Mennonite intellectuals, lay members, and clergy with a sense of their identity and central questions ever since 1944 when Goshen Dean Harold S. Bender’s “The Anabaptist Vision” appeared in *Church History*. Other seminal texts have been John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus* and J. Lawrence Burkholder’s *The Problem of Social Responsibility from the Perspective of the Mennonite Church*. But probably most powerful of all has been experience. Some of these experiences include being conscientious objectors to war, of seeking to demonstrate commitment through international relief work, and of going into cities to try to alleviate the pains of poverty. Today, poets and painters



have expanded and sometimes challenged the historical identity project. Finding consensus among all these claims to faithful identity is elusive. We have come to embrace ambiguity and paradox, just as you have done. Let me attempt, however, to define what is distinctive, the ideal form of Christian higher education as we try to practice it at Goshen College.

*The Mennonite model of both "calling" and "service" is rooted in a theology of suffering and humility, is passed on most effectively through narrative, singing and other experiential forms, and, at its best, aspires to nothing less than the formation of a communal conduit for God's grace so that "healing and hope" in the form of peacemaking and service "flow through us to the world."*

The best way to illustrate this thesis is to use some teaching experiences as a case study. In the mid 1990's, when I chaired the English department at Goshen College, I taught a course called the Senior Seminar in which I was searching for methods that would help our students use their literary analytical skills, reflect on their learning after four years, bond with each other and with Goshen College, and prepare to enter the world. In it, I describe the course I just finished teaching, "The Literature of Spiritual Reflection and Social Action." The premise for this course was simple. I asked three people I respect for their learning and their Christian faith to tell me about the book that made the most significant change in their lives. Amazingly, each person could tell me immediately what the book was and what happened when he or she read it. To the books they picked, I added one of my own.

One of those books, and the first one we read, was *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, a survivor of Auschwitz, Dachau, and two other concentration camps. The 16 students who elected to add this one-hour class on top of a regular load were all Mennonites. Two Chinese professors who are exchange scholars in our international service-learning program, the Study-Service Term (SST), audited the class. They claim no religion, but were extremely interested in ours and offered points where they saw agreement or disagreement with Eastern thought, especially Buddhism. The person who chose the Viktor Frankl text, and who came to class to talk about its impact on his life, is a Methodist-turned-Presbyterian. He is also wheelchair-bound, having been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis a decade ago.

My method for designing the course could be called a Pedagogy of the Holy Spirit. I believe it evolved out of my own prayer life and the prayers of many people who lift up Goshen College to God every day. The idea came as a flash of inspiration. The people walked into my life at the right moment. The course did not so much develop along pre-planned lines as it unfolded out of mystery. I am still awed by what took place in those winter afternoon presentations and discussions.

I did not plan it, but our first book was about suffering, terrible suffering, meaningless suffering. We never used the word "martyr," as we would have done if we had been studying about the 4,000 Anabaptists who were drowned or torched in the 16th century instead of 6 million Jews exterminated in the twentieth century. But there were passages of this book that resonated with Mennonite students in special ways, often without their knowing why. Frankl described his purpose this way: "I had wanted simply to convey to the reader by way of a concrete example that life holds a potential meaning under any conditions even the most miserable ones" (12). If there were time today, we could parse every word of that statement for its relevance to the thesis of this paper. But you have already done that, noticing words such as "simply," "concrete example," "meaning," and "miserable."

Throughout the book the author's tone is remarkable. I can only give it one of my highest compliments--it is humble, suffused with love. Frankl writes for the living, but he carries the memory of those who died. He begins his book with this statement, "We who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles--whatever one may choose to call them--we know: the best of us did not return" (19). Mennonites of the sixteenth century might have said the same. In a chapter called "The Case for Tragic Optimism," Frankl gives what could be called an apology for the course itself: "All we can do is study the lives of people who seem to have found their answers to the questions of what ultimately human life is about as against those who have not" (146).

At Goshen College we do a lot more than study people's lives. We also study chemistry, math, poetry, computer science, art, history, etc. Individual classes in a random sample of courses would probably not differ drastically from those of any other good liberal arts college. But we do have a special place in worship and in our academic life

for the narrative--especially the life narrative or spiritual autobiography--and we encourage our faculty to tell their own and other's stories--to testify. I came to Goshen College expecting to stay three years in 1976. Instead, I never left. What drew me and held me were powerful stories. I can recall, from among scores of personal narratives I know well, the story of Carl Kreider, dean and president emeritus, who told the students in a 1978 chapel service that he chose to borrow money in the 1930's in order to attend Goshen rather than take a full scholarship to Oberlin because "he did not want to break his parents' hearts."

He went on to describe a journey of the highest intellectual and spiritual challenges in a way that was so beautiful, both in its use of simple yet eloquent language and through gentle tone of voice and body language that I found myself saying, "There's something here they never heard of in graduate school. And I want to find it."

Among the narratives that shape our theology, our campus community and our individual choices at Goshen College is an important set involving international service-learning. The program behind these narratives, called the Study-Service Term (SST), was instituted 30 years ago as part of our general education package. Since then, about 6,000 students have spent 13-14 weeks in a "significantly different" (usually "third world") culture and have spent half of that time in a service assignment. Over one hundred faculty have led units of students in this powerful form of experiential education. Almost everyone who participates tells others about ways his or her life was changed, sometimes dramatically.

Goshen, Indiana, is a town of 24,000 in the middle of America, and the students on our campus, like most residential college students, are mostly white, mostly middle-class students. Yet if the dormitory walls were to give up their secrets, they would ring with stories of suffering and ecstasy that come from such places as Chengdu, Abidjan, Jakarta, Port au Prince, San Jose, Tecucigalpa, Jena, Santo Domingo, and hundreds of villages from all parts of the globe. Students make meaning out of experiences such as watching a sleek Mercedes with tinted windows roar past beggars lined up on both sides of the street, walking through suffocatingly beautiful rain forests, digging wells, worshipping in mud huts--or in spectacular cathedrals, trying to understand the mysterious opposite sex under even more mysterious

circumstances, recognizing the privilege Americans carry with their passports and the resentment privilege breeds. The most touching stories, however, usually come from the families with whom students live and from the generosity of their hospitality. Students return back home with softer, more sensitive, hearts and stronger minds. On SST hearts and minds are connected because the stories require the engagement of both. If a student reads about some cultural fact first and then sees a version of the practice or value described, there is either an "aha" moment or a moment of cognitive dissonance due to either the perception or the reality differing from the expected. But the experience is more than clinical, as observation in a laboratory might be. It usually matters some visceral way to a student. It may come at a moment of physical pain or exertion or homesickness or hunger. It may induce guilt, fear, a flood of tears, quiet musing, or a surge of adrenaline. Even people who want to be objective or detached cannot avoid the subjective on SST. But those who gravitate to the subjective are not safe either. If they are to make meaning, they must draw back far enough to see and seek information outside themselves. The journals of students under these circumstances become a place of exploration of self and other, facts and feelings, and a record of rapid maturation.

The narratives of SST, though different in every case, often bear the mark of the redemption narratives of the Bible, whether or not our students (and even faculty) always recognize these marks. Listen to these words from student David Roth, writing last year, after returning to the Dominican Republic following four days in Haiti.

*I'm going to bed tonight tired, but a good tired that has come from thoroughly extending myself in every intellectual, emotional and physical way during the Haiti trip. I am spent intellectually--I pushed so hard to soak up every word from every speaker, pushed my brain constantly for three days, examining/connecting/critiquing ideas presented to me. I spent myself in staying up late all the nights to talk among wonderful people in fascinating subject areas. And I've never learned so much in three days, never. I think my life/views/opinions have been altered permanently in some areas, like thinking about poverty, and about dependence/service issues, and about entering a culture you have little knowledge of. And it feels good to be spent. The rush I got from all the input has given me so much to ponder in a long-term sense.*

Again, we could spend a long time, if we had it, reading

this entry closely, but you will notice how explicitly it addresses the topic of this conference--and that it is conscious in doing so. Both the deliberate placement of the student in a disorienting situation and assigning him to learn via the reflective mode of journaling are part of the pedagogy and part of the deeply imbedded and too often unarticulated philosophical-theological structure of our curriculum. The form the student gravitates toward naturally is the narrative. Perhaps, ironically, one reason why we have not done a good job of explaining our narratives philosophically or theologically is that we have experienced their reality so profoundly and find them to be self-evident, requiring little or no justification.

Our purpose in examining David Roth's words, however, is to observe the structure of his narrative and some of the allusions to the biblical narrative one could draw out of it. Robert Frost has said that poetry begins in wonder and ends in wisdom. In this case, the narrator begins in exhaustion and ends in a "rush" that he recognizes will be the stockpile of memory on which he will draw-- "ponder" for the rest of his life. If I were writing comments on this entry (something the faculty leaders do on SST), I would point out to David that he has written in these sentences his own psalm, with the usual structure of great exertion mixed with pain leading to deep satisfaction from yieldedness. He has therefore discovered something profound about his own name, "David." He is a singer and dancer before the Lord. He has also wrestled, like Jacob, for a blessing. Now he will ponder these things in his heart, like Mary.

I do not consider such observations to be "mere piety"--a patina of religiosity over an experience not presented as religious by the student. Rather, I see this as an opportunity simultaneously to deepen learning (has he ever thought about the structure of the Psalms?) and deepen faith (does he recognize the biblical power of naming to his own calling in life?).

The author Madeleine L'Engle has a great following among Mennonites. She has visited the Goshen campus at least three times since I have been there. I have read her trilogy to both my children. Inside a dog-eared copy of her book *The Wind and the Door* is her admonition, in her own handwriting, to my son, Anthony: "Be a namer." Ever since L'Engle's first visit to Goshen, wherein she named the process of naming for me, and ever since I read the passage in that same book about Progo the angel, whose job it is to name all the stars, I have had a deep

appreciation for the power of naming in education, especially church-related education. What would happen to the world if every one of the students who left our campuses, were truly and deeply named? L'Engle herself would say that war and violence would subside and the world would reflect more clearly God's design in creation. The secret to building a redemptive community is to lavish love and attention on each of its members, as God has lavished love on us. What is a more profound way to do that than to help each member discover meaning in his or her name? We become peacemakers as we ourselves are filled with the peace that passes understanding. We become servants as we are served by Christ upon his knees.

When each member of a community comes to know the meaning of his or her own name, another kind of naming occurs--the naming of the powers and principalities--that attempt to separate us from the love of God. As we become firmly rooted ourselves, our eyes open to the rootlessness around us. The apostle Paul gave us a name for evil forces-- "powers and principalities." Theologians John Howard Yoder and Walter Wink have expounded on the concept and redeemed it for a secular age. Walter Wink has also suggested that institutions, as well as individuals, can draw sustenance from the idea of vocation. Noting that in the book of Revelation the New Testament churches of various cities were addressed not by the name of their cities, but by the names of the Angels who defend the church from the Powers and Principalities, Wink asks us to consider the possibility of taking seriously what kind of angels our institutions might have or recover.

In a February 13-15, 1998, meeting in Mundelein, Illinois, of educators who wish to transform higher education by recalling its spiritual roots, a Catholic nun reminded the group that during Vatican II, the various orders were asked to focus on their "founding charism." I have found it fruitful to reflect on what the "founding charisma" of Goshen College might be and what its angel might be named. Perhaps these will be useful images for you also.

As I have walked with you through a theology of suffering and humility, visited a few narratives, and found a few more names for the profound spiritual process which produces peacemakers, servant-leaders, and strong communities, I found myself thinking again about the New Testament Church, so full of conflict, so alive with promise. I thank you for providing the setting of this conference and sharing with me your traditions, which

stimulated my own thinking. On SST it is a truism that when we go abroad we come to know our homes better. That transformation has happened to me here among you.

The poet is Sarah Klassen.

Praise God

Bells toll a sombre invitation  
And the people come.  
The women's shoes have been removed  
For death. Doomed,  
She's arrayed in a dull red  
Petticoat. Before the end  
She lifts a slender hand  
Like this  
As if in benediction,  
Pulls from her aching mouth the  
Wooden gag  
Meant to keep her mute  
And begins  
Bravely  
Singing her terrified heart out.

Listen.

August 16

I told Martin I had no culture,  
And I don't.  
We were sitting in the grass and I looked at his hair like  
black wool twisted into living snakes and I wanted to cry.  
For I have no culture.  
He's named after a reverend, a hero.

He closes his eyes when listening to Paul Laurence Dunbar  
or Maya Angelou and "He'll rise."

But what am I?

He eats soul food.

I hate sauerkraut and sausage,

I don't even have a generation, too young for "X."

What do I do?

Hang a flag upside down and bitch about the class system.

I have no heritage, no ethnicity.

If I have a culture it's one of greed and lustful power.

Samantha makes tortillas and talks Spanish with her mom,  
Her aunts start prayers with phrases like, "dios mio."

And what do I have?

Old women with doilies on their heads

Who scorn me for liking the taste of beer and having long  
hair.

I have no war to protest like my father.

So I remain sarcastic and hateful.

But I want a hero.

Not some athlete or politician.

I want someone who pinches and twists my soul until I can  
raise my hands and shout, "Halleluya!"

Instead I remain some pseudo-leftist without a cause.

Wanting to be idealistic in this world that preaches  
conformity and compromise.

I distrust that system of buy, buy, and buy and I hate and  
disbelieve this corporate vengeful Christianity until I  
realize that I don't believe in anything. I want to believe or  
trust or cry.

I'm tired of protests.

For once, I want to celebrate something.

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*Shirley Hershey Showalter is president of Goshen College.*

## VOCATION: A CHAPEL HOMILY

Matt Peterson

Allow me to quote former St. Olaf professor Dr. Howard Hong. He says, "The tragedy is that we seem to have lost the full grasp of the Christian vocation, its center and its implications." Hong had it right in his 1955 book *Our Church and the World*. He had it right then, and he has it right now.

Vocation is a term students seldom hear around here. What is a vocation, and how do you get one? First, vocational schools don't have a monopoly. You don't necessarily go to a vocational school to find your vocation, just as you don't necessarily come to St. Olaf to become liberal and artsy. In fact, I know plenty of people here who have no desire to become liberal. And I know people whose art is only destined for the refrigerator.

The word vocation comes from the Latin verb *vocare*, to call or to summon. A vocation, then, is a calling or a summoning. Traditionally a Christian concept, a vocation is a calling by God answered by the individual whom God personally calls. A vocation is not a product that any trade school or liberal arts school can tout.

Centrally, vocation is a calling to enter into daily communion with God. Through my daily communion I see how far I am from total communion, and thus I understand my *being* Christian as continually becoming Christian. Centrally, then, vocation is a call into becoming. Now this becoming, of course, has its implication. The implication is that in my continually becoming Christian I *do* something that aids me in becoming. Primary is the becoming. Secondary is the doing.

Unfortunately, we say we *become* English majors, English professors, seniors, or senior citizens rather than Christians. We strike the sense of becoming Christians, or we put *becoming* Christian alongside rather than foundational to becoming a student, teacher, theologian. We deform the sense of becoming into becoming an accomplished student, musician, or artist rather than becoming a Christian. Add the power of success to the mix and vocation's tie to

becoming Christian is all but lost. Success ties closely with our labels, which makes becoming a "something" even more sought after and subdues the faith-relationship in vocation even further. A "successful" person is successful regardless of religious devotion. Success is a person's GPA, win-loss record, number of honorary degrees, or net worth.

Hong is right. "The tragedy is that we seem to have lost the full grasp of the Christian vocation, its center and its implications." God calls us into a relationship with God. Our vocation is our attempt to enter into that relationship in a daily, daylong level. Our vocation is not a title. It is a summoning to be with God as we write papers, change garbages, or file tax returns.

Anthony Bloom writes, "A prayer makes sense only if it is lived. Unless they are 'lived,' unless life and prayer become completely interwoven, prayers become a sort of polite madrigal which you offer to God at moments when you are giving time to Him." If I do not seek to know God and serve God's people through my vocation, then it is an aimless or vainly directed occupation, a *thing* that occupies me, a pile of to-dos that fills time and directs according to deadlines and bottom lines.

On some days my papers, exams, rehearsals, and practices are my living out my vocation. And some days they are a pile of to-dos. Soon enough, the to-dos will gain even greater voice--for this very reason, whether or not I treat my future job as the implication of my vocation, I will still have to do my job to pay loans, buy food, and save money.

In the same hour that many Americans finish a 60 to 80 hour work week or an even longer study week, do they, do *we* not also feel something wrong with this "come hell or high water" demand for production? Is there not something wrong with the passion we have for Friday and the dread of Monday? Is there not something wrong that many people work only so they can retire or graduate? Part is that we are simply overworked--the weekend being our

only time to relax, to have time to ourselves, to reflect, to worship, to see our family. Part is that many of us have simply picked up majors, taken classes, or chosen jobs that help fulfill no calling whatsoever. These vocationless careers and educations only afford weekend, holiday, and summer escapes--escapes from the rat race. Is there something wrong with this? We answer now with the same excitement as on Easter Sunday. The pastor says, "HE IS RISEN!" We reply (dryly), "He is risen indeed."

Today I ask us, "Is there something wrong with the productive nature of school or the busy-ness of business?"

And we respond, (dryly), "Yes, there is something wrong, something flat-line, dead-cold, gravely wrong."

"Well," asks another, "How do you know it is dead wrong?"

"Because I'm living in it."

"So what are you going to do about it? Are you going to change it or get out of it?"

"Well, eventually I will graduate, get a job with vacations, and later I will retire, if that's what you mean. But right now I am too tired. I just want to finish my work and take a nap."

There are some, however, who do something about what seems wrong with going to college only to get a degree, living only for the weekend, and working only to retire. They, we, develop philosophies, theologies, and trite maxims to smooth over the contradictions. We rationalize the contradictions.

For example, we now value work independent of its spiritual possibilities. Today, a job's major connection, often its only connection to faith is that it allows for tithing. Spiritually, work only "pays off" on Sunday. In a collegial

setting like this, many students cannot answer what their daily, collegial work affords them spiritually. I often think that our living in a "faith community" means that we take it on faith that we live in a faith community. Where in our daily work and our communal living is the vocation? Really, many of us value daily work because we value daily work. We have lost vocation's center as a calling, and so all we have left to value is vocation's implication--the doing. If I value my doing something independent of my becoming a more earnest Christian, then I live by a Godless center, no matter how much religious rhetoric I heap on.

Professor Hong says, "When religion, God, and the Christian faith are used to bolster something else, [then religion, God, and the Christian faith] become something else." He continues, "The elevation of the secular task was not to mean our accommodation to the world and the glorification of work in itself. It was to make the daily life a witness to the love of God. In a faithless inversion have we not employed the faith rather to dignify what we do, than to redeem the time and human life?"

If I work on a hog farm all day, shoveling hog-piles of waste and I say that this work is my vocation, I do not affix the title vocation to explain that my stuff don't stink even though the hogs' does. A vocation is not about making me smell good, look good, or feel good, nor is it about academic success or monetary prosperity. It's not about positive self-image. If anything, my vocation teaches me about how little I know, how much I want people to think I know, and how little I can do on my own. It reveals to me how grossly I love myself, and how I allow my ego to inflate to Michelin-man proportions. My vocation, if anything, deflates.

My daily work, being part of my vocation, means that I can live in a relationship with God. My actions in this work are prayer and discourse with God. Amen.

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