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

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INTERSECTIONS

faith + life + learning

NUMBER FOURTEEN

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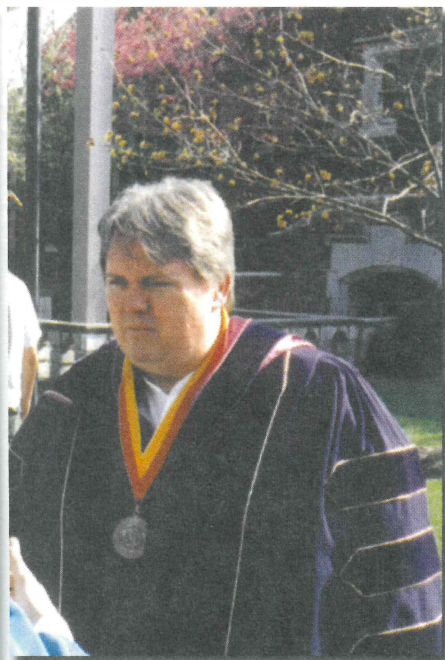
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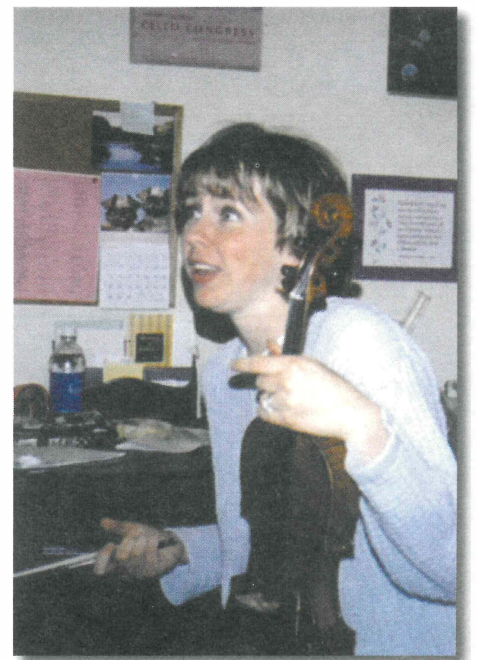
Becky Gardener



David, English Professor

**Vocation:
the place where
your deep gladness
and the world's
deep hunger meet.**

F. Buechner



Rebecca, Violin Teacher

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INTERSECTIONS

SUMMER 2002

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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.

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Surely “vocation” is a one of the precious gifts Lutheran theology offers education. It is an awesome and humbling notion to believe that we are each called to serve God and others in the places and among the people of our daily lives, and to honor God by doing so with excellence. It is fitting, then, that this issue of *Intersections* (Faith + Life + Learning) considers vocation in an “up close and personal” way.

Several of the articles in this issue sprang from presentations offered during the 2001 Vocation of a Lutheran College conference, and 2002 participants will receive the first copies of this issue. As a new staff member of the ELCA Division for Higher Education and Schools I attended my first “Vocations” conference last year. I was joined by a diverse group of new and seasoned college and university faculty, staff, and administrators, theologians and scholars. We came together, at the invitation of the ELCA Division for Higher Education and Schools, to think about what it means personally and collectively to be called to serve God and others through our vocations in Lutheran higher education. This conference is a gift to the church as it considers its role in education and to education as it considers its role in the church. To learn more about The Vocation of a Lutheran College conference, contact Dr. Arne Selbyg, director for ELCA colleges and universities, at aselbyg@elca.org.

Speaking of gifts, *Intersections* (the journal of Faith + Life + Learning that grew out of the first “Vocations” conference in 19XX) and its editor, Dr. Tom Christenson (professor of philosophy at Capital University) are treasures to those who care deeply about higher education and faith. Some of the participants at a recent consultation considering the need for “Lutheran Identity” resources in ELCA schools and centers, campus ministries, and colleges and universities found *Intersections* to be a surprise gift; they hadn’t seen an issue before. Whether you are reading your first issue or whether you’ve read every issue, it would be helpful to know about you. Consider gifting future issues of *Intersections* with your feedback. Photocopy the table of contents. Jot notes next to the articles: What did you read? What did you skip? Please share a bit about

yourself: something that explains why you would read the publisher's note of *Intersections*. Finally, tell us how you ended up with a copy of this issue. For example, "It comes via interoffice mail, distributed by the president's office." Send your notes to Dr. Tom Christenson, *Intersections* editor, Capital University, 2199 E. Main St. Columbus, Ohio 43209.

Blessings,
Sue Edison-Swift
Assistant Director, ELCA Colleges and Universities

FROM THE EDITOR

Many of our campuses are or recently have been abuzz with conversations about vocation. I would like to think that this is not entirely due to the hope of winning millions in the Lilly lottery. If vocation is an idea that is at or near the heart of a Lutheran understanding of education then it should be something we converse about whether or not the conversation is funded. It should just be part of who we are and what we do.

As I listened to the presentations included in this issue the question was raised for me, "What have we learned from these Lilly funded programs that can be applied to those of us who have not been funded? Is there some way to share the gift, to pass the learning on to institutions that have little or no budget for such programs and activities?" From the presentations included in this issue I have drawn a conclusion that I think is applicable to all of our ELCA colleges and universities; we need to encourage and enable more conversations about vocation at all of our institutions. (1) Faculty need to be engaged in conversation about vocation, about what moves us to do what we do, and what moves us to care about the kind of job we do, about what we feel called to do and how that informs our work. What kind of money would it take to encourage such conversation? Twenty dollars will buy enough wine to get such a conversation started. When I retire I plan to leave a wine endowment to my university, with the proviso that faculty will converse as they drink it. *In vino veritas*. (2) Students need to be engaged in such conversation. Students grow in proportion to the significant conversations they have. They come to college with culture-shaped ideas about the nature of success, about finding a good job, and about how all that is related to the learning they will do in college. We need to talk about such things in an encouraging and critical way, not just once during orientation, but over and over again in classes and out. It's probably the most important conversation they can have while in college, yet we often make no special effort to encourage and enable it. What would this cost? Nothing more than we are spending now. (3) We need to encourage our alums to talk about vocation, to share stories about people they've encountered who lived out a vocational approach to their work, their situation, their daily responsibilities. We need to hear the voices of our alums, and to be informed by what they have to tell us about what they've learned and from whom they've learned it. We might be significantly surprised to find out where the lessons of vocation are learned. What would it cost us to initiate such conversations? Very little, and in the long run nothing. An institution that shows some interest in its alums will find that interest more than returned.

We decided to print an issue of *Intersections* that's a good deal "fatter" than usual in order to publish together these pieces all focused on vocation. Let us hear what you think about this issue and about the possibility of other single topic issues in the future.

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VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT—A COMPREHENSIVE COLLEGE PROGRAM

Darrell Jodock

In the fall of 2000 Gustavus Adolphus was one of twenty colleges to receive from the Lilly Endowment a grant for the "Theological Exploration of Vocation." A fourteen-month planning process preceded the grant proposal. What follows will reflect some of the thinking that emerged during those fourteen months, as well as some of my own. I intend that what I say speaks to any of you at any of your institutions, with or without a grant.

First, a preliminary clarification of terms. In what follows, the word "vocation" will *not* refer to a person's occupation, even though today the words "vocation" and "occupation" are often used interchangeably. I want to use the word differently. What comes to mind immediately is a rabbi I once heard speak. He told about a man who worked for the moving company he had hired. Throughout the move the man was so cheerful and so helpful that the rabbi's curiosity was aroused, and he asked him about it. The workman replied (in words to this effect), "Moving is a stressful time for any family. I am a Christian, and my vocation is to try to make it easier for them." His *occupation* was moving furniture; his *vocation* was helping people cope with the stress of moving.¹ In what follows, the word "vocation" will refer to an overarching self-understanding which (a) sees oneself not as an isolated unit but "nested" into a larger community and (b) gives ethical priority to those behaviors that will benefit the community. Usually this self-understanding is built on a foundation of awe and gratitude. I will return to the concept of vocation later, but for now this preliminary clarification is sufficient.

After that note about terminology, we turn to the central issue. Why should a college related to the Lutheran Church be concerned about vocation? For two interlocking reasons:

The first reason has to do with context. Both in his article "Bowling Alone" and in his book by the same title, Robert Putnam² has described the remarkable decline of civic engagement in the United States. The participation of Americans in what he calls "secondary communities"—that is, any regular face-to-face meeting—went down significantly in the second half of the twentieth century. The title of his article came from a statistic he happened to notice: between 1980 and 1993 the number of people bowling rose by 10% but those

participating in bowling leagues decreased by 40%. So, more people were bowling, but more were bowling alone. That statistic prompted him to look at secondary communities in general. He found that during the previous forty years participation had declined in PTA groups (from 12 million in 1964 down to 7 million), the Boy Scouts (down 26% since 1970), the Red Cross (down 61% since 1970), the League of Women Voters (down 42% since 1969), fraternal organizations (Lions, Elks, Shriners, Jaycees, and Masons all down), labor unions (down more than a half since the 1950s), religious organizations, and other similar secondary communities. And between 1973 and 1993 the number of people who said they had attended *any* meeting on town or school affairs during the past year fell by more than a third. In fact, decline occurred across the board, except for tertiary groups (such as AARP) with membership lists but no meetings. And with this decline has come a corresponding loss of what Putnam calls "social capital"—that is, that reservoir of trust and community understanding that allows a neighborhood to sort out and implement its response to a problem or a crisis. He cites survey evidence to show that Americans express a correspondingly lower level of trust in other people and in institutions. In 1960 58% of Americans said most people could be trusted; by 1993 only 37% did. Those who report that they "trust the government in Washington" only "some of the time" or "almost never" rose steadily from 30% in 1966 to 75% in 1992. In Putnam's view, participation in secondary communities and the development of trust and social capital go hand-in-hand.

Putnam does not claim to know the cause of the decline in civic engagement that he describes. The causes are likely complex, but in my judgment mobility is likely one of them. Another is the advent of television, which not only absorbed people's time and attention but also, perhaps unavoidably, conveyed a distorted view of our society, as more dangerous and dysfunctional than it actually is. Healthy families are not the material out of which drama is made, so dysfunctional families dominate "the tube." As reported on National Public Radio, an insurance company was surprised recently when a survey it commissioned showed that almost all respondents said they were happy with their own families while simultaneously believing that families are in bad shape in the country—a matter of perception likely influenced by the way other families are portrayed in movies, in newspapers, and on television. A

number of years ago a study showed that people who watch television all overestimate the crime in their own communities, but the more they watch the more exaggerated their estimates become. Such perceptions are not neutral; they prompt people to withdraw. The more frightening their neighborhood appears, the less likely a person is to participate in secondary communities and be otherwise involved in neighborhood affairs. Another possible cause for the decline in civic engagement is the separation of people's workplace from their place of residence. Moreover, the housing pattern of the typical suburb, with its excessive reliance on automobiles rather than pedestrian traffic, also undermines any operative sense of a neighborhood. And closely connected with the separation of residence and workplace is the fragmentation and compartmentalization of people's lives. They are not "nested" anywhere; they hop from one unconnected perch to another, from their place of residence to a weekend cabin, from their church building to a place of entertainment, from little league practice to the grocery store, from school to music lessons, from day care to their place of business often without any similarity of location or any continuity among persons participating in those various activities.

This context (declining civic engagement) is part of the lived reality of our students. But they are also products of their high schools, and an important feature of today's secondary students is that they are by and large remarkably separated from the world of adults. To be sure, they see authority figures on a daily basis—teachers, principals, parents, and the like—but they often do not witness those adults (or any other adults, for that matter) interacting with each other. Many seldom listen to adult conversations about the community. They do not see how their parents behave at work. They often do not interact with other adults in their neighborhood. So, not only has American involvement in communities declined, but what involvement there is is often not visible to high school students.

The advice young people typically receive is also not helpful. They are told to "do what makes *you* happy," to "express *yourself*," to "develop *your own* talents," to "work hard so that *you* succeed," and so on. In other words, the message is usually couched in individualistic terms. And insofar as others come into the picture at all, the recommended approach is an ethic of mere tolerance, not engagement. The message they receive and internalize goes something like this: "Let your neighbor do his or her own thing, and so long as it is not harming you, it's okay."

"You are responsible only for your own actions, not for anyone else's." And so on.

The net result is that students entering the doors of our colleges often have little experience of vocation, little experience of the dynamics of human community, little experience of community involvement, and little understanding of either vocation or community.

Communities are not led from the outside but from the inside; so a lack of involvement yields an absence of leadership. One type of leader emerges when he/she perceives a problem in the neighborhood that needs to be addressed and goes to work trying to make things better. Another kind of leader wins respect and social influence by his/her consistently wise counsel, his/her understanding of people and sensitivity to the dynamics of a community. In either case, community involvement is essential.

The societal question that needs to be confronted is, once those socialized in a previous era disappear, who will lead our neighborhoods and communities?

The second reason has to do with tradition. The colleges represented at this conference are heirs to a Lutheran tradition. One of its facets is an ethic of community benefit. Although Luther found guidance in the principles he discerned in the Scriptures, his was emphatically *not* a rule-oriented ethic. It was an ethic of "Christian freedom"—that is, freedom not only *from* coercion but also freedom *for* one's neighbors and one's community. He kept thrusting his readers out into the community. If it needs mayor, become a mayor. If the community needs a hangman, become a hangman.³ If it needs a school, help build one.⁴ His primary ethical question was always, what behavior will benefit the community? Or, what course of action will help my neighbor? This made him quite willing to break rules, even to recommend that his cautious colleague Philip Melancthon "sin boldly," if the resulting action would benefit one's neighbor. He saw no problem in allowing one's own reputation to be tarnished, and abandoning what contemporary Americans call their own "rights," in order to benefit the community. His is an ethic of seeking justice and enhancing human dignity, not an ethic of "rights"—and the difference is significant, because "rights" language is individualistic and not communal, and it offers no help when the rights of one person come into conflict with those of another. There is a kind of radicality about Luther's ethic. Non rule-oriented Christian freedom allows one to dig to the root of social problems and propose fresh solutions. Unmerited grace sets a person free

for a radically community-oriented life—so radically community-oriented, in fact, that its preoccupation with another may not only be self-forgetful but even, in a sense, God-forgetful. In comparison with Luther's contemporary, John Calvin, in whose ethic "obedience" plays an important role, Luther directed people's attention primarily to their neighbors, rather than focusing directly on obeying God.

(Given this ethic of community benefit, it is perhaps no accident that the largest social service network in the nation is the Lutheran service agencies, larger than Red Cross and other similar organizations. Nor is it likely an accident that 25% of the not-for-profit nursing homes in the country are Lutheran. Nor that Lutheran Disaster Relief has the reputation for staying the longest to provide assistance after a flood or a tornado or a hurricane. Others come and leave, but LDR is still there months later. Nor that outside the borders of the U.S. during the last half century Lutheran World Relief has led the way in developing indigenously based relief and small-scale development projects wherever the need is the greatest, regardless of the religious, ethnic, or political background of those helped.)

While I lived in Pennsylvania and came to know the Amish, I gained a deep respect for their community-oriented decision-making. A telephone is okay in the barn, because it doesn't disrupt the family, but not allowed in the house, where it does. Riding in a car is permitted; owning one is not, because the resulting mobility pulls people apart. For the Amish, any new technology is on probation until its effect on family and community can be discerned. If it undermines either, the technology is "put away" (i.e., disallowed).⁵ My point, of course, is not that we all follow the Amish pattern, but I do admire the ethical priority that influences their decisions, a priority consistent with Luther's community-oriented ethic.

The Lutheran ethic of community benefit is nested in several other principles that deserve mention.

One such principle is the graciousness and generosity of God. Luther's own religious and theological breakthrough involved a recognition of undeserved giftedness from a God who creates righteousness rather than demands it. That biblical insight ended his struggles in the monastery and energized his teaching, preaching, and writing. The ethic of community benefit is an ethic of human generosity, a correlate of divine generosity.

A second principle is Christian freedom. If the fundamental reality is an undeserved giftedness from God, then there is no basis for coercion. Nothing can be required for an *undeserved* gift, so there is "freedom from." But, as already mentioned, undeserved giftedness does entail generosity toward others, that is, a "freedom for."

A third principle is a profound awareness of the centrality of community. Humans are inherently relational beings, shaped and formed by their connectedness, incomplete and impoverished without it. Nothing that Luther says makes sense of this is not so.

A fourth principle is "God active in the world." God is not portrayed as "above" the world, controlling its outcomes, but deeply involved in a conflicted humanity, seeking to create new possibilities for justice and dignity and peace. The relevant point here is that this God is acting in, with, and under someone who aids us and in, with, and under our own words and deeds when they benefit others. In no way does this principle undermine human agency or freedom; it simply gives ultimate meaning to those behaviors that reflect our connectedness to others.

A fifth principle is "the theology of the cross," meaning in this instance the surprising character of God's presence. Paradoxically God's generosity and our connectedness are often most evident amid pain and suffering. God is, as it were, calling to us to "look over here; this is where I am, here with someone oppressed or in despair."

The Lutheran idea of vocation is that every human being is invited to an ethic of community benefit. That idea of vocation is nested in these five principles, which give it character and focus.

If one facet of the Lutheran tradition is an ethic of community benefit, another facet, to which our colleges are heirs, is Luther's support for education. He recommended universal education for both young men *and* young women in order to equip them for community service and community leadership. Only if they understood human decisions and their consequences, he thought, would they be able to choose wisely for their own communities. With education "they could," in his words, "gain from history the knowledge of what to seek and to avoid in this outward life, and be able to advise and direct others accordingly." Without schools, the result, even of a disciplined upbringing, would be "little more than a certain enforced outward respectability." Underneath, humans would be "nothing but the same old blockheads, unable to converse

intelligently on any subject, or *to assist or counsel anyone*.”⁶

The colleges represented at this conference were founded at various times and with various motivations, but the common thread throughout all those stories is a concern for community leadership—both in the form of educating clergy and in the form of preparing young men and women for lives of citizenship—of ethical commitment, community involvement, and wise decision-making.⁷

So, I believe we should care about vocation because (1) our context needs it and (2) our tradition supports it. The confluence is significant—dare I say, compelling?

I turn now to **the program at Gustavus**. I do so in order to provide some examples of what can be done. The project is just getting started, so it is too soon to assess success or failure. A few things have happened, including two student retreats, a faculty workshop, a series of discussions among the student services staff, selecting a Director for the Center for Vocational Reflection, and influencing the way some staff members deal with students, but most of it will not go into effect until this coming year. Its overall goal is to enhance the possibility that every student will be challenged to define his or her life in terms of vocation. We studiously tried to avoid adding new requirements and the like. We tried instead to infiltrate campus life on a variety of levels so the opportunity would present itself to every student somewhere during his/her years at the College. In the words of the title suggested for this presentation, we tried to create a *comprehensive* program.

I find it helpful to think about our proposal on **three levels**.

The first of these levels is the definition of vocation. Those of us who worked on the proposal decided that we needed to define what we meant by vocation. As the planning committee endeavored to do so, one question with which it wrestled was that of religious orientation. If we were trying to enhance the sense of vocation for all students, while not all are Christian or, if Christian, not Lutheran, how should we proceed? (We recognized that Luther and the Lutheran tradition are of little direct help at this point. Because Luther lived in medieval Christendom, religious pluralism was not something to which he gave much attention. However, Luther did insist that one need not be Christian in order to be a good citizen, and that outlook opens the door to a serious engagement with the

issues of religious pluralism.) There was agreement at Gustavus about what we wanted to do; we wanted to build on the Lutheran tradition of vocation but try to define our purposes in such a way as to be available to persons of other religious traditions, or even no tradition.

Here’s what we formulated:

We understand vocation to be a sense of responsibility encompassing multiple areas of one’s life (work, family, citizenship, etc.) so that the person lives life in such a way as to benefit the community. For the Lutheran tradition out of which Gustavus comes, the most profound foundation for a sense of vocation is gratitude to God for the free gift of God’s love and for the gifts received through others (teachers, parents, mentors, friends, etc.). That same tradition recognizes that vocation may also be grounded in other religious faiths and on other understandings of self and the world, and that diverse perspectives and traditions enrich each individual’s sense of calling.

Closely associated with the sense of responsibility and integral to our understanding of vocation are the wisdom to understand what benefits the community and the courage to act for justice and defend human dignity even when economic, social, and political pressures make it easier not to do so.

I do not want to argue that this formulation is anything special, but it does reflect a consensus that we were trying to be inclusive but not relativistic. That is, a human being can build one’s own vocation on several different religious and philosophical foundations, but vocation cannot be built on just any foundation. It is not, for example, compatible with individualism—that is, the view that one’s life can be whole and complete without deep, meaningful, and ongoing ties with others. It is not compatible with careerism, with complete cynicism, or with an encompassing sense of entitlement. But the concept did seem compatible with the form of Buddhism represented by one member of the planning committee, with the Catholicism of another, and with the agnostic humanism of still another.

The second level is what I will call “middle principles.”

In this setting all I mean by that designation is some answer to the question, “what types of experience tend to enhance a person’s sense of vocation?” If we were to design programs that had that effect, we needed to have some conceptual guidelines; we needed an overall strategy before determining what our tactics would be.

Here we relied heavily on the research done by Sharon Parks and her co-authors (Laurent Parks Daloz and Cheryl and James Keen) in *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*.⁸ They interviewed 100 persons from across the U.S. whose lives exhibited a commitment to the betterment of their communities. A day-long workshop, led by Sharon Parks, provided the planning committee with a thoughtful précis of that research.

My own formulation of our “middle principles” includes the following:

Awareness of the connectedness of one person with another. Any experience which enhances that sense of being “nested” in a larger whole may contribute to a sense of vocation.

A safe place in which to consider alternatives. Many of the people interviewed for *Common Fire* spoke of their dinner table as a safe place where they explored public policy issues, religious differences, and the like. Others from more dysfunctional nuclear families spoke about a grandfather who offered a safe place for conversation while baking doughnuts every Friday night or a grandmother who would talk with her grandchild while shucking peas. But how does this need for a safe place affect a college campus? When I was at Muhlenberg I discovered that many entering students did not dare discuss controversial topics, for fear of too intense a reaction from others. In the context of a course on “Religion and American Culture,” I asked them to form groups of four that included students whose views on abortion were quite different. After establishing some ground rules and providing some basic information, I asked them to meet for at least two 50-minute periods, during which they would seek “common ground.” They were to record those things upon which they agreed and to identify those about which they wished there would have been agreement but there was not. From their written reactions I learned that they were utterly amazed how productive a conversation they had had and amazed they could agree on as much as they did. So we need to be aware that creating in our classrooms and on our campuses a safe space to explore options is a significant challenge and to recognize that some experience of the possibility of common ground is essential for vocation.

Modeling. That is, listening to the concerns and conversations of adults about community matters.

Mentoring. Being asked the right question to prompt

thinking about vocation.

“A constructive engagement with otherness.” The emphasis in this middle principle is not so much on “otherness” as on “constructive engagement.” It should not be confused with discussions of “diversity,” where the emphasis falls on the educational value of exposure to different cultures. The formulation suggested here comes from the authors of *Common Fire* and entails discovering a bond of humanity across some social boundary—a boundary which may have little to do with race or gender or nationality. For one woman in their study, a sense of vocation emerged when she visited a nearby prison and discovered a common bond of humanity with its inmates. She now runs a large program that brings teachers and counselors into the prison to provide opportunities for those inmates. The authors are discussing more than exposure; involvement is required in order to overcome the tendency toward “tribalism”—i.e. clustering together with others who are similar or have similar interests and merely tolerating those who differ.

A sense of agency and influence. That is, an experienced recognition that a person can affect what is happening in his or her community. It is important to recall how significant this factor was in distinguishing the rescuers from the bystanders during the Holocaust. Persons who became rescuers sometimes had as much prejudice as those who did not, but they (a) saw the victims as humans in need and (b) had a greater sense of their own agency. In the words of Samuel and Pearl Oliner, “Rather than regarding themselves as mere pawns, subject to the power of external authorities, they, in significantly larger percentages than the nonrescuers, perceived themselves as actors, capable of making and implementing plans and willing to accept the consequences.” Sometimes leaders and sometimes followers, rescuers felt they could affect events—and they did. To this day they “concentrate less on their own victimization and speak more of others’ pain and others’ losses” and they continue “to be more involved in community activities” than do the bystanders.¹⁰ Any experience that enhances a student’s sense of agency contributes to vocation. Certain kinds of service learning may well be helpful here.

Religious reflection on questions of meaning and purpose in life. Involved here are both space for reflection, and reflection of a particular level and scope that I would call “religious.”

These “middle principles” are a mixed bag and not all equally specific or equally relevant, but they provide the

guidelines for the programs we envisioned.

The third level therefore involves those programs. Here I will proceed in three steps.

Step one. Programs oriented toward encouraging students to consider church professions—clergy, directors of Christian education, youth workers, church musicians, and the like. For simplicity, let me focus on clergy. Clergy are strategically located to give leadership to neighborhoods and communities, but they no longer have the status that they once did. They have less visibility and less social prestige than four or five decades ago. Therefore community leadership does not automatically come with the office. In many settings today it is perfectly possible for a clergy person to relate only to the members of his or her congregation. In other words, it is possible to be a pastor or priest or rabbi and not live out vocation, in the sense we are using the term. The number of seminary students who graduate from our church-related colleges has fallen dramatically in the last three decades. This decline is a matter of concern, because graduates of our Lutheran colleges have, in general (please note, I am quite aware that I am painting with large strokes here and that there are many exceptions to this generalization!), been better educated in the liberal arts, better prepared for theological study, and more able to assume leadership among their peers than those trained in technical fields at state colleges and universities. So our program has three aims: (a) to encourage young men and women to consider church professions, (b) to encourage them to see their role in that office in terms of benefit to the larger community, and (c) to increase the numbers of students in seminary who come from church-related colleges.

The programs aimed at accomplishing these goals include the following:

Provide a fall orientation and a spring retreat for students involved in the Chapel apprentice program—a program under the direction of the Chaplain's office for students both to engage in ministry on campus and to reflect about it.

Provide January-term courses that explore ministry—e.g. one course specifically on church vocations and another on Christian social activists.

Support (in alternate years) "Inside Out," a summer program for high school students that is led in part by Gustavus students and alumni. The purpose is to give

Gustavus students an opportunity to serve as mentors, while also developing the leadership skills of the high school students and encouraging them to attend a church-related college.

Inaugurate (for the intervening summers) a summer high school theological conference on vocation and leadership. The idea here is give selected high school students a taste of serious theology and an opportunity to interact with other young people who have some awareness of a calling into church service.

Provide stipends for summer church camp counselors. Our experience has been that over 60% of the persons who enroll in our pre-theology program cite their experience as a counselor at a church camp as an important part of their journey. The difficulty is that summer earnings from camp counseling are quite meager. The purpose of these stipends is to open the experience of camp counseling to Gustavus students who would otherwise be unable to afford it.

Step two. Programs aimed at all students. What follows is a long list. My purpose is not to recommend the whole list or even to recommend any particular way to implement the middle principles. What I want to demonstrate by going through the list is how multi-faceted and comprehensive our approach intends to be. It is designed to intersect with students in different ways and at different stages during their four years. On the campus of another college, quite a different list of activities might need to be developed, but these are the ones we have identified.

At the beginning of a student's college experience:

Give attention to vocation during summer registration for first-year students (including a component for their parents!) and during orientation after they arrive on campus in the fall.

Provide a vocation-oriented retreat for first-year students during the spring semester.

Inaugurate small group discussions in faculty and staff homes for first-year students.

Along the way:

Support a January-term wilderness experience for 2nd and 3rd year students, involving reflection on the experience of living in community and on vocation.

Introduce a more intentional reflection component into the existing community service program by training student leaders to model and mentor vocation-oriented reflection. This training would occur via a sequence of three retreats, designed for the first, second, and third years of the student's involvement.

Provide a program coordinator to work with the Community Service Office and the Chaplain's Office to organize the training for community service leaders and to enhance service learning among faith-based groups on campus.

As students make career choices:

Bring to campus alumni who exhibit a sense of vocation to meet with students who are considering entering the same profession (e.g. a lawyer to meet with pre-law students).

Provide half-day retreats to consider the vocational implications of post-graduate plans and career choices.

Provide an annual workshop that would address issues faced by persons in the professions, relating to ethics, decision-making, and professional standards of assessment.

For the campus as a whole:

Support interfaith dialogue on campus.

Provide an annual four-day spring conference on vocational reflection that brings to campus a speaker or speakers to make campus-wide presentations, conduct workshops and the like. Topics could include interfaith dialogue, the needs of society, the intersection of theology, stewardship, and the environment, and the like.

For faculty and staff:

Support a mentoring program for new faculty, including a summer workshop for mentors and periodic gatherings of mentors and new faculty.

Provide a half-day orientation on the mission of the College for administrative and support staff

Support a faculty-staff retreat to explore the Lutheran tradition of the college and its church-relatedness and discern how integral issues of vocation, community service, and social justice are to the identity of the College.

Inaugurate a summer faculty development workshop, oriented toward introducing a component on vocational reflection into a new or existing course. This began in June. Eighteen faculty members wrote proposals. Fifteen were accepted. Those fifteen were involved in a three-day workshop in June. Three times during the summer they will meet together in groups of five. And they will gather for 1-½ days in late August.

Support a year-long faculty collaboration seminar on vocation.

It should be emphasized that the programs mentioned above are proposed programs. Each will be evaluated as we go along. There likely will be revisions, additions, and subtractions as we grow into this program.

Step three: The Center for Vocational Reflection. As we surveyed all of these programs, it became clear that coordination was important. There needed to be some central place on campus to serve as a source of support and encouragement for all of those faculty, staff, and students who will be involved in implementing the programs. There also needs to be clearing house to ensure that the programs being supported actually do deal with vocation. We have thus created a Center for Vocational Reflection, with a full-time Director, an administrative assistant, and a ten-member Board whose role is to set policy and oversee its activities. The role of the Director will be to speak to different groups on campus regarding the concept of vocation, to provide opportunities for reflection, to approve retreats and programs and projects which fall under the guidelines of the grant, to encourage new initiatives, and to organize some of the programs already envisioned in the proposal. Much of the actual programming will be done by someone else (staff member, faculty, students), but the Director will be the key link in the network to keep things going and to keep them on track. For the next five years funding for this Center will come from the Lilly grant, but the College has committed itself to raising funds to keep it in operation after that period.

Conclusion. I have mentioned various programs in steps 1-3 as examples of what can be done. They are intended to bring the discussion "down to earth." As indicated earlier, my central purpose has not been to advocate any particular way to implement the middle principles, but to argue that the contemporary context (with its decline of civic engagement) and the tradition of our Lutheran colleges (with its focus on an ethic of community benefit and its vision regarding the purpose of education) together

encourage us to give increased attention to vocation.

A pair of visitors (from Willamette College in Oregon) were on campus July 23rd to examine our project on vocation. They asked what I found most exciting about the program. I responded: the potential to expose students to something that is genuinely counter-cultural, in order to stimulate a different kind of engagement with our society. My hope is that greater attention to vocation will arouse in them a passion for justice and for human dignity and a sense of their own agency. Or, to borrow terminology from holocaust studies, I hope that with a keener sense of

vocation graduates will be “resisters” and “rescuers” amid whatever darkness creeps into our future, rather than “bystanders,” or (God-forbid) “perpetrators” of that darkness. From the Nazi era and similar incidents since 1945 we already know how critical for others those different responses of very ordinary citizens can be. My argument is that increasing the number of resisters and rescuers among our graduates is a goal worthy of our attention and of our collective energies.

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¹ An occupation *may* be a vocation (in sense I am using the term) if it is an avenue by which a person benefits the larger community, but occupations are not automatically understood this way.

² Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy*, VI (January, 1995), pp. 65-78, and *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

³ See, for example, Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed,” *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), LXV, 95.

⁴ See Martin Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), LXV, 347-378.

⁵ For more information, see Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

⁶ Luther, “To the Councilmen,” pp. 369 and 368. Emphasis added.

⁷ For a fuller discussion of the topic of the Lutheran underpinnings for liberal arts education, see Darrell Jodock, “The Lutheran Tradition and the Liberal Arts College: How Are They Related?” *Called to Serve: St. Olaf and the Vocation of a Church College* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1999), pp. 13-36, and “Freedom, Humor, and Community: A Lutheran Vision of Higher Education,” Inaugural lecture for the Drell and Adeline Bernhardson Chair in Lutheran Studies, Gustavus Adolphus College, September 21, 1999 (available on the web at www.gustavus.edu/oncampus/academics/religion/jod_inag.html).

⁸ Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

⁹ This term is borrowed from James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America’s Culture War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), pp. 177 and 223. See also Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 150-193.

RENEWING A SENSE OF VOCATION AT LUTHERAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: INSIGHTS FROM THE PROJECT AT VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY

Marcia Bunge

Introduction

I have been asked to speak to you today about Valparaiso University's "Project on Theological Exploration of Vocation," a nearly two million dollar project funded by the Lilly Endowment. As director of the process for writing and submitting the grant proposal, I was privileged to work with many people on our campus in shaping this project. Since institutions are invited by the Endowment to apply for the grants, my purpose today is not to offer advice about submitting a proposal or to focus on the details of our project. Rather, I want to use my remarks to generate a lively discussion among us about why it is important to strengthen reflection on vocation on all of our campuses and about how this can be done, with or without outside funding. Therefore, before I introduce you to our project, I want to spend some time highlighting the importance of the concept of vocation for all of our institutions: how it informs our mission statements; why it is such a powerful resource for all of our students today, regardless of their religious backgrounds; and why all Lutheran colleges and universities need to renew and invigorate attention to vocation. I then want to outline eight important ways of creating a space for students to reflect on vocation and to discern a sense of calling that we discovered while formulating our grant and that you can easily support on your campuses. It turns out that many of these activities require more time than money to support, and they have been important vehicles of moral and spiritual formation throughout the Christian tradition. After devoting the bulk of my remarks to emphasizing why we should all renew attention to vocation and some general ways this can be done, I will briefly outline the particular activities of Valparaiso's project, and I will close with some of the challenges that renewed reflection on vocation has created for us. Serious reflection on vocation is both an exciting and a disturbing enterprise because it causes you to reexamine your own life and the institutions in which you work and to reconsider your obligations and responsibilities. If you reflect seriously on vocation, then you no longer feel comfortable conducting "business as usual." I'd therefore like to share some of the most challenging and troubling questions we face as we try to carry out our project with integrity.

I. Vocation and the Mission of Lutheran Colleges and Universities

Although Lutheran colleges and universities all seek to provide their students with a strong liberal arts education, they all emphasize, in various ways, that part of their mission is to prepare students for service to the church and the wider community. Thus, while Lutheran colleges and universities, like all colleges and universities, strive for academic excellence, they also emphasize exploration of faith and service to others. Their mission statements therefore typically include a commitment to helping students reflect on how their education and career choices might be informed by their deepest moral and religious beliefs and conducted in service to church and society.

This emphasis on service to church and society is deeply informed by the Lutheran concept of vocation. Indeed, the notion of vocation has always been central to the mission of Lutheran institutions and to Lutheran accounts of the Christian life in general. All believers, Martin Luther taught, are called to use their own unique gifts and talents to glorify God and to love and serve the neighbor. Although Luther believed that one is saved or justified by faith alone (not by works), he also emphasized that faith frees and empowers one to love and serve others and to seek justice. In this sense, all Christians share a common "Vocation": they are all called to express their faith in works of love and service within the church and the broader culture. As Luther wrote, "Faith is truly active through love, that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done."¹ No matter what daily tasks Christians perform or specific careers they pursue, they are all called to love God and to love and serve the neighbor, especially those in need. This sense of calling is built on Jesus' command to his followers to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" and to "love your neighbor as yourself."²

Although Luther claimed all believers share this common Christian calling, he also emphasized that they honorably carry it out in a wide variety of specific "vocations," within specific duties and offices that occupy each human life. Luther thereby firmly rejected the idea, common in his time, that people who enter the priesthood or who become monks and nuns are more pleasing to God than bakers, shoemakers, politicians, parents, or others immersed in

affairs of the world. He recognized that the Christian life and its practice of love of the neighbor can be lived out in diverse ways. The many duties and responsibilities we carry out in our personal and professional lives—whether as teachers, politicians, doctors, lawyers, firefighters, parents, or spouses—are all vehicles of God’s care and redemption of the world. Thus, Luther enlarged the concept of vocation by honoring activities outside the priesthood or monastic life; by honoring not only paid work but also our duties as parents, spouses, sons, daughters, and citizens; and by honoring our role as citizens and the need to contribute to the common good. His ideas about vocation have been highly influential not only in the church but also in Western culture. At the same time, Luther did not ignore the importance of excellence in church leadership. He understood the need for well-educated pastors and musicians who live out their vocations in the employment of the church.

Vocation within the Lutheran tradition, then, is a rich theological concept and a powerful resource for all of our students today, regardless of their religious backgrounds. It invites us to reflect on a number of issues such as: our service to the needs of the neighbor; our unique gifts and talents; our multiple duties in life as parents, spouses, sons and daughters, citizens, and professionals; and our relationship to God. Because the mission and identity of Lutheran colleges and universities are deeply informed by the concept of vocation, we hope that as our students think about their life goals, they are asking themselves more than the typical set of career questions: How should I make a living? What kind of career would make me happy? Do I have the skills to succeed in my field? Will I earn enough money? At a Lutheran college or university we are hoping they are also asking questions related to a deeper sense of vocation—to a deeper sense of calling: What are my special gifts and talents? How can I best use them to love and serve others? How can I contribute to the common good? Is there a larger purpose to my life? What is God calling me to do? Do my goals fit with my values and beliefs? If I get married, if I have children, will I be able to balance my commitments to work with obligations to my family and my community? We also hope that at Lutheran colleges and universities students are not pondering these questions by themselves—but that they are also finding friends, professors, and advisers who are helping them address these questions and who are asking these questions themselves. Whether Lutheran, Catholic, atheist, or Buddhist, all of our students are searching for purpose and meaning in their lives and for ways to contribute to society. Lutheran institutions assume that they are all greatly aided

in their search by engaging in serious and extended conversation about vocation and by having plenty of opportunities to explore a sense of calling.

Contemporary Challenges Call for Renewed and Invigorated Attention to Vocation at Lutheran Colleges and Universities

Unfortunately, several contemporary challenges have made it more difficult for Lutheran colleges and universities, including our own, to ensure that students are indeed introduced to theological ideas about vocation or have had opportunities to explore more deeply their own sense of vocation. These contemporary challenges make it necessary for Lutheran institutions of higher education to renew and invigorate their attention to vocation.

For example, one can no longer take for granted, even at a university rooted in the Lutheran tradition, that the concept of vocation is widely understood or even part of a student’s or a faculty member’s vocabulary. Some students have had little or no contact with the church and have not discussed issues of faith even with their parents. Even students brought up within the church now arrive at the university with little knowledge of their tradition or the historic language of faith, let alone with an informed theological understanding of vocation. Moreover, many professors and staff members come from religious or secular traditions that have not emphasized the notion of vocation. Thus, they are often uneasy speaking about their own lives and work in terms of vocation and certainly do not feel equipped to discuss vocation with students.

In addition, we live in a particular cultural context that undermines a rich theological understanding of vocation. In a consumer culture, focused on the accumulation of material goods and wealth, the term vocation, even within the church, is often reduced to refer only to a paid occupation, whether a particular “worldly” profession or ordained ministry. Here, one’s vocation is simply the way one earns a living. Because our culture also glorifies individualism and self-fulfillment, speaking about vocation can also sometimes be a way of simply adding a spiritual gloss to a subjective sense of self-fulfillment. Here, one’s vocation is what one does, whether paid or not, to find personal meaning and happiness. In this cultural context, in which vocation is understood as either paid work or self-fulfillment, there is little room for reflection on the relation of work to one’s faith, to family life, to civic and environmental responsibilities, or to God’s care and redemption of the world.

Another challenge within contemporary culture for the church and for church-related colleges is that, even in the church, there is a tendency to "rank" certain kinds of paid work as more "worthy" than others. Some of my business students tell me, for example, that in their circle of Christian friends, medicine and law are seen as "worthy" professions but business is not. Even just a few years ago, pastors and priests were viewed, even by many outside the church, not only as important religious leaders but also as valued civic leaders. Now, however, becoming a pastor or priest is generally disrespected or viewed with indifference. Thus, we find even highly talented young people who sense a call to ordained ministry being discouraged by parents, friends, and teachers from entering the ministry and encouraged to pursue more lucrative or publicly respected careers.³ In contrast to this "ranking" mentality, the concept of vocation claims that all occupations that serve the common good, when properly carried out with justice and compassion, have dignity and are expressions of God's will.

Given these and other challenges, Lutheran institutions of higher education need to be more intentional about helping students gain access to ideas about vocation and helping them reflect on their own lives in terms of vocation. The concept of vocation is a valuable resource that is rooted deep within our institutional missions for prompting serious reflection on faith, love, and public service. If we want students to think about work more than as just a way to earn money or as a form of self-fulfillment, if we want students to ask questions about the deeper moral and spiritual dimensions to their life goals, if we want students to live out lives of service with their particular gifts, then the best way for Lutheran colleges and universities to begin is by renewing and invigorating attention to the rich concept of vocation that they have inherited.

II. The Lilly Endowment's "Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation"

The Lilly Endowment has recognized these challenges for church-related colleges and has understood that religious ideas about vocation can be a tremendous resource for young people, particularly during the college years, when they struggle with so many questions about who they are, what they believe, and what they are meant to do. Leaders of the Endowment have also supported programs that strengthen the church and build community, and they have realized that exploring the concept of vocation is one way to foster church leadership and civic engagement. Therefore, two years ago the Endowment started a new initiative called "Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation." This initiative has two central aims: 1) to

help students at church-related colleges and universities to gain access to religious wisdom about vocation as they make choices about their future careers and commitments; and 2) to strengthen leadership in the church by providing talented young people with opportunities to explore full-time ministry, either lay or ordained, as their life's work.

In 1999 the Endowment invited Valparaiso University and approximately thirty-five other church-related colleges to apply for grants that would address these two aims. Many members of the University worked together to formulate our grant proposal. Two committees of ten people, representing various departments and campus offices, generated initial ideas for the project. These proposals were then evaluated and refined in conversation with many other members of the faculty and staff, with students, and with outside consultants.⁴

As we formulated these proposals in conversation with one another, one of the questions we kept asking was: What is already working on our campus? What kinds of activities and programs are already helping students to gain insight from theological ideas about vocation, to develop morally and spiritually, and to grow as leaders in church and society?

III. Ways of Creating a Space for Reflecting on Vocation and Discerning a Sense of Calling

As we spoke to students about activities and programs most meaningful to them, eight general kinds of activities emerged. All of them are valuable ways of creating a space for reflecting on vocation and discerning a sense of calling. If one looks back at the history of Christianity, then one recognizes that these kinds of activities have commonly been used throughout the Lutheran tradition and throughout other faith traditions for moral and spiritual formation. If one looks, too, at recent sociological and psychological studies on moral or spiritual development,⁵ they also confirm the value of these kinds of activities for young people today. Most of these activities do not cost much money to support but do require the time and attention of adults, whether they are parents, pastors, professors, friends, or mentors. I would like to mention briefly these eight general activities or "doorways" through which students can begin to reflect on faith and vocation. There are, of course, many more, but these were the most significant on our campus. By outlining them, you will understand the basis for many of our project's activities.

1) Contact with Caring Adults and Exposure to Role Models. We all recognize the importance of caring adults

and role models in the lives of young people. Students told us how much they appreciated contact with professors who cared about them, whether that contact came through class work, sports activities, or events sponsored by the chapel. Although students appreciated long-term mentoring relationships with professors, I was surprised how meaningful even passing remarks by professors can be to them, especially comments about their particular gifts and talents.⁶ Students also see alumni as role models. Students told us how much they appreciated particular programs, such as Christ College's annual alumni panel, that bring back outstanding graduates to campus to speak about the ways they are trying to integrate their careers with their faith, family life, and public service. Having this exposure to people from different walks of life who are models of service in their communities gave students concrete possibilities for thinking and acting in life-giving ways. Students also see one another as role models. We believe that one reason more of our graduates are attending seminary is that over the past few years we have attracted several outstanding students who intend to become ordained ministers or full time church musicians. Because these students are respected by their peers, they are prompting other highly talented students to at least imagine, if not seriously consider, the possibility of a full-time church vocation.⁷

2) Prayer and Spiritual Fellowship. As we see throughout the Christian tradition, prayer and intimate spiritual fellowship have always been important for reflection on one's calling, and they are important practices for students today. On our campus, for example, students appreciated a program directed by two theology professors⁸ who invited students interested in church vocations to meet every other week for fellowship and prayer. This group also participated in an annual spiritual retreat. This kind of close spiritual fellowship attracted many students and created a sense of community, and the group grew from less than a dozen students to now nearly seventy.

3) Leadership in Worship. Students who helped lead worship services, whether as sacristans, as members of chapel choirs, or as members of "Soul Purpose," the University's liturgical drama group,⁹ mentioned how formative these leadership experiences were for them in terms of reflecting on their faith and sense of calling. Although we cannot yet prove this as a fact, we have found that a high percentage of students who do take up leadership roles in worship are not only leaders in other areas of campus life but also later become active leaders in their churches and in their communities. This makes sense because as students take on these roles, they learn skills applicable to any parish setting, they gain a deeper

understanding of worship, and they are prompted to reflect on their faith and their own relationship to the church.

4) Music and the Arts. The arts, especially music, have always been an important vehicle of moral and spiritual formation in the Christian tradition, and they are highly valued in Lutheran contexts. The moral and spiritual significance of music for Lutherans goes back to Luther's own emphasis on the importance of music and the arts and to the long and rich musical tradition in the Lutheran church. For Luther, music was not simply an ornament for worship service but rather a vital element of human existence, an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and a powerful vehicle for spreading the gospel. He emphasized the value of music in these bold words, "Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise."¹⁰ Because of the vital role of music and the arts in religious life, he specifically encouraged Christians to train young people in these areas.¹¹

5) Service. Students learn a great deal about themselves and their convictions as they help others. If you know students who have volunteered on your campus or worked for agencies, such as the Lutheran Volunteer Corp, then you know this is the case. As many studies about service learning and volunteer work confirm, participating in service projects with caring adults helps young people mature emotionally, morally, and spiritually.¹²

6) Cross-cultural Experiences. We all know how living in another country or culture raises profound questions about one's identity and convictions, and many of our students told us about their formative experiences abroad. Travel courses were especially meaningful to students because they were able to be in conversation with professors over an extended period of time and in settings that stimulated reflection on a whole range of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

7) Church Camps and Wilderness Experiences. There are many examples within the Christian tradition of how close contact with the natural world has been a source of spiritual growth and inspiration. Many biblical passages emphasize the beauty and goodness of creation and the importance of going to the wilderness for spiritual renewal, cleansing, or insight. Early in the Christian tradition, monks retreated to the wilderness to meditate and wrote eloquently about the insights they gained about God's creation and their place in it. The important relationship between the spiritual life and the natural world is also found in the works of Celtic Christians, medieval mystics, St. Francis, and many Christian writers today, such as Leonardo Boff or Wendell Berry. Many of our students echoed this long tradition as they told of their life-changing experiences at Bible Camps, church camps, or at wilderness retreat centers, such as

Holden Village.

8) Study and Reflection. In most faith traditions, reading, study, and reflection are not just the practical means of getting a job but are also moral and spiritual acts. This was the case for many of our students, as they told about books and courses that challenged them not only to refine their skills but also to rethink their convictions. Within the Christian tradition, study of the Bible is the centerpiece of moral and spiritual formation, and it should be part of the curriculum at any college of the church. In addition, most Christian traditions, including Lutheran, emphasize the importance of a strong liberal arts education that incorporates the close reading of a wide range of texts because this kind of education not only strengthens one's ability to interpret scripture but also helps one gain the skills and knowledge necessary to use one's gifts to serve others and contribute to the common good. Writing to political leaders, Luther told them that well-educated citizens serve both church and society and are "a city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength."¹³ He also advised them that "no effort or expense should be spared to provide good libraries" filled with books from all the arts and sciences.¹⁴

Although we did not start writing our grant with a list of these eight activities, you will see how versions of all eight are woven into our project. I am delighted this is the case because students have different interests and backgrounds, and the "doorways" through which they can best enter reflection on vocation vary.

IV. Specific Aims and Activities of "The Project on Theological Exploration of Vocation at Valparaiso University"

Keeping in mind what we had learned from students, recognizing the centrality of vocation to the mission of our university, and taking into account the strengths of our own existing programs, the gifts of faculty and staff, and the current needs of students, we developed our project on "Theological Exploration of Vocation."

The project has two overarching programs with two central aims. The first program, the CAMPUS-WIDE PROGRAM, aims to help all students explore theological understandings of vocation and to provide them with opportunities to reflect more deeply on their own vocations and to grow as leaders in church and society. The second program, the CHURCH VOCATIONS PROGRAM, aims to strengthen opportunities for talented students to explore full-time church vocations and to strengthen the preparation of students who expect to enter full-time

church ministries. In other words, this second program is directed primarily to students who are interested in becoming pastors, deacons, or full time church musicians. Each of these two major programs includes several specific activities.

The CAMPUS-WIDE PROGRAM has two parts. The strategy of the first part, entitled "Academic Activities," is to incorporate the theological exploration of vocation more fully into the academic life of the University, thereby creating a shared discourse on vocation among faculty, staff, and students. Although members of the community come from different economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, we want all members to be able to carry on an informed and lively campus-wide conversation about vocation. We want vocation to be part of the shared academic discourse on campus. The ways in which we hope to develop this shared discourse include:

- 1) incorporating theological texts on vocation in the University's Freshman Core Courses; helping faculty develop courses that incorporate theological exploration of vocation; sponsoring an annual weeklong series of lectures, panels, and conversations on vocation (which all members of the campus community will be encouraged to attend); funding Alumni/ae Panels on Faith, Work, and Public Life (in all seven of the University's schools and colleges);
- 2) inviting new tenure-track faculty and administrators to participate in a nine-day seminar on "Vocation, the University, and the Church" at the conclusion of their first or second academic year at VU (this program will greatly strengthen our orientation for new faculty and administrators);
- 3) providing workshops on vocation for members of the faculty and for administrative staff who advise students on a regular basis about career plans (such as those in Admissions and the Career Center).

As you can see, through these activities, a large number of people on our campus will be introduced to theological ideas of vocation and will have had opportunities to reflect on their own work in the light of these ideas: all first year students; all professors teaching First Year Core Courses—some 43 each year; all professors who develop courses that incorporate ideas about vocation; many of those who serve as student advisers; and all new faculty and administrators. Furthermore, all members of the community will learn more about vocation through the weeklong series of campus-wide lectures and panels. Through these activities we hope we can foster a shared

discourse on our campus that helps members of the community at least engage, if not appropriate, an informed and theologically rich understanding of vocation.

The strategy of the second part of the Campus-Wide Program, entitled "Chapel Activities" is to build on this shared discourse and to provide students with structured opportunities to reflect more deeply on their own vocations and to grow as leaders in church and society. In our setting, we think the best way this can happen is through three particular "doorways":

- 1) offering discernment retreats (in which students can reflect on and discuss vocation in a spiritual setting of prayer, silence, worship, and fellowship);
- 2) providing several liturgical leadership opportunities in the Chapel (such as paid internships and apprenticeships for students who help lead worship; retreats for members of the chapel choirs; and trips for VU liturgical ensembles);
- 3) supporting projects on social justice and environmental responsibility that integrate service and reflection (student groups will be able to apply for grants that allow them to develop service initiatives on campus or to volunteer in service projects off campus).

The second major program of Valparaiso's Project is The Church Vocations Program. This program consolidates and strengthens many of the University's existing efforts to recruit and prepare talented students specifically for church ministries by offering five opportunities that integrate vocational discernment, academic preparation, and moral and spiritual formation:

- 1) Church Vocations Symposium (a bi-weekly symposium for students interested in pursuing a church vocation that emphasizes fellowship and spiritual reflection);
- 2) Mentoring Program (students have the opportunity to seek out and foster a mentoring relationship with a respected ordained minister or lay leader);
- 3) Exploring Church Vocations Excursions (students who are interested in considering the possibility of full-time service in the church are able to explore various ministries of the ELCA and LCMS through trips to Chicago and St. Louis);
- 4) Advanced Seminar Led by a Senior Tutor (an outstanding professor will offer an advanced seminar for church vocations students on a topic of interest to them);
- 5) Visiting Minister in Residence (each semester a leader in the church will be invited to campus to share his or her gifts for seven to ten days).

One of the main strengths of the project as a whole is that is truly campus-wide: it is not the possession of one department or one person, and it offers varied opportunities to a wide range of students by incorporating so many forms of the eight "doorways" mentioned earlier. Through the project's many activities, we hope that all members of our community discover how intellectually, morally, and spiritually stimulating reflection on vocation can be.

V. Challenging Questions Prompted by Reflection on Vocation

Of course, as we reflect more seriously on vocation, and as we seek to carry out this project on our campus, we have been faced with a number of challenging questions. Reflecting on vocation does not provide us with a convenient rubber stamp of approval on our lives or institutions; rather, it raises profound questions about our personal, professional, and civic obligations and responsibilities. I'd therefore like to share four of the most challenging and troubling questions we face as we try to carry out our project with integrity. These are questions that all those carrying out vocation projects on other campuses have also been forced to address and questions that perhaps you, too, are raising in your community.

- 1) What can faith traditions learn from one another about the strengths and limitations of their concepts of vocation and about the process of discerning one's calling? For example, a Lutheran concept of vocation rightly honors the work of many professions even as it lifts up the broader call for Christians to love and serve the neighbor, whatever professions they pursue.

Nevertheless, as Karl Barth and Stanley Hauerwas claim, Lutherans are still sometimes guilty of reducing vocation to paid work or careers, thereby easily forgetting that their deepest calling is to follow Christ. Here, Lutherans can learn much from Mennonites or other faith traditions that emphasize discipleship. Furthermore, because Lutherans and other Protestants are sometimes tempted to reduce vocation to paid work, they often neglect other crucial elements of a broader sense of vocation, particularly the need for rest and meditation--the need for time to listen to the One who calls us. Here, Catholics have an overabundance of riches in their insightful and varied traditions of meditation and spiritual direction, and Protestants can learn much from them. However, Catholics still struggle with the widespread misperception that the term vocation is reserved for those called to the priesthood or to religious orders, and they try to correct this

misperception by building on Lutheran ideas. All faith traditions are seeking to articulate a meaningful vision of vocation within our contemporary context. What can we learn from one another in the process?

2) How well do we invite parents of students into our conversation about vocation? Although we certainly hope that colleges and universities shape the moral and spiritual lives of young people, we must humbly admit, as Aristotle recognized thousands of years ago, and as studies of faith formation emphasize today, that parents, in most cases, are and should be the primary agents of moral and spiritual formation in their children. Some parents carry out this task better than others, but all of them are looking for ways to connect with their children and to find ways to discuss questions of meaning and value with them. Are there ways that colleges of the church can invite parents of students into reflection on vocation, so that parents and students share a common and meaningful discourse for speaking about goals and commitments?

3) How well do we help faculty and staff reflect on their vocation? Do we recognize that living out one's calling is a life-long process? Students are not the only ones in our communities who struggle with issues related to vocation. Faculty and staff also face serious questions about what matters in life as their circumstances change: as they change jobs, get married, have children, or face family health problems. Since all of us are continually challenged to face new life circumstances and accept new responsibilities in our families and communities, we must continually reevaluate and renew our sense of calling. As communities of faith and learning concerned about vocation, do we offer opportunities not just for students but also for faculty and staff to reflect on vocation?

4) How well do our everyday institutional practices reflect our convictions about vocation? In other words, how well do our day to day institutional practices and policies reflect a commitment to love and serve the neighbor and to seek justice? To what extent are the foundations of our mission being eroded by economic pressures and corporate models of "how to do business"? As I speak to my colleagues, or colleagues at other institutions that received Lilly grants, these are perhaps the most troubling questions for us as we seek to carry out these grants with integrity. Our concerns typically circle around four major areas:

Responsibilities to Families with Children. Are we helping faculty and staff live out their vocations by acknowledging the difficulties of balancing commitments

to work, family, and the community? Can we do a better job of supporting families by offering adequate health care benefits, parental leave policies, or child care?

Just treatment of those on campus with the lowest paid positions, typically housekeeping staff, dining staff, and adjunct faculty. How do we speak with integrity about vocation when people working on our campuses feel exploited or underpaid?

Environmental Responsibility. Since colleges of the church are rooted in a rich theological vision of vocation and the goodness of creation, they should be models environmental responsibility. However, they all too often mimic the destructive habits of our consumer culture. If we take service to the neighbor and future generations seriously, then we have to be concerned about how much garbage we generate; how much energy we use; and how we can protect our soil and groundwater.

Obligations to the wider community. In what ways, if any, do we contribute to the surrounding community? Do our neighbors view our institution as a civic asset or as an institution that "takes care of its own." Although our mission is not to be a social service agency, does not our mission call us to attend to needs in the wider community and contribute to public life?

These are the kinds of tough questions we need to address if we at all care about the identity and mission of Lutheran colleges and universities, if we take vocation seriously, and if we want members of our community to at least engage, if not appropriate, some of the wisdom about what matters that is embedded in the concept of vocation.

Conclusion

Of course, in any project that aims to shape the moral and spiritual lives of young people, there are paradoxes; and the Lutheran concept of vocation acknowledges many of these paradoxes. For example, even as the Lutheran concept of vocation calls us to take seriously the task of educating young people and helping them mature in faith and service to others, it emphasizes that genuine faith and service ultimately come through God's grace and God's activity. Even as the Lutheran concept of vocation also calls us to develop institutional practices that reflect our deepest convictions, it warns us that human self-interest and power struggles often mess up our best intentions. However, recognition of such paradoxes does not mean those at Lutheran institutions must surrender to cynicism, pessimism, or indifference. A Lutheran view of vocation is also grounded in a trust and confidence that there is a God who sustains the world, who loves and forgives us, even when we fall short, and who empowers us to use our

gifts and talents to love and serve those in our midst. By taking seriously the notion of vocation that shapes the mission of all of our institutions, I hope that all of us are able to discover a deeper sense of our own calling and to

address both the yearning of students for lives that matter and the needs of church and society for leadership and service.

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¹ "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, edited by Timothy Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 617.

² Mark 12:28-24; Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28.

³ Because fewer talented young people are entering the ministry, there is a marked lack of creative and vibrant leaders in the church today, as a recent study by the Auburn Center and several other studies confirm. See, for example, Elizabeth Lynn and Barbara G. Wheeler, "Missing Connections: Public Perceptions of Theological Education and Religious Leadership," (Auburn Studies, No. 6, September 1999).

⁴ Outside consultants included Dr. Timothy Lull (President of Pacific Lutheran Seminary and Luther scholar), Dr. Jonathan Strandjord (Director of Theological Education of the ELCA), Richard Hardel (Director of the Youth and Family Institute of Augsburg College), Brian Johnson (Campus Pastor at Gustavus Adolphus College), Michael Beaty (Baylor University), and Paul Koch (an outstanding VU graduate who is currently attending Luther Seminary).

⁵ See, for example, studies by the Search Institute and the Youth and Family Institute of Augsburg College.

⁶ For example, I once had a bright and compassionate engineering student in class. I wrote on the back of one of his essays that he had a lot of gifts for ministry, wondering if he had ever thought of becoming a pastor. Later that week he came in my office. He told me that another professor had just mentioned the same thing, and he admitted that he had always thought he had a call to ministry but had never been encouraged to pursue it. These almost off-handed remarks by two professors prompted a process of discernment that eventually led him to the seminary.

⁷ We are able to attract these outstanding students, in part, through the Allen Scholarship Program, which provides generous scholarships to top students seeking church vocations (up to full tuition, fees, and room and board). The Allen scholars currently enrolled at VU share a deep commitment to the church and to practices of faith. They are also highly articulate and intellectually gifted. Although most of them come from Lutheran congregations (and are fairly evenly divided between ELCA and LCMS), a few are Presbyterians or Episcopalians. The Allen scholars also come to VU with impressive records of service to the broader community, and many of them are currently leaders in a wide array of on- and off-campus activities.

⁸ Dr. David Weber and Dr. David Truemper.

⁹ Directed by Dr. John Steven Paul

¹⁰ Forward to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae iuconudae in Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 53:323.

¹¹ In one passage Luther claims, "I would like to see all the arts, especially music, used in the service of Him who gave and made them. I therefore pray that every pious Christian would be pleased with this [the use of music in the service of the gospel] and lend his help if God has given him like or greater gifts. As it is, the world is too lax and indifferent about teaching and training the young for us to abet this trend." "Preface to the Wittenberg Hymnal" (1524) in *Luther's Works*, 53:316.

¹² Strommen and Hardel cite one study that found "involvement in service proved to be a better predictor of faith maturity than participation in Sunday School, Bible study, or worship services." The study also disclosed that youth who reported growth in their faith during the previous two or three years were the ones most likely to have been involved in "helping people who are poor or hungry or helping people in town or city" or "spending time in helping projects through the church." They also found that service activities deepened a young person's relation to the church. Apparently, involvement in service activities helps all youth, whether in the church or not. In a study of public school youth, those who participated in service activities were "half as likely to be involved at risk behaviors as nonservers." Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel, *Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* (Winona, MI: Saint Mary's Press, 2000), 94-95.

¹³ Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" (1524) in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 45:356.

¹⁴ Luther, 45:373.

MARTIN LUTHER, VOCATION, AND CHURCH COLLEGES: NURTURING FUTURE LEADERS FOR CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Richard W. Rouse

Did you know that thirteen of sixteen newly elected bishops in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America received their undergraduate degree from a Lutheran college or university? Did you know that two of the sixteen are from the PLU class of 1971! Others coming from ELCA schools include graduates of Augustana (Sioux Falls), Concordia (Moorhead), Gettysburg, Gustavus Adolphus, Luther, Newberry, and St. Olaf. 75% of those who make up the new Conference of Bishops (or 49 out of 65) will be products of our Lutheran schools.¹ These kinds of numbers are not confined to bishops or pastors. Many leaders in business, in government, in the medical field, in education, and in community service are likewise products of a church related college or university.

Educating for Lives of Service

The basis premise of my lecture is this: Our *ELCA colleges and universities are training grounds of future leaders for our church and community*. Why do I say that? Because of the principles of Lutheran higher education upon which our learning enterprise is based. One of those is Luther's doctrine of vocation which was the inspiration for PLU's motto "educating for lives of service, inquiry, leadership, and care". A place like Pacific Lutheran University is unique because we are not just about the business of educating students to receive a degree or providing them with skills to be successful in their future occupations, but we are also preparing them to live meaningful lives that will be filled with purpose. Our church colleges offer a value-added education that enriches mind, body, and spirit. Our genuine hope is that the graduates of our schools will leave our institutions with a greater sense of service and a belief that they can and will make a difference in their community and in the world. And many have and are doing so today.

One of the major contributions of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was Luther's doctrine of the **Priesthood of All Believers**. Building on imagery found in first Peter, chapter two, Luther believed that all Christians—not just those who were ordained or belonged to holy orders--were called in their baptism to be priests. This meant that all believers were to share the good news of Jesus Christ and to be "little Christs" to their neighbor. For Luther, a person's primary vocation (or calling) as a

Christian was to serve God and neighbor in all arenas of life—at home, at work, at school, at church, or in the community. Every Christian, then, was to live out their faith in daily life using their particular gifts and talents in service to God and others.

Martin Luther sought to reform a whole medieval class system that elevated some jobs or stations above others. In his 1521 writing, *On Monastic Vows*, Luther rejected the notion that priests and monks held a superior vocational status. In a society that believed those who chose religious orders were somehow more holy or closer to God, Luther argued that butchers or bakers were also blessed with a holy calling—sing the tools of their trade to serve the neighbor in need. He once made the scandalous claim that a washer woman and a bishop were of equal status before God as long as both were faithful to their calling to serve Christ and others in their daily life and work. Hence Luther's comment: "if everyone served his or her neighbor, then the whole world would be filled with divine service."²

Luther also sought to distinguish between **vocation** (one's calling to serve) and **station** (the place where one lives out one's calling). Luther believed that each station (e.g. teacher, politician, banker) was established by God to serve the needs of human beings in society. Each station is equally necessary for human life and as such each had the potential of being a place for divine service. Luther broke with the tradition that one is born into a particular station or was destined to remain there for life. His writings suggest that advancement to any station must be possible for those who obtain the proper education and training. Reflecting on the reformer's influence on changing societal norms, Hans Schwarz concludes "Luther's teaching on vocation is still able in our own day to help counter the individualistic and self-centered striving for one's own advantage, and to allow us to rediscover the fact that our work is meant to serve the common good."³

(Let me illustrate this further with a short video clip from a new drama called "Holy Odors" written by Pastor John Trump. It is about Luther's teaching on vocation and features theater students from Pacific Lutheran University where the play premiered this past February. To set the stage: a co-ed is in the university library studying for a class on Martin Luther. She falls asleep and suddenly a

figure from the past appears and begins to talk with her.)

Paths Unknown: Developing Vocations of High School and College Youth

This past year, several of our institutions collaborated on a major project called "*Paths Unknown: Where is God Leading Me?*" Focusing on the theme of vocation and discernment, the program was billed as an innovative way to help Lutheran high school and college age youth explore their future using the latest in web-based and interactive video technology.

Five educational institutions in the Western Mission Cluster agreed to partner together in this project. Staff from California Lutheran University, Luther Seminary, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Pacific Lutheran University, and Trinity Lutheran College were joined by representatives from the ELCA Division for Ministry, the Faith and Life Forum, and Fishers Net. Together we formed a project team to develop the format, content, and delivery system that would enable us to share resources on vocation and discernment with youth across the Western half of the United States.

The team agreed on several hoped for outcomes:

To help youth understand Luther's concept of vocation and make connection between their baptism and call to ministry in daily life.

To assist them in discerning God's plan for their life and ministry.

To make them aware of the need and opportunity for full time church related service.

To recruit youth for our church colleges (that integrate faith and values with learning).

To recruit youth for seminary and the ordained ministry.

Multiple delivery systems were considered to be imperative because of the scope of the project. A dedicated web site was developed by FALF board member Boyce Lawton of Wofford College; and continues to be available as a resource that is maintained by the Faith and Life Forum. The address is: godleading.com. The web site was designed to contain a variety of resources for youth workers and/or individual youth and adults such as a) a list of books and films on the topic of discernment and call; b)

an introductory piece about Martin Luther and his theology of vocation; c) a self-graded quiz on the topic of vocation; d) a spiritual gifts inventory; and e) a sample course outline for using these web-based materials for a class, workshop, or retreat.

An online virtual forum was held in January and February 2001 as a way to introduce youth to the topic of vocation, discernment, and call. Participants were asked to log on to the web site at least three times a week when new items for discussion were posted including articles by author Alan Briskin, by Rolland Martinson and Mary Hess of Luther Seminary and by Jane Strohl of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Every Wednesday night an open chat room was provided so that individuals could discuss issues in real time with each other. In addition, several threaded discussions were offered by way of bulletin boards on the web site. These were places where people could post a question or a comment; others could come and see what had been posted and respond if they chose to. Participating in the online forum were over three hundred persons from forty states and Canada and Mexico.

Virtual Forum Thesis Statement:

Every Christian has a ministry! According to First Peter 2:9-10, all followers of Jesus—you and me!—are gifted and called to share the good news of God's love in all arenas of life. That means we are challenged to live out our faith in daily life—at home, at school, at work, or wherever we find ourselves. In baptism, we are called to use our gifts in service to God and others. Some are called to provide leadership in the church (such as a pastor or lay worker) while others serve in the wider community. But all are gifted and all are called. Join us in discovering how God is calling you to use your gifts!

Youth in Washington, Minnesota, and California (locations of sponsoring schools) were also given the opportunity to participate in a one day interactive video workshop. The workshops included small group discussion and discernment, a panel of youth and adults who shared their vocation journey, a newly written play by FALF board member Pastor John Trump on the topic of Christian vocation called "Holy Odors", a "live" hook up with seminary professors who spoke on the topic of discernment and call, and a renewal of baptism service. Those who attended gave the conference high marks. Among the responses of the participants were these comments:

"The panel discussion and small groups were really

helpful, and the play was great.”

“It was helpful knowing there are others like me.”

“It brought me closer to God and cleared up a lot of things that were questioned.”

“It was a reminder of how grace has played a huge role in my life.”

“It was great to talk with future pastors and seminary professors about the Christian’s daily life and ministry.”

A follow-up to the Paths Unknown project is planned including updating the web site with additional resources and developing an online course that will include archival video streaming of some of the presentations from the one day workshops. We are working with several ELCA divisions to explore the possibility of developing two tracks—one for youth and one for adults. If your college or university would like to be included as a sponsor of the course as well as have a hotlink from our web site to your schools web site, please let me know. We are looking for new partners and I believe we can all benefit as well as have a greater impact on the youth we serve if we choose to work together.

Conclusion: Colleges That Make a Difference

What are we doing on our campuses to identify, mentor, and nurture future leaders for church and community? Some of your schools are currently participating in the Lily Foundation vocation and leadership initiative. Some are finding ways to engage faculty, staff, and students in conversation around key principles of Lutheran higher education such as vocation. There is much being done, there is much left to do. We are left with this challenge. How can we help all of our faculty and staff at our respective schools recognize and claim **this important mission of instilling in our youth a sense of vocation**? How can we assist them in developing a sense of their

calling to use their gifts to serve others and to make a difference in our world?

The *Reclaiming Lutheran Student Project* has already made a significant contribution to our self-understanding as church-related institutions. It has confirmed that our Lutheran colleges do indeed make a difference in the lives of our students. Commissioned by the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA) in 1999, a national survey was conducted of the parents and alumni of both Lutheran and public flagship colleges and universities. Results of the research gave strong evidence of the claims that our Lutheran colleges make in these areas:

A commitment to good teaching and a personalized learning experience. Compared with students at flagship public institutions, students at PU and other Lutheran schools were more likely to attend small classes and have a majority of their classes taught by professors.

A strong sense of community and the value of involvement beyond the classroom. Again, a greater number of our students had a sense of community on campus and were also encouraged to live lives of service in the wider community.

The integration of faith and values into the college experience. Overwhelmingly students at a Lutheran college or university discovered opportunities to explore matters of faith and values compared with only a small minority of students at public flagship schools. Students at our church colleges developed moral principles to guide their actions and a majority are now active in church and religious activities.

It would seem now more than ever the colleges of the church are needed to prepare men and women for leadership in a new century of mission.

Richard Rouse is the Executive Director for Church Relations and Continuing Theological Education at Pacific Lutheran University.

¹ Source: Report by Arne Selbyg, ELCA Division for Higher Education and Schools (June 28, 2001).

² Martin Luther, sermon on Matthew 22:34, *Predigten des Jahres 1532*, WA 36, 340.12f.

³ Hans Schwarz, *True Faith in the True God: An Introduction to Luther’s Life and Thought* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1996), p. 140.

HOLY ODORS

John P. Trump

Characters:

Maggie - age 22, senior in college
Chris - age 22, senior in college
Herr Kopp - a peasant of the 16th century

As the play begins, Maggie is in the college library stacks. She is at a desk that sits perpendicular to the audience. There is a chair on the other side and another desk behind her. There are bookshelves extending towards the back of the stage, perpendicular to the audience, disappearing into darkness, or a wall. This is where people will enter or exit, through these rows of books. There are books on her desk as she studies. She does not love her studies and is tired. She has a laptop with her. She types...

MAGGIE: Oh drat, where was that quote...it's here somewhere. *(Looking through her books.)* Here? No, maybe here. There we go. No wonder I couldn't find it. Anything this boring you'd want to forget. Apology of Augsburg. They should apologize for this, for the drudgery, the punishment...Jeesh, what were these guys thinking? And to think wars were fought over this stuff. *(Returning to her work)* Oh, I'm so tired... *(Lays her head down on her desk)*

Chris enters and begins sneaking up on her.

MAGGIE: Hello Chris.

CHRIS: How did you know?

MAGGIE: I can smell you.

CHRIS: What?

MAGGIE: You still use that same soap.

CHRIS: What's wrong with it?

MAGGIE: Nothing's wrong with. I have just been a friend with you long enough to know it, and I have a sensitive nose.

CHRIS: Is it, well, a bad smell?

MAGGIE: It's a fine smell, if you have to smell.

CHRIS: Everyone has a smell.

MAGGIE: No, they don't.

CHRIS: Yes, everyone does.

MAGGIE: What's my smell?

CHRIS: I don't know.

MAGGIE: See?

CHRIS: Just because I don't know it doesn't mean you don't have one. If I have a smell, you have a smell.

MAGGIE: I don't use some super-duper, extra deodorant plus, fragrant soap bar, that's all.

CHRIS: Maybe you should.

MAGGIE: What's that supposed to mean?

CHRIS: Just kidding, just kidding. I'm flattered, actually.

MAGGIE: Don't be.

CHRIS: She knows my smell. She knows my smell.

MAGGIE: Will you be quiet?

CHRIS: It means you care.

MAGGIE: It means we have spent enough time together around this campus, studying, talking...

CHRIS: And other things.

MAGGIE: But none of "those things" which would warrant you hollering through the college library that I care.

CHRIS: Of course, I'm surprised you smell anything since you keep your nose so much in those books.

MAGGIE: Do not.

CHRIS: Oh, but you do. What's this?

MAGGIE: Reformation history. Dr. Schmidt.

CHRIS: Oh, gag.

MAGGIE: It's not that bad.

CHRIS: Apology of Augsburg. Smallcald articles. We Lutherans are so tedious.

MAGGIE: Yeah, I know.

CHRIS: But sometimes it's good. When Luther deals with the common stuff, the everyday. When he talks of the guy in the gutter, the farmer shoveling manure, the lady just trying to feed the kids. Beer! He brewed beer! As a college student, you know I like that! Does he talk about sex in there anywhere?

MAGGIE: Look, I have to finish this thing. I have a lot of work to do. This is my senior year, and a lot is riding on it.

CHRIS: What? I forgot, is there something higher than Magna Summa, super double duper Cum Laude? Is there a ranking higher than the first?

MAGGIE: Don't be so sarcastic.

CHRIS: Eat, drink, be merry the good book says, for this life is futile, my dear friend. A vanity of vanities, a chasing after wind. When we have shuffled off, this mortal coil must give us pause. What dreams may come? Ah, there's the rub!

MAGGIE: Look, pick. Ecclesiastes or Shakespeare, not both, and don't butcher the bard so horribly.

CHRIS: Is it vanity that you chase?

MAGGIE: It is simply my future that I concern myself with.

CHRIS: Oh as if you have to worry. Look, Maggie, you are one of the top students at this school. You have graduate schools begging for you, not to mention me begging you to...

MAGGIE: Groveling doesn't become you.

CHRIS: Oh, but we are all beggars.

MAGGIE: Now you quote Luther? I think he was referring to our status before God. Not men pleading for a date.

CHRIS: It still applies. And you are a goddess.

MAGGIE: And you are a devil. Get off your knees. And don't go talking about me. You don't do so badly yourself, but you, aren't you filled with anxiety? Aren't you worried?

CHRIS: About what?

MAGGIE: About the future. About what you're going to do when you shuffle off this mortal coil we call school.

CHRIS: I'll figure out what I'm going to do eventually. It'll come to me.

MAGGIE: What are you thinking about doing come June?

CHRIS: I don't know. I might bike across the country.

MAGGIE: Come on.

CHRIS: Really. I think when I graduate I am going to bike across the country. I have a friend in Durham in an environmental energy firm who might have something for me.

MAGGIE: You're so lucky.

CHRIS: Huh?

MAGGIE: You can do almost anything you want. What about med school?

CHRIS: I'm not so sure I'll get in. I think I need to work first anyway. I have to make sure why I'm doing it, you know, that I want to do it. Not just because I liked ER, or that it's a family tradition.

MAGGIE: I sort of wish I had a family tradition.

CHRIS: Don't be so sure.

MAGGIE: Really. Something. Someone to say: Here, look at this! You need to do this.

CHRIS: I think you already know what it is.

MAGGIE: Don't start on that.

CHRIS: You just want to ignore all the obvious trail markings.

MAGGIE: I don't need to hear it from you too.

CHRIS: Why not? After all, if you know my smell...

MAGGIE: That doesn't give you the right to tell me what direction my life should take.

CHRIS: I'm not. I'm just saying, you tend to ignore the obvious. Maybe that's why you are so anxious.

MAGGIE: Don't analyze me. One intro to psych course and everyone's a counselor.

CHRIS: I'm just saying, if yo get good grades you have more options open to you, but if you choose a path, well, you might not need to be so perfect.

MAGGIE: And you think you know my path?

CHRIS: I think there's been something biting at you for some time.

MAGGIE: The ministry.

CHRIS: There. She said it. The dirty word is on the table.

MAGGIE: Ordained ministry.

CHRIS: Oooooouuuu...even dirtier, stinkier! We've talked about it.

MAGGIE: And I'm not sure I want to talk about it again. I have a paper to finish.

CHRIS: I mean, if I could do it, I would.

MAGGIE: What?

CHRIS: Be a preacher.

MAGGIE: You?

CHRIS: Yeah, but I'm not cut out for it.

MAGGIE: I'm scared to ask; why not?

CHRIS: I hate meetings. And all the sucking up you have to do. Yes, Miss Tilly, I do think your bunyons are tragic, and we can certainly include them in the congregation's prayers today. We'll list them with Mister Smith's hemorrhoids.

MAGGIE: That is a down side.

CHRIS: And people. I basically can't stand people.

MAGGIE: You don't hate people.

CHRIS: I don't have the patience.

MAGGIE: And I do?

CHRIS: I think so. The issue is, so you have the call? I think you do.

MAGGIE: How can you be so sure?

CHRIS: I had my doubts, until that letter.

MAGGIE: I should have never shown you that thing.

CHRIS: It was great. Your dad meant every word of it.

MAGGIE: I know he did.

CHRIS: And he's no pastor, or theologian. He's just an honest guy, making a living, and he sees in you the gifts for ordained ministry. That's cool. He's not pressuring you.

MAGGIE: Felt like it.

CHRIS: He was just telling you he'd be proud, and you have the gifts.

MAGGIE: What gifts? Tell me?

CHRIS: All of them! People skills, speaking, smart; you'd be great. And you obviously believe it.

MAGGIE: Obviously?

CHRIS: Apparently so.

MAGGIE: Like you don't?

CHRIS: Yeah, but I have too much fun playing around with the backside of the picture.

MAGGIE: Huh?

CHRIS: When I look at a painting, like the Last Supper, I wonder, what's going on behind them? What's on the backside? What's on the backside of the gospel? Of Jesus? What don't we know? That's a fun question. People in the pews don't want to look at the backside of Jesus...so to speak.

MAGGIE: You put it so delicately.

CHRIS: I've seen you in chapel. And that time you preached...

MAGGIE: So I preached. Who says I enjoyed it?

CHRIS: But you were good.

MAGGIE: So? What does Campbell talk about? Follow your bliss. What is your passion!? I don't know if my passion is THE passion, if you know what I mean.

CHRIS: Then what is your passion?

MAGGIE: You know it.

CHRIS: Still?

MAGGIE: Still love it.

CHRIS: Digging up old bones and pottery?

MAGGIE: I love archeology.

CHRIS: It's just a phase. You took what, two courses?

MAGGIE: Here.

CHRIS: What's this?

MAGGIE: A grad school application. For the school of archeology.

CHRIS: You're kidding, right?

MAGGIE: No, I'm not. Shouldn't I at least find out?

CHRIS: How do you make a living digging up old stuff?

MAGGIE: Listen to you...oh, live life! Be happy! I'll bike across America. You of all people should be encouraging me.

CHRIS: It's just that when we're married, someone has to have a stable career. You know, for the health benefits.

MAGGIE: We're not getting married.

CHRIS: Not if you're going into archeology. That's the last straw. I won't follow you all around the world chasing dinosaur remnants.

MAGGIE: You know where some of the best artifacts are found?

CHRIS: Where?

MAGGIE: Outhouses!

CHRIS: Oh great, you really want to dig around in dead people's ancient...

MAGGIE: Shhhh...be quiet.

CHRIS: Look at it. The holy call to word and sacrament, lifting the bread and wine, or lifting up old bones, cracked pots, maybe you'll be lucky and find a piece of dinosaur poop! Oh boy! Talk about your odors!

MAGGIE: Yes. Oh boy. Maybe it would be the find of the century.

CHRIS: But maybe you're just running away, from the ministry.

MAGGIE: Maybe, maybe not. Maybe it IS ministry.

CHRIS: Now you're stretching it.

MAGGIE: Maybe I will be the one to discover, I don't know, the bones of King David. And we find out that he wasn't as gorgeous as Michelangelo thought, that he was a dwarf. What about that?

CHRIS: Don't be ridiculous.

MAGGIE: An archaeologist has just discovered evidence of a great flood, that created the Black Sea, some 7000 years ago, and on the bottom of the sea, buildings. Could this be evidence of Noah's flood? Isn't that important? Or isn't it just as important if I discovered relics of a lost tribe of native Americans who traveled here hundreds of years earlier from another land? And suddenly, suddenly we wonder, how could they have done that? How did our planet change? What made them die out? All of that can shed light on our present, and our future.

CHRIS: But is it ministry?

MAGGIE: Why not?

CHRIS: I think you're called to do something more. Look at me. For once, I am serious, as your friend. You must consider this. Of all things to regret not doing. You say you are not certain? Was Paul certain, or Peter, or Luther?

MAGGIE: Maybe you're right, maybe I am just avoiding the call.

CHRIS: How many people have told you that? Not just in passing, but really told you? Lots, I bet.

MAGGIE: Sometimes I think I am like Luther, studying here.

CHRIS: How so?

MAGGIE: The way he was fleeing the call, pursuing law, until his encounter with the storm and his prayer to St. Anne. I guess I need more lightning to convince me, scare me. I don't know.

CHRIS: Well, get through this paper. Think about it.

MAGGIE: I really appreciate you coming in here and totally messing me up.

CHRIS: I did not.

MAGGIE: I was studying perfectly well, now...Now I'll be back to being consumed with this question.

CHRIS: Sorry.

MAGGIE: Let me work.

CHRIS: Or sleep.

MAGGIE: Look, you owe me one. Come back here in about twenty minutes or so, and wake me up. I'm going to take a little nap.

CHRIS: A reformation power nap.

MAGGIE: Just come wake me.

CHRIS: Here I am Lord...is it I Lord...I have heard you calling...(as he leaves)

MAGGIE: Shhhh... Why must everyone know better? Lord, we have to straighten this out sometime soon.

She lays her head down on her desk for a nap. She is restless. A man enters. He is dressed in 16th century peasant attire. He looks at her books. They seem strange to him. He pulls up a chair and sits.

KOPP: Ask me.

MAGGIE: (waking) What?! (She jumps from her seat)

KOPP: Ask me about this...this reformation.

MAGGIE: Who are you? You get away from me.

KOPP: Calm down Maggie.

MAGGIE: How do you know my name?

KOPP: Shhh. We are in a library, aren't we?

MAGGIE: Look, just leave me alone.

KOPP: I just thought I'd give you a hand.

MAGGIE: Who are you? Is this some kind of joke? Did Chris put you up to this? You're from the theater department, aren't you?

KOPP: Theater?

MAGGIE: Then you're one of those guys off the street. You smell like one.

KOPP: I beg your pardon.

MAGGIE: Get lost, or I'll scream.

KOPP: They won't hear you.

MAGGIE: Huh?

KOPP: They won't hear you I said.

MAGGIE: This has got to be some sort of a bad dream. I'll just lay my head back down and it'll all go away.

Pause.

KOPP: Dreams are funny things, I heard Luther say. Didn't God use dreams with Joseph, with prophets, with Ezekiel, dreams and more dreams? Nothing wrong with dreams.

MAGGIE: Okay, I'll just enjoy it then. Yes, that's it, enjoy it, and hope it is a dream.

KOPP: What is all this? Books on the Reformation? They really wrote this much about everything that happened?

MAGGIE: Who are you?

KOPP: You don't know? I must be in a lot of these books.

MAGGIE: Luther? Martin Luther. Of course...I was reading that book, Conversations with Luther. Where is it...here it is...that makes perfect sense.

KOPP: Conversations with Luther? Let me tell you, it was tough to have a conversation with Luther, with him always preaching at you. Why must it always be Luther?

MAGGIE: You're not Luther?

KOPP: What did you expect?

MAGGIE: Doctor Amsdorf?

KOPP: That bore?

MAGGIE: Melancthon?

KOPP: Please!

MAGGIE: Duke Frederick?

KOPP: Do I look like a Duke? Come now, I must be in there somewhere.

MAGGIE: You smell like...like...

KOPP: Yes?

MAGGIE: Of dead fish!

KOPP: What's wrong with fish?

MAGGIE: Nothing, I guess...

KOPP: The disciples fished. Jesus caught fish. He cooked and ate fish. He did miracles with fish. What's wrong with people who deal in fish?

MAGGIE: Yes, but you smell so...

KOPP: You mean to tell me, you are studying the Reformation, and all the changes that took place, the world upside down, and you don't know me?

MAGGIE: Forgive me. I'm at a loss.

KOPP: Why, without me, the Reformation, would have been totally different. Luther would have certainly been different without me. Luther may have stayed in his ivory tower, his pedestal, with priests high above us, but I helped him get his hand into the real world.

MAGGIE: I don't understand.

KOPP: What changes did Luther bring to the ministry?

MAGGIE: He broke with the church. He talked of the ministry of all people.

KOPP: Yes, yes...what else? Practical changes? CONJUGAL changes?

MAGGIE: Marriage. Ministers could marry.

KOPP: Yes.

MAGGIE: You performed Luther's wedding?

KOPP: Do I look like a priest? Why, after risking my neck, after going to all the trouble to haul them all out of that convent, don't I get remembered? It's the little guy who does the real work, but gets no notice. I am Herr Kopp.

MAGGIE: Yes?

KOPP: Leonard Kopp.

MAGGIE: I'm sorry, I still...

KOPP: I am the pickled herring merchant who helped Katherine Von Bora and eight other nuns escape the convent, right under the nose of Duke George, which by the way, was no easy task and not to be taken lightly. It was punishable by death. They caught Phillip the barber sneaking Luther's writings into the choir, and now he is the prison barber.

MAGGIE: Katherine Von Bora. Yes, Luther's wife. She escaped when she got on board a wagon.

KOPP: My wagon.

MAGGIE: Yes, your wagon, and got into the empty pickled herring barrels.

KOPP: That is what everyone says. That isn't exactly so.

MAGGIE: What?

KOPP: They were to get in the barrels, but at the last minute, they refused. They were afraid that they would end up smelling like pickled herring, like me actually, and how could they get husbands in Wittenberg smelling like that? So we put them on board, and I covered them up as if they were pickled herring barrels.

MAGGIE: Very clever.

KOPP: Very risky. We must have been quite a sight rolling into Wittenberg. One student wrote, "Nine women have arrived in town more eager for marriage than for life. May God find them husbands, lest worse befall." But it was I who brought them to town, and brought Luther his wife, the mother of his children, the queen of his house, the partner in his bed. But do I get any credit? Am I more than a footnote in all these books? Why, where would he be without me? I brought him the greatest gift of his entire life. Well, maybe not.

MAGGIE: How so?

KOPP: Well, Katie gave him his children. How Luther loved those children. Katie gave him those children, but I brought him Katie, so I should at least be remembered.

MAGGIE: I am sure I won't forget you.

KOPP: And well you shouldn't! Can you imagine Luther without, without changing diapers! Without sex! Without love? Without the chores of a home? That is the stuff of life, and Luther loved life, all of the life, the dirty little parts of it.

MAGGIE: But why me? Why are you talking to me? Why am I dreaming you?

KOPP: Well, there was Chris...

MAGGIE: So this is all Chris' doing...and you had me believing I was dreaming...

KOPP: No, you are dreaming. Because of what Chris was saying, I had to speak up.

MAGGIE: Why?

KOPP: It's about your call.

MAGGIE: Of course. You are the lightning I wanted!

KOPP: But what kind of lightning? If God was telling you to pursue the ordained ministry, don't you think you would be speaking with Luther? Do you think you would dream up Herr Kopp?

MAGGIE: Then what?

KOPP: I said it was about your call. You assumed your call into the ordained ministry. Look at me. I am called.

MAGGIE: You?

KOPP: You seem surprised.

MAGGIE: You deliver pickled herring. Though, I guess, when you rescued Katie.

KOPP: No. I am called now, every day.

MAGGIE: It does not seem like a choice many people would make.

KOPP: Look, in my day, pickled herring was a staple. It was important. We didn't have canned goods, or refrigerators. People needed pickled herring. So why wasn't I called to deliver it? I take pride in what I do.

MAGGIE: Yes, but how is it benefitting God's kingdom?

KOPP: Look at Katie. What did she do?

MAGGIE: I don't know.

KOPP: She did everything, to take care of Luther, to run the home, to earn an income. She had an apple orchard, a fish farm; she even brewed beer, all to keep ministry going. Is delivering pickled herring any different?

MAGGIE: It's just that some things are so much more obvious.

KOPP: You mean?

MAGGIE: For instance, a doctor. Or a nurse. A teacher, a public servant of some sort.

KOPP: Are they somehow better? Tell me, who scrubs the floors of doctors' offices and the hospitals? Without the janitor, germs go crazy, disease spreads, the doctor can't work. So tell me, is the janitor less called?

MAGGIE: It's hard to see it that way.

KOPP: That's called sin.

MAGGIE: Sin?

KOPP: Sin. And the disciples said, let me sit at your right hand and your left in the kingdom of Jesus. We all want to reign. What do you really want to do? To be? I could teach you all about pickled herring.

MAGGIE: I love archeology.

KOPP: What?

MAGGIE: Digging up old bones and things, to find out about the past. Did you know dinosaurs ruled the earth millions of years ago?

KOPP: Dinosaurs? What's that?

MAGGIE: Never mind, but we can learn so much, by exploring the past. Why animals, why peoples, died out. What happened to the earth? How did people live? It excites me.

KOPP: Then maybe you are called to that.

MAGGIE: To dig up old bones? Old pottery? Do you know where they find some of the best discoveries?

KOPP: No.

MAGGIE: Outhouses. Toilets. Privies. People used to throw everything down them. They didn't have garbage service. They dumped everything down the hole out back. How could digging around in THAT be a sacred calling? It stinks.

KOPP: So does herring. Is it honest?

MAGGIE: Yes.

KOPP: Does it challenge you?

MAGGIE: Yes.

KOPP: Can you provide for yourself and others, and not be a burden on your family?

MAGGIE: I think so.

KOPP: Could it help?

MAGGIE: Help?

KOPP: Help someone, or society? Help, in some way? Pickled herring helps those who enjoy it.

MAGGIE: Most certainly. I think all knowledge helps.

KOPP: And you enjoy it?

MAGGIE: So far, yes. I'm not sure.

KOPP: Join the rest of us. But back in my day, we didn't have many choices. You did what your father did, unless you were fortunate enough to go to school. And women, they worked, but only in the home.

MAGGIE: We have many choices.

KOPP: Then make one.

MAGGIE: But maybe I'm called to the ministry, to be a pastor.

KOPP: And maybe I'm here to help you escape the convent.

MAGGIE: Convent?

KOPP: Sure. Katie and others were often in convents, in the ordained ministry, for the wrong reasons. For security? Because their families put them there. Or, like Luther himself, to please God somehow. But Luther found out it does not work. He went into the ministry because of a vow he made in fear, but it was in that ministry that he discovered the ministry of life, life as ministry. He even taught me that.

MAGGIE: He did?

KOPP: Certainly. He liked me, most of the time. After all, I had brought him his Katie. And depending on how he felt about married life that day--the feelings which can rise and fall like the tide, mind you--well, he would either love me or hate me. Usually, he was glad to see me, and would say, sit. Let's talk a moment.

MAGGIE: He must have talked a great deal.

KOPP: There was so much to talk about. But we didn't talk of such heady things as in these books. No, not with this fish merchant. I recall, one time, he talked of smells. I guess I bring up the topic. I recall, he began with an insult. He said: "Herr Kopp, you stink to high heaven. At first I was offended and would have left, but he laughed and told me to sit, to sit beside him. I told him the smell was a hazard of my trade, and he laughed his deep laugh and said: "Yes, yes, I know that. It is one of the things I like most about you, Herr Kopp. You have a trade. What is my trade? Do we trade in God's word? Sometimes I wish my hands smelled like yours, that I was called to sell pickled herring, or even to practice law, as my parents wanted." I said, "But Dr. Luther, you bring us sacraments. You have translated God's word to us. You preach to us, daily." "Yes, yes," he said. "But you are called to live God's word, daily, even in the grind and ordinariness of your day. As you break in all the odors of the day. Do you know what the church does with those orders?" he asked.

MAGGIE: What did he say?

KOPP: He said, "We burn incense, and wave it before our priests to insulate them, to protect them lest they inhale and smell the everyday smells of life. Don't you know, Herr Kopp, that those are holy odors?" He laughed. Holy odors? I didn't understand. "Holy odors," he said again, "Not Holy ORDERS, but Holy ODORS." "Oh," I said, and chuckled. He thought it was very funny. "Don't you know, Herr Kopp," he continued, "that we all end up rotting flesh, that if we were to dig up the bones of kings or of ministers, or peasant, or the pope himself, we would all smell as rancid. Except..."

MAGGIE: Except?

KOPP: "Except for the sweet smell of God's breath saying peace, peace I give you." And with that, he got up and left me. I shall never forget. Why not dig up old bones, and call it ministry?

MAGGIE: But why, why do we still hear in scripture of disciples called to ministry, to put down their nets?

KOPP: Oh, but wasn't Paul still a tent maker? Can you imagine the smell of the tanning hides? And Amos, a dresser of sycamore trees. What did they smell like in the spring?

MAGGIE: I went to a friend's ordination the other day.

KOPP: Yes?

MAGGIE: And the scripture, they read so many, endorsing that call. And I wondered what they could read for me?

KOPP: We could certainly write a service for you! We will begin with Ezekiel! The spirit of the Lord was upon me, and took me to a valley of...what?

MAGGIE: Dry bones.

KOPP: And what about Adam's rib? God dug that one up to discover Eve. And didn't Samson slay the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass? I don't know. Maybe it was really different in my day, maybe not. But when I wonder about what I'm doing, delivering fish, I just think about all the fish in the Bible, and I am consoled.

MAGGIE: But what if there are, I don't know, no stockbrokers, or no consultants, or no architects in the scripture. What then?

KOPP: But there are people. Lots and lots of people, living out their faith, fetching water from the well, being carpenters, and soldiers, and tax collectors, and even priests. You are not Lot's wife.

MAGGIE: You lost me.

KOPP: What did she get in trouble for?

MAGGIE: For looking back.

KOPP: She turned to stone, when she did not heed God's call, God's word. Oh. If I had a coin for everyone I knew who turned to stone, who stood motionless in life, because they did not follow God's call, God's voice.

MAGGIE: Sometimes I am afraid.

KOPP: Of what? So were the Israelites, when they fled Egypt. But would it have been better to stay bound in slavery? Go ahead. Dig up old bones. It's as holy a call as the one called to say words as we lay them in the ground.

MAGGIE: Maybe we should have a religious rite for digging up the bones too?

KOPP: Oh, but then the priests would claim that job for themselves. No, you can do it, if you so choose.

MAGGIE: If I choose.

KOPP: Where is God calling you to go?

MAGGIE: I'm not sure.

KOPP: That's okay. Just don't think one road is holier than the other. But, I have a fish to deliver. Funny thing about those fish, lying in that water, staying soaked.

MAGGIE: What about them?

KOPP: Sort of like baptized. Sometimes we just forget that we're always lying in, walking in, sleeping in, working in, and living in those baptismal waters, each and every day. Soaking in it. But I need to get going. All these books make me nervous.

MAGGIE: I love them.

KOPP: To each their own. Goodbye.

MAGGIE: Wait. Stay a moment. I'd like to ask you a few things, for my paper.

KOPP: And when the professor asks you for your source, what will you say? When he asks where you dreamed this up, will you simply say, "yes"? I don't think so. Goodbye. Sweet dreams. *(He exits)*

MAGGIE: I guess you're right. Who would have believed a dream? Herr Kopp...where was he listed? He must be here somewhere. Here? No, here. This is so tiresome. Maybe, maybe, a quick nap. *(She lays her head down)*

CHRIS: *(Entering, singing)* Hey, wake up, Maggie, I think I got something to say to you. Wake up, the stacks are closing.

MAGGIE: Hey, what's going on...How long have I been asleep? You were supposed to wake me.

CHRIS: Yeah, well, I ran into a certain young lady, and well, you know.

MAGGIE: But I...oh my...Chris, do you smell something?

CHRIS: Like what?

MAGGIE: Like pickled herring.

CHRIS: You've lost it. Let's get out of here.

MAGGIE: No, no, I think I may have discovered something.

CHRIS: You've been studying too hard.

MAGGIE: No, come one, let's get some coffee.

CHRIS: But it's late.

MAGGIE: Come on, come on. I've got a bone to pick with you. *(They exit)*

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OF FATHERS AND FEMINISM: HOW ONE LUTHERAN WOMAN CAME TO A VOCATION

Karla G. Bohmbach

Why am I here?¹

It's a simple enough question on the face of it – only four words, each of one syllable. But what existential anxieties it can provoke. I don't mean in the sense of why am I standing in front of you here today, at Valparaiso University, giving a talk related to the topic of the vocation of a Lutheran college. That's an easy enough question to answer: because Arne Selbyg asked me to, on a suggestion from DeAne Lagerquist. No, I'm talking about the bigger implications of that question: Why am I here? And how did I get to be here, as the person that I am? -- that is, as a Lutheran woman, a feminist biblical scholar, recently tenured² and promoted by Susquehanna University, and, one month shy from turning forty.

I think it all goes back to Vacation Bible School when I was a kid. Now I liked Vacation Bible School (or VBS) a lot. Instead of stodgy hymns from the Lutheran Hymnal, we sang fun Jesus songs. Instead of enduring dry sermons on abstract theology, we listened to stories of fascinating and dramatic biblical characters – and then actively responded to them, asking questions, drawing pictures, dramatizing scenes. Plus, VBS had both snack time and recess. Recess in particular was not to be overlooked -- not when Vacation Bible School occurred in June, which meant going outside to play. Not when this was Minnesota, where, having just come through the six months of a Minnesota winter – with all the cold, snow, and darkness thereby implied -- recess outside was practically a synonym for heaven.

But when I was nine years old, Vacation Bible School ended for me in a quite tumultuous way. It happened on the last day, during the last hour, of the week's activities. We had just had snacks, and were now playing dodge ball out on the playground, waiting for our parents to come by and pick us up. The ball got out of the circle close by to where I was standing. I ran to get it. Then, before I was quite aware of it, an older boy was there too. He pushed me aside in trying to get to the ball, and I fell. As I did, I hit my forehead against the edge of the brick windowsill of one of the church windows. Suddenly, blood -- my blood! -- was pouring from my forehead. I screamed. Not from pain; it didn't hurt. But, I had never seen so much blood

before – and certainly not my blood. I was afraid that all the blood would drain from my head and I would die.³

It was a sign, a marker, perhaps even a warning, though I didn't understand it so at the time. It enacted in a very blunt and visible way what I had never previously imagined possible – that the church could be, and indeed, was, a danger to me, a danger that could bring with it in the short term pain, fear, and the shedding of my blood, and, in the long term, permanent scarring. And it was a particularly troubling danger in that it could come so unexpectedly, appearing rudely and shockingly in the midst of fun and games, or, more benignly, even while just going about the humdrum routine of my life.

But even though it came to me so unexpectedly, this danger did not come to me without form: it was male. Remember: it was a BOY who pushed me into that brick windowsill and set me to bleeding and screaming. But just here is where the meaning of the event also starts to get complicated and confusing, for my savior that day was also a male. The janitor of the church – an older man – as soon as he saw me bleeding, quickly scooped me up in his arms, settled me quickly in the cab of his pickup truck, and sped me off to the clinic, where I was soon stitched up. Two polar opposites – the church as danger and the church as rescuer – and both were mediated through a male voice, a male face, a male presence, a male authority. Mixed messages. Always, in my life, the church has visited upon me mixed messages.

It goes as far back as my first life-memory. I couldn't have been more than three years old. It was the end of a Sunday morning church service, and we were being ushered out. I was walking with my Dad, holding his hand. We must have made for a funny sight – Dad at six feet two inches in height, me at no more than two feet. We got to the back of the church, where the pastor was standing, and my Dad urged me to shake the pastor's hand. But I couldn't; indeed, I was appalled at the thought. Having seen the pastor on all those Sunday mornings, way up high in the pulpit, dressed in the same sort of white robes that I knew angels wore in heaven, and always expounding on God's word – well, I had come to the conclusion that the pastor WAS God.⁴ And I knew, with perhaps the assurance of

only the very young, that I was unworthy of shaking God's hand. So even though I was normally an extremely gregarious and confident child – or so I've been told – I carefully but resolutely tucked my hand behind my back, and lowered my eyes to the floor. I wasn't going to have anything to do with shaking God's hand. It wasn't that I didn't want to; but I doubted, already at that age, my worthiness to do so.

That feeling of unworthiness has stayed with me. It resurfaced very vividly just a few years ago, when I participated in a spiritual exercise at a mid-week informal worship service for students at Susquehanna. Chris Thomforde, the chaplain at the time, made use of a strategy developed by Ignatius of Loyola, whereby we were to imagine ourselves into a biblical story.⁵ We all got quiet and comfortable, and then Chris started reading slowly and meditatively Mark 4:35-41 – the story of Jesus and his disciples crossing the sea of Galilee at night and getting caught up in a fierce storm. Where did I place myself? At the beginning I hovered at the edges of the group of disciples. I WANTED to be a part of their group, but didn't feel I actually had that right. Then, when Jesus and the disciples got into the boat, though I yearned quite intensely to go along, I could not really believe that Jesus wanted me, too, to come along with the rest of the group. It wasn't until Jesus looked right straight at me, and issued me an invitation from himself directly, that I had the assurance of being wanted, and so had the confidence to actually climb into the boat. Once in the boat, though, I didn't sit near him. While Jesus took a seat in the stern, I moved to a place halfway along the starboard side of the boat. It was the closest I dared get to him, even though I kept my eyes fixed on him the whole time, even as he fell asleep. When the storm came up, I clung madly to the side of the boat, water streaming into my eyes, while still focusing all my attention on Jesus as the disciples woke him up with their plea to take notice of the danger we were in. And, yes, at that point Jesus did calm the winds and the waves. I had perfect faith he would do so – even though my sense of unworthiness kept me always at some distance from him.

But where and how did I get this sense of unworthiness? After all, I grew up in a church that proclaimed, in those familiar words of John 3:16, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."⁶ I grew up in a Lutheran church that emphasized our being saved

through God's grace, that stressed our justification before God as a result of God's own benevolent actions towards humanity. In the words of Romans 3:23-24 – "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Or, again, in the words of Roman 5:1 – "since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I have heard such words countless times in my life, because, when I say I grew up in the Lutheran church, I mean that I was practically raised in, and by, the church. The Lutheran church was the social and cultural center of my life. Both of my parents, and all of my grandparents, were life-long members of the Lutheran Church. Within weeks of my birth I, too, was baptized into, and became a member of, the church. Practically all of my parents' friends were members of the Lutheran church, and almost all of our family socializing was done within that context. The family's weekly and yearly demarcation of time depended on the church: Sunday morning church and Sunday School, Wednesday evening Lenten services, once a month hotdish potlucks with the church's Couples Club, Wednesday morning Release Time classes for us kids, Saturday morning confirmation class during the seventh and eighth grades, an abundance of Christmas time and Holy Week services (Holy Week, in particular, was a marathon -- one service on Maundy Thursday, two each on both Good Friday and Easter Sunday – plus an Easter brunch and Sunday School). The Lutheran Church was a central definer of my life. It ordered my family's time, our relationships, our ideas and values, our behaviors.

And yet, despite all that, I could never feel, or believe myself to be, fully a member of that church community. For the Lutheran church in which I grew up was a congregation of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. And in this church only men could be ordained, only men could preach or publicly read from scriptures, only men could preside at communion or assist in the distribution of the elements, only men could be members of the Board of Elders (the governing council of the church), only men could vote, and only men taught the adult Sunday school classes.⁷ Women had far fewer, and far less prestigious public tasks: they taught the children's Sunday school classes, played organ and sang in the choir, cleaned and prepared the altar paraments. The church had a male face that was omnipresent and dominant. But because the maleness was so Other to who I was as young and female

that face was also very remote and inaccessible to me.

The simultaneity of the church's male face as both dominant and inaccessible, present and removed, was both exacerbated and reinforced by a family dynamic in which my father was pretty inaccessible to us kids, and yet, probably for that very reason, highly valued and very much at the center of our family's life. Dad worked outside the home; and he had a job that he loved immensely. He always put in upwards of sixty hours a week – out of the house by eight in the morning, home shortly before six in the evening for supper, but then often enough going back out again after supper, working until ten or eleven at night. Saturdays were always work days; Sunday afternoons often were – except during football season when he cheered on the hapless Vikings.

When Dad was home, our life centered on him; we dropped whatever else we were doing and reoriented ourselves to him. For example, supper always had to be on the table at six – that's when Dad expected it, and he only had about a half-hour window of time for eating before he needed to take off again. But the rarity of his presence also meant, for me, that any time I did have with him was especially cherished. Those times stand out vividly in my mind: 1) Dad teaching me to stand on my head when I was seven years old (I'm still a great head stander!); 2) fishing with him in Canada while on a family vacation, where I caught a four and a half pound Northern (the only fish anyone in our family would catch that week!); 3) spending a Sunday afternoon some time during my teen years holding an elevation stick so he could do some surveying.

Another time when I got to be with Dad was during church on Sunday morning. In this situation, I was helped immensely by being the oldest child. As my younger sisters started coming along, Mom's attention and energy were focused on them. That left Dad and I to our own devices, so to speak. For me that meant having Dad to myself. And I remember clearly putting a lot of effort into manipulating the seating arrangements in the family pew so that I would be seated next to my father. But it wasn't just about having exclusive time with my father, important as that was. It was also about the magic of reading. You see, although I'm not quite clear about when or how I was taught to read, I do know that my earliest reading memory goes back to those Sunday mornings in the pew sitting next to my Dad. He would trace, with his finger, the words of the hymns being sung. And as my eyes followed along,

week by week, the lines on the page gradually made more and more sense. They became text; decipherable words that opened whole new worlds to me. Access to my father; access to the written word. I wonder, do I love to read so much because I see it as a gift given to me by my father? I certainly had – and still do have – a reputation in my family as being an inveterate bookworm. "That Karla, always with her nose in a book." I can still hear the voices of my mother and my sisters saying that.

When I was growing up, our parents told us four kids – all daughters – that we could be whatever we wanted to be, and do whatever we wanted to do. And I remember Dad, even more so than Mom, being especially insistent about it. And so our parents bought us all the books we wanted; praised us for our A grades – as well as our C's, as long as we had tried our hardest; sent us to all the summer camps – church, cheerleading, Girl Scout, music – to which we wanted to go; and sat through countless music recitals, athletic competitions, and dance-line performances. As we moved into our high school years, it was taken for granted that we would go to college. The only proviso was that we NOT go to the local teacher's college (which was also the local party school) – our parents wanted more for us than that. They wanted us to see the world; to live up to our potential; to grasp life to its fullest.

But how was I to square that with a church that so clearly and blatantly limited the possibilities for women? And how was I to square that with the actual practices of our family? After all, although Mom taught us girls how to play piano, Dad never taught us how to hunt. And although us girls did plenty of chores around the house, they were mostly the so-called women's tasks of dusting, vacuuming, folding clothes, and washing dishes. Dad was the only one in the family who mowed the lawn, shoveled snow off the driveway, or put gas in the car. And I wonder now, if we had had brothers, would they have done "Dad's chores," and also been taught how to hunt?⁸ Would traditional constructions of gender thereby have been more blatantly enacted in our family? And what then might have been the consequences for the ways in which us daughters thought about, and lived out, our lives?

But even without brothers, life was bringing with it too many contradictions. Although I wanted to believe my parents' story that said I, as female, really could do anything and be anything that I wanted – I wasn't actually seeing it happen in the world in which I lived. So I turned

to books -- because there I did find girls who lived expansive lives, ones with seemingly no imposed limits. Nancy Drew, Trixie Belden -- these girls had adventures, they didn't take no for an answer, and they did everything that the boys did. Even more, through their actions they helped fix some of the wrongs of the world, thereby earning the respect of all with whom they came into contact. They were my ideals. And yet, they were fictional, which was why I favored even more a series of biographies that told about the childhoods of famous American personages. And I especially loved those biographies that featured famous women. Again and again I read the stories of the growing up years of Helen Keller, Jane Addams, Betsey Ross, Eleanor Roosevelt, Sojourner Truth, Molly Pitcher, Annie Oakley.

But none of these stories interacted with religion in any meaningful way. And I think, given the centrality of the church in my life, stories that did not have a religious element to them could never be seen by me as entirely relevant or satisfactory. Unfortunately, I didn't get such stories from the church; indeed, I received scarcely any stories at all from there, my church being much more interested in theology than in story. Sunday morning sermons were most often expositions of the second reading of the day, which was usually a passage from one of Paul's epistles. Listening to such sermons fostered the sort of alienation and exhaustion that Kathleen Norris talks about when she first goes to church after years of being away. With words such as justification, reconciliation, crucifixion, and sanctification being bandied about -- she'd go home after church and collapse into a three hour nap, feeling totally battered by the foreignness of the language and concepts.⁹ I, too, felt similarly dazed and confused. I might have found some relief in Sunday school classes, except here the opposite problem pertained: the classes had become rather insipid, not to say irrelevant -- sure, there were stories, but how was I supposed to relate to, or care about, sheep-herding, tent-dwelling, donkey-riding, drawing water from a well, or fighting with sword and spear.

But confirmation class -- THAT was the worst. Every Saturday morning during my seventh and eighth grade years, I reported to a dingy basement room in the church where, after reciting by memory assigned passages from the Bible and Luther's catechism, I retired to a hard wooden chair and, along with my classmates, settled in for a two and a half hour lecture by our pastor on some aspect

of the confessional doctrines of the Lutheran Church. During our one 15 minute break we all headed downtown to buy candy, hoping rather forlornly that it would sustain us for the last hour of that morning's lecture. Not surprisingly, none of the information from those years has stayed with me -- whether of the lectures or of the memorization passages.

And yet, I do have one positive memory of those years. One day, instead of returning from our confirmation candy-break to another lecture on doctrine, we came back and heard our pastor retell for us the story of the last seven days of Jesus Christ on earth. We were enthralled; transported outside of ourselves; bespelled. For a full hour, no one coughed, shifted in their chairs, or dropped a pencil. We scarcely even breathed. Imagine how impossible that was: for not less than twenty thirteen and fourteen year olds to be so enraptured. And yet, our pastor wove such magic with his words -- we could see, hear, feel, almost smell and touch (!), the pains and passions of the people caught up in the events of that long-ago week in Jerusalem.

When I got home that day, I told my Mom about our pastor's story-telling and the way in which it cast such a spell over us. Mom had also had occasion to hear him tell stories; she agreed that he was wonderful. Why, then, I asked, didn't he tell stories more often? Why, for instance, did his sermons focus on Pauline theology, instead of at least some of the time expounding on the many rich and wonderful stories in the gospels and in the narrative sections of the Old Testament? Mom didn't know.

When I was confirmed, someone gifted me with a Bible, a paraphrased, easy-to-read version known as *The Way*. One of its features was a chart laying out each biblical chapter according to the supposed timeline of [biblical] events as conceived by the book's editors (thus, the book of Job appeared after the first 22 chapters of Genesis; Proverbs was read after 1 Kings 4; Jonah after 2 Kings 14:25; etc.). This chart appealed to my love of orderliness and lists, and I decided to use it as a guideline for delving into the stories -- not the theology! -- of the Bible. More, I wanted to see if I could actually succeed in reading the entire Bible.¹⁰

When I got to the books of Samuel and Kings, I took my love of lists and orderliness a step further, and constructed a chart listing the whole series of rulers of the respective kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Or rather, I attempted to graph out such a chart. It didn't take me long to realize

that the biblical text wasn't entirely cogent in its listings of the kings, the number of years they reigned, or how their regnal years coordinated with the reigns of other kings. I gave up, leaving the chart uncompleted (though I still have it, as well as the Bible). Shortly thereafter I stopped my reading of the Bible entirely. But it wasn't my inability to finish the chart that defeated me; rather, it was the fact that the stories I was reading were not my stories. What did I know of kings and governments, battles and priests? Nothing. So, although I had finally found some religious stories, I had not found religious stories in which women were present and active. My Bible reading had led me to the same end as the "truth" presented to me by the church -- that there was no real place for me, as female, in the world of religion. Add to that the fact that by now I had years of hearing from my parents that I could be and do anything, even as they simultaneously held up to me as highly valued a religious realm in which the roles and status of women -- were sharply curtailed. The contradictions were cutting too deep. I was beginning to feel, existentially at least, as if I had been slammed into a brick wall and was now left reeling from the shock and the blood.

I fled, though not literally. And if it was my version of adolescent rebellion, it was done in a very nice, covert, and -- dare I say it? -- Lutheran way. In my teen years I turned all my attention and energies towards my school studies and activities. I barely tolerated church services; indeed, I only went because it was a parental condition placed on my being able to work at a pizza place late Saturday nights. I also adamantly refused all efforts to interest me in church camps, the youth group, or bible studies. Later, when it came time for college, I applied to St. Olaf -- a Lutheran school, to be sure, but the wrong sort of Lutheran school, being related to the American Lutheran Church and not the Missouri Synod. Besides, I applied primarily because of its music program, not its religious connections.

But St. Olaf became the place which nourished in me a rebellion that eventually became much more overt and radical. When I floundered on music theory after only one semester, I found myself trying on, and taking off, a whole series of other majors: English, Political Science, Philosophy, International Relations, Religion, History. Wherever I wandered, though, I met professors willing to take on any and all questions -- without prejudicing them from the start with a Bible bias. Critical inquiry, far from

being seen as antithetical to religious beliefs, was seen as a potential reinforcement and even furtherance of them -- even in religion classes. I was being introduced to a new sort of intellectual freedom. With it, I even read Ayn Rand my sophomore year, and, daringly, but briefly, declared myself an atheist (!).

St. Olaf also had another revelation for me: there, for the first time, I encountered a Lutheranism with a female face. Bruce Benson may have been the college's chaplain, but Kristine Carlson was serving as chaplain intern. Classes where I learned the history of ideas were taught not only by Bill Poehlman, Eric Lund, and Jim Farrell, but also Joan Gunderson, Anne Groton, and Constance Gengenbach. And when I went to chapel, whether during weekdays or on Sunday mornings, I saw not only men, but also women, serving as lectors, preachers, and communion assistants.

It was especially this aspect of my St. Olaf experience that I used as a springboard from which to launch my ultimate rebellion against my parents, and the contradictory messages which they had enforced on me: I declared my intention of becoming a pastor. Here, I thought, was a real test for my parents. They had previously affirmed that I could do anything I wanted -- except that in their system of belief no woman could have any leadership role at all in the church. How, then, would they receive the news that I had chosen a field of work that, because I was a woman, ran directly and forthrightly against the very heart of the beliefs and practices of their religion? My father, in particular, had always modeled the very high value he placed on work. So I was pressing the illogicalities of their message deep into my father's home court. Would he now turn hypocrite and somehow try to deny me the right to find the same high value for myself in a vocation? But if he did not, would that mean that he, in effect, had been forced into a compromise of his religious beliefs?

As it turned out, my parents took the news of my becoming a pastor quite calmly. My Dad affirmed explicitly that I had the right to make my own decisions about my life and career. He admitted that he would be uncomfortable theologically with my being up in the pulpit preaching the Word of God; nevertheless, as my daughter, he would support my doing so, even if that meant sitting in a pew and listening to the sermons that I preached. Although he would never make the same decision as I was making, he trusted, believed in, and respected my abilities and my character as a thoughtful and mature person to make the right decision for myself.¹²

Well. With my parents' acceptance of my supposedly radical career choice, the wind of my rebellion was let out of my sails. Thus, when I sat down to write my application essay for seminary, I was quite unable to do so: I simply could not articulate why I wanted to go to seminary. Going to seminary on the strength of rebelling against your parents probably isn't a sufficiently strong, or good, motivation for doing so anyway. But I didn't even have that anymore. In the end, I was likely saved from making a time-consuming and expensive mistake: my parents' very willingness to accept the possibility of my becoming a pastor meant that I no longer needed to prove my independence from them by doing so. Though we weren't aware of it at the time, the seminary, the church, my parents, and myself were all thereby saved from an immense amount of aggravation.

But what, then, was I to do with my life? My sisters and I agree that one of the more vexing legacies of our father was the very passion and enjoyment which Dad brought to, and derived from, his work: his close-up example for so many years meant that nothing less than that would do for us and our work.¹³

As it turns out, I began the journey towards answering that question in a rather prosaic way: while on a Sunday car trip to Winona, MN I suddenly thought, "I'll do what Jim Fleming does!" Now Jim Fleming was an instructor I had had during a one-semester study abroad experience in the Middle East, which I done during my Junior Year at St. Olaf. Jim had taught us the historical geography of the land of Israel, a major piece of which involved taking us on tours of archaeological sites throughout Israel. My desire to do what Jim did thus meant becoming a biblical historian and/or archaeologist. It meant, I thought, being able to get in touch with the real-life stories of the people – men and women – who lived in, and wrote, the stories of the Bible. It thereby meant bringing together my love of story, my rootedness in Christianity, and my need to see, in the religious realm, the faces of women. Although I did not yet fully recognize it, this vocation would become the means by which I could find women, and specifically religious women, with whom I could, somehow, identify and relate to – though not necessarily in an unproblematic way. The fact that these religious women would be the women of the Bible was likely a consequence of my own Lutheran tradition's stress on the Bible, coupled with my especial interest in the history of remote times, places, and peoples.

Almost immediately, I launched myself into a multi-year quest towards this vocational goal. I was woefully ignorant at the start – I thought such an enterprise meant pursuing a Ph.D. in History, which, had, in the end, been my major at St. Olaf. But no. I was told it meant a Ph.D. in Religion. On top of which, I needed to steel myself for multiple years of study of multiple languages, which had definitely not been my forte as an undergrad. In the next years, I studied Greek, French, and Hebrew, visited a number of graduate schools, and eventually applied, and was accepted, to Duke University's graduate program in Religion.

One of Duke's biggest appeals to me was the fact that it had a woman professor of biblical archaeology: Carol Meyers. In my investigations of graduate schools, I had already begun to realize how dominated the field was by men and by the male perspective; this certainly seemed a step in the wrong direction from the more inclusive perspective of my years at St. Olaf. Indeed, embedded in my first-year experiences at Duke in the classroom and library was a whole other educational experience whereby, through a veritable bombardment of words and actions, I was made to feel that my being a woman somehow made me "less" – less important, less qualified, less capable, less intellectual. Even with Carol as my main professor, I could not escape the message that my gender was a problem, or, at the least, an issue that somehow needed to be explained away or excused. Never before in my life had this message been made so blatant – or never before had I noticed it so. The Lutheran church in which I had grown up had, for the most part, simply ignored women – not simultaneously battered them with the message of their fundamental worthlessness. In any case, the church's message had been for me, at least, partly counterbalanced by affirmative messages I had received from both my parents and my schooling. At Duke there was no real counterbalance . . . until my second year.

In the fall semester of my second year, at Carol Meyer's suggestion, I took a graduate level seminar on the History of Feminist Thought. That course remains the very best, and most memorable, course I have ever taken – which is saying quite a lot given the approximately twenty-one years of full-time schooling I have had. Part of it was timing, of course; the class simply came along for me at the right time. Still, it was also in that course that I discovered, quite simply, that I was not alone. I met others who were troubled by the same sense of alienation that I had felt so much of my life, alienation springing from my identity as

a woman and its problematic construction in our world. I was given a whole raft of questions, strategies, and angles of seeing by which I could evaluate, critique, even dismantle and rebuild, much of what I had previously learned, assumed, and thought. I was introduced to a whole community – of both women and men, from both the present and the past – who had felt and been motivated by some of the same angst that moved me. I was given the power of naming myself – as a feminist -- and analyzing the world in which I moved in a way that made sense to me.

From that course sprang so much else. I went on to earn a graduate level Certificate in Women's Studies. My dissertation was feminist in both its topic (biblical daughters) and its approach (an interdisciplinary feminist reading strategy making use of new historicism, anthropology, and deconstruction). My teaching since then has been strongly informed by a participatory, discussion-oriented mode which owes much to feminist pedagogy.¹⁴ And most of my research and writing has been feminist in terms of both its methodology and subject-matter. Fundamentally, I see the world with feminist eyes. My reading, my questions, my values, my interests are all strongly shaped and informed by a feminist stance and epistemology.

But even though feminism gave me the critical counterpoint which has substantially sustained and nurtured me for the last decade or so of my life – both intellectually and emotionally – it has not freed me from the coils of angst-filled meaning rooted in my childhood faith and family. I do not think we ever entirely escape, or free ourselves, from our childhood experiences and the formative influence they have on our lives. As Michel Tourmier observes: "Childhood is given to us as ardent confusion, and the rest of life is not time enough to make sense of it or explain to ourselves what happened."¹⁵

And so for me I continue to struggle over the church's importance in my life, which especially means struggling with its legacy to me as a church with a male face – and the implications thereof. For whereas this male-faced church has often presented itself to me as a strong, meaningful, and positive presence, it often has, too, and simultaneously, marked me with overwhelming feelings of estrangement and alienation. As for God, that Presence whom the church mediates, if it is not really the Monster God about whom Kathleen Norris writes,¹⁵ it is at least a God whose

presence, instinctively for me, calls up images of something remote, forbidding, stern, inaccessible. God, faith, religion are not easy things for me to trust, easy things for me to have faith in, because too often they have been Other to who I am as a woman; thus, I do not feel entirely safe in or with them.

And yet, I do continue to struggle. The Lutheran church of which I am a member in Pennsylvania belongs to a synod which has, in the past few years, experienced a shortage of pastors. One of its strategies to deal with that was to institute an Authorized Lay Worship Leaders Program, a training program for lay people who might, at the end of two years of all-day Saturday classes taken once a month, be authorized to lead worship in local Lutheran congregations. My pastor – a man, by the way – gently but insistently urged that I take part in it. In the end, I was both student and teacher in the program. (I enrolled as a student, but also stepped out of my student role to teach one of the Old Testament sessions). It seemed sometimes that with this program God was playing a big joke on (or with) me: after all that struggle so many years ago about whether I should go to seminary or not, I was here being given the opportunity to go to a sort of Cliff Notes' version of a seminary. Then, too, I also felt in many ways like a kid who was being allowed to both have their cake and eat it. For with this program I would be able to do all the fun stuff of being a pastor (that is, preach and preside at worship), while avoiding all the un-fun stuff (that is, administration and meetings).

Two summers ago our class was formally authorized at our Synod Assembly to function as lay leaders of worship. In the midst of the congratulatory applause, though, I still remember seeing one male pastor out in the sea of chairs who looked very upset and ostentatiously was NOT applauding. Mixed in with the distressing feelings that were stirred up for me from seeing that was the memory of what had happened just the week before. I had received a special, anticipatory authorization by the bishop not only to preach at the Sunday morning worship of my church, but also to preside at communion. Despite some initial nervousness, I ended up feeling unbelievably comfortable and right in that role. And yet . . . I have also never told my parents of that experience, wherein as a non-ordained woman I distributed the communion elements.

Still, I also positively acknowledge how my childhood experience of faith, family, and father has resulted in so

much of the impelling interests that have led me to where I am today: the love of story, the use of the Bible as a central lodestone of meaning, the intense yearning to see and connect with women – their pains, joys, and desires – knowing that they were shared by me and so knowing that, just as they did, I, too, might have an acknowledged place in the world. I do not think it's accidental that I acceded so readily to Carol's suggestion that I write a dissertation on biblical daughters – my own role as a daughter has been so formative in my life; I wanted to see what that role had meant for other women in a religious context – which meant, for me, examining the Bible's portrayal of daughters. Nor do I think it's happenstance that my first published article was a critical examination of the story of the concubine of Judges 19 – a woman who is abused, gang-raped, murdered, and dismembered by the men of her community, including her husband. At the time of its writing, I was struggling through feelings of helplessness engendered both by a move to a new town and a first full-time job as a college professor, and a growing suspicion and panic that my marriage was in its death throes. More recently I wrote an article on the significance of names and naming in the biblical world, noting that names often express the fundamental character or destiny of a person, and that those who did the naming thereby were recognized as having both authority and discernment to correctly recognize who that person was and who they might become. Ironically, but perhaps fittingly, I found out from my Dad just a few months ago that it was he who named me – it seems that as a young schoolteacher he was much taken by the brightness and attractiveness of a high school co-ed named Karla. (By the way, I don't think my Dad has ever shared with my Mom the reason for my name.) In any case, my scholarly writing about the world of the Bible and the world of women, even sometimes without my knowing it, and even as academic and properly footnoted as it has been, has also been deeply imbrogated in the events and experiences of my life, especially of the interplay between the male gaze of the church – both positive and negative -- and the feminism from which I have derived the means to look back at, and critique, measure, and evaluate, that male gaze.¹⁶

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¹ The inspiration for opening my paper this way comes from Ernest Simmons. In his book, Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction for Faculty, he begins with an anecdote arising from the question: Why are you here? In Ernie's case, he recalls being asked the question by a college registrar at the start of his college career, and then notes the ways in which it both did, and did not, provoke existential anxieties in him. See Ernest L. Simmons, Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction for Faculty (Minneapolis:

Several months ago, in the midst of working on an earlier version of this paper, I received a phone call from my Mom. She asked what I was up to and I told her a bit about this paper. I then turned around and asked her if she remembered anything about the Vacation Bible School episode when I had hit my head and gotten stitches. She did indeed. This is what she remembered. She remembered getting a phone call from the vicar at the church whose first words were: "Don't worry; it's not serious." And, on the strength of his words, she didn't. She drove down to the clinic and was ushered into the examination room where I was waiting to be stitched up. And she was quite calm and collected during the whole time – even as we waited for almost an hour before a doctor came in to do the stitches.

What she had also been told by the vicar was that the accident occurred simply because I had run into the brick windowsill. In other words, in the version she had received, no boy had been responsible for my pain and blood; I had simply brought it upon myself. When I told Mom my version of what had happened, complete with the older boy pushing me into that brick windowsill, I was surprised by my Mom's response. She tartly observed that well, of course they weren't going to tell her the whole truth, because, if they did, the church might be opening itself up to a lawsuit; so they placed all the responsibility for the injury on to me. I could not recall my Mom ever before being so critical of "the fathers"; I had always generally seen her functioning as a sycophant for my father and the male authorities of the church. That day I felt the thrill of a secret, shared bond with my Mother, the forbidden salt taste of being on common ground with her in questioning and critiquing the central male figures in our lives.

But all that, I think, is a story for another time.

Thank you.¹⁷

Augsburg Fortress, 1998), pg. 1.

² Tenure, in particular, is a funny thing. It is a supposed marker of achievement in academic life, but unlike so many others, it does not bring with it any new gains. As a friend of mine, Linda McMillin points out, all tenure means is that you get to continue doing what you have already been doing for the last six or more years – surely not an unmixed blessing. Not getting tenure can be devastating; but getting tenure can mean only more of the same – for endless years to come. I was amused to discover that bell hooks begins her book, Teaching to Transgress, with a similar experiential reflection. “In the weeks before the English Department at Oberlin College was about to decide whether or not I would be granted tenure, I was haunted by dreams of running away – of disappearing – yes, even of dying. These dreams were not a response to fear that I would not be granted tenure. They were a response to the reality that I would be granted tenure. I was afraid that I would be trapped in the academy forever.” bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

³ Time magazine recently ran an article on the dangers of dodge ball, though none of the examples were remotely similar to the danger I faced. The letters to the editor that ran in response to it during the following weeks were divided about equally between those supporting and those opposing the article’s arguments. See Tamala M. Edwards (with reporting by Anne Moffet), “Scourge of the Playground It’s dodge ball, believe it or not. More schools are banning the childhood game, saying it’s too violent.” Time Vol. 157, no. 20 (May 21, 2001), p. 68. And also Letters to the Editor in Time, 6-11-2001 and 7-2-2001.

⁴ Note that Richard Lischer, in his just published memoir of growing up, and then becoming a pastor, in the Lutheran Church, also recalls the high esteem in which he held his pastor as a young boy. But he didn’t take it quite as far as I did – seeing the pastor as God. See Richard Lischer, Open Secrets: A Spiritual Journey Through a Country Church (New York: Doubleday, 2001), pp. 21-22.

⁵ See Ignatius of Loyola, Meditations.

⁶ All Biblical translations come from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁷ This same situation tends still to pertain today. A recently-written history of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (written from an “insider” perspective) argues that ongoing discussions about the leadership roles of women in the church are linked to issues about authority, with this latter being a still unresolved issue that goes back to the very beginnings of the church in the 19th century. See Mary Todd, Authority Vested: A Story of Identity and Change in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). The issue of women’s place in this church (or lack thereof), also gives rise to a conflict between Richard Lischer and his congregation in the 1970’s. See Lischer, pp. 197-201.

⁸ I suspect so. Two years ago, when my oldest nephew turned thirteen, my Dad made a great deal of fuss about his first hunt: a gun was obtained and they went practicing on a shooting range, both as prelude to an actual hunting trip. (But the hunters were unsuccessful on that trip; no deer were shot.)

⁹ Norris writes: “When some ten years later I began going to church again because I felt I needed to, I wasn’t prepared for the pain. The services felt like word bombardment – agony for a poet – and often exhausted me so much I’d have to sleep for three or more hours afterward. Doctrinal language slammed many a door in my face, and I became frustrated when I couldn’t glimpse the Word behind the words. Ironically, it was the language about Jesus Christ, meant to be most inviting, that made me feel most left out. Sometimes I’d give up, deciding that I just wasn’t religious. This elicited an interesting comment from a pastor friend who said, ‘I don’t know too many people who are so serious about religion they can’t even go to church.’” Kathleen Norris, Dakota: A Spiritual Geography (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993), p. 94.

¹⁰ In an earlier version of this section of the paper, I wrote about “giving myself permission” to read for myself the Bible. As I pondered the reasons for thinking that I needed permission, I realized that I had already imbibed too well the lesson that, as a girl, the realm of religion had areas marked off to me. Thus, any religious initiatives that I took – even just reading the Bible without an outside mediating interpreter – might lead to the transgressing of boundaries, the breaking down of barriers behind which I was NOT to go.

At about this same time, my Dad took a similar position with one of my sisters. It turns out that she had an incredible aptitude for mathematics, so much so that she was left bored and frustrated by our limited high school math curriculum. Thus, she petitioned the school board to graduate early so that she could start taking calculus classes at a nearby college. Although today such a move is not at all unusual, at this time and place it had never been done before. She was required to make a formal appearance before the school board with our parents. At the hearing, Dad greatly surprised her by making the statement that, although he would never make the same decision she was making, he had full confidence in her ability to make the right decision for herself, and so he fully supported her request to graduate early. (The request, by the way, was granted.)

It turns out that, among my sisters, I had it relatively easy. Once I decided on a career choice -- just one year out of college -- I did not deviate from it. Another sister, though, graduating with a major in Art History, went on to jobs in a museum gallery, an arts and antique boutique, and at Cargill. Currently she works as an administrative coordinator for elderly people who work as volunteers, though, just two weeks ago she told me she was out applying for jobs again. Another sister earned both a B.A. and an M.A. in math. For awhile she taught math, first at the high school level, then at the college level. Tiring of that, she got her private pilot’s license,

then flirted with the idea of becoming a CPA or a meteorologist. She decided instead to learn how to “design space ships.” She’s currently finishing a B.S. degree in aerospace engineering at Embry-Riddle College in Prescott, AZ. The third sister took a somewhat different route: she’s married to a pastor, with whom she has six kids. She’s currently home-schooling the four youngest, while also serving as the church’s administrative assistant and organist.

¹³ Even in such stodgy and rote courses as Old Testament Introduction, I find myself organizing the material in such a way that it plays on themes of ambiguity, contradiction, and paradox. These may be good Lutheran themes (especially paradox), but for me they are especially pertinent because of their grounding in feminism.

¹⁴ Quoted in Jeffrey L. Staley, Reading with a Passion: Rhetoric, Autobiography, and the American West in the Gospel of John (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 145, n. 122.

¹⁵ Norris encounters the Monster God through fundamentalism. She describes it as follows: “When I was very small my fundamentalist grandmother Norris, meaning well, told me about the personal experience I’d have with Jesus one day. She talked about Jesus coming and the world ending. It sounded a lot like a fairy tale when the prince comes, only scarier. Fundamentalism is about control more than grace, and in effect my grandmother implanted the seed of fundamentalism within me, a shadow in Jungian terms, that has been difficult to overcome. . . More insidiously, it imbedded in me an unconscious belief in a Monster God. . . Trust is something abused children lack, and children raised with a Monster God inside them have a hard time regaining it.” Norris, pp. 95-96.

¹⁶ What I am alluding to here, and what I think my writing is groping towards, is an outgrowth of reader-response criticism known as autobiographical criticism. For some recent works of such criticism in the field of biblical scholarship, see Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, The Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation (London & New York: Routledge, 1999); Janice Capel Anderson and Jeffrey L. Staley, eds., Taking It Personally: Autobiographical Criticism; Semeia 72 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Danna Nolan Fewell, “Imagination, Method, and Murder: Un/Framing the Face of Post-Exilic Israel,” in Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and The Book, ed. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 132-152; and Jeffrey L. Staley, Reading with a Passion.

¹⁷ I want to express my immense thanks to Linda McMillin. It was her work (and our talking about it) on an autobiographical piece of her own that eventually stimulated me into the writing of this article. See Linda McMillin, “Telling Old Tales About Something New: The Vocation of a Feminist and a Catholic Historian,” in Reconciling Feminism and Catholicism, ed. Sally B. and Ronald Ebest (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press), forthcoming. The shape and thrust of this piece was also profoundly informed by Laurel Richardson, “Vespers,” in Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 217-38. Finally, it was the members of the 2000 Lutheran Academy of Scholars who poked and prodded me into thinking more deeply about what it has meant, and means, to be Lutheran; then, too, they gave me some much needed encouragement in the early stages (and struggles over) this piece. I thank them.

DISCERNING VOCATION: PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

Tom Christenson

Why I Became a Professor

I grew up just two blocks from the college campus where my father worked. He was not on the faculty. In spite of that many of the students called him "Doc." He was a steam engineer given the responsibility of keeping the showers hot, the radiators warm, the whole place running. As a child I enjoyed visiting him in the "boiler room," his place of work. I liked the pungent smell of hot steel and the machinery of the pumps. Besides, there was always coffee, donuts and a small circle of folks in conversation.

Often after school I would stop in to see my dad and hang around until he was ready to walk home from work. On many of those days I would spend the hour between four and five in the afternoon wandering around campus, peeking into rooms, labs and offices. I remember the vacated classrooms, remnants of lessons left on their chalkboards. There I came upon traces of worlds described in foreign tongues, in Greek and Latin, in German and French, in the calculi of math and physics, and very often in English terms that weren't part of my elementary school vocabulary. I remember the smells and sights of the laboratories — formaldehyde and skeletons and all sorts of glass apparati and organic and inorganic chemicals. The art department also had its identifying smells, sometimes clay, sometimes oil paints. It was fun to look in from week to week to see works in process. But of most interest to me were the faculty and staff who were still around in the late afternoon. There was a biology prof with a giant moustache who looked like a walrus. A theology prof with Harpo Marx hair had two desks in his office that he paced between. There was a music prof who was about 6'10" tall with reddish blond hair, a giraffe-like neck, and a high counter-tenor voice. There was the librarian who regarded my looking at books with suspicion, guarding them as if they were her very own. The art professor would say to me every time I'd peek into his space, "I like to draw pictures. Do you draw pictures?" There was the professor of mathematics who had a blackboard in her office. As I watched through her open door she wrote proofs with her right hand and erased them immediately with her left. There was a very near sighted man who paced the hallway of his building with his nose almost touching the slim volume he held open in his hand. On the cover was only one word, "Novalis." I found all these characters simultaneously fascinating and frightening.

For me walking through those nearly deserted buildings was like a trip to wonder-land. It was a world of unreality in a way, a journey into world of imagination, into an intellectual play-space. But most of all it was a bedlam of weird folks. People who, though in adult bodies, seemed to be child spirits arrested in their development who were "confined" to this institution to play out their days. The college campus was, from my point of view, a kind of menagerie for the mentally sharp but developmentally retarded. It was a place where people seemed to be happily institutionalized in ways that removed them from the cares of the ordinary world. That gave them all the time they wanted to pursue their peculiar interests. Like a zoo, it was a great place for a kid to visit, but I then thought, not a place a normal person would want to reside.

But as I advanced through my teen years, through high school and then college I came to discover that, in fact, I was not a normal person at all. Many of my peers, and a few of my parents' friends, started pointing out to me that I was weird. I had a high school teacher who even told me I was the weirdest person he had ever met. When I came, finally, to accept the truth of what they said I was relieved to know that there was a place for me and people like me. So after the appropriate induction and certification I moved in, and except for a few years when I was sprung to the outside world, I have remained happily confined here ever since. I am very thankful there are such places as colleges and universities, places where people can pass there lives drawing pictures, studying the sex-life of waterfowl, learning and perfecting the grammar of a no longer spoken language, reading the works of a single author over and over again, teaching a complete fiction like economics as if it were reality, teaching mice and rats to do tricks, blowing a horn. An asylum for child-like minds building towers of intellectual blocks and then knocking them down, that's where I belong. It's that sense of fit that makes me a professor.

Why I am a Philosopher

When I was a junior in high school I took a class in physics. Well into the class our teacher, who always wore brown suits, was introducing to us Bernoulli's principle — that faster moving fluids (such as air) have a lower pressure than slower moving or stationary fluids. This principle is exemplified by the fact that smoke exits the window of a

moving car, that an airplane wing has lift, that we can sail a sailboat into the wind, etc. After hearing all of this I raised my hand and asked the teacher why this was so. He said, with a sense of satisfaction, "Because of Bernoulli's principle." I then asked, "But why is Bernoulli's principle true?" He said, "Because faster moving fluids have a lower pressure than slower moving fluids." I looked around the room for reinforcement but found everyone else was busy writing down what he said, making sure to get the spelling of "Bernoulli" right. But I was still puzzled. His answer had not really advanced my understanding so I said, "And this is true because ---?" "Because of Bernoulli's principle," he replied, now obviously agitated by what must have seemed like my unrelenting stupidity. I paused for a while considering whether I shouldn't give up and be silent. But finally I blurted, "Is 'because of Bernoulli's principle' really an answer at all? Isn't it just a name for our ignorance?"

At that point he gave me an angry look and growled,

"Christenson, you're nothing but a damn philosopher."

He was, as it turned out, correct. At that time I did not know what a philosopher was, but I could sense from his tone and the accompanying adjective that it was not a particularly good thing to be. I won't argue the virtues of philosophy here, but I have usually seen my inclination towards philosophy as a gift, but occasionally I understand that everyone else does not see it that way. I continue to this day being puzzled by what others take to be significant knowledge. I have over the years compiled a fairly long list of things that we parade as knowledge that seem to me to be "names for our ignorance." But calling or curse, whichever way I look at it, I know this twist of mind is something I am stuck with. One of my colleagues recently introduced me as "an unrepentant philosopher." I am guilty as charged.

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BOOK REVIEW

Alister McGrath Glimpsing the Divine: The Search for Meaning in the Universe. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. 123 pp. (Hardback)

Don Braxton

Glimpsing the Divine offers twelve brief meditations on the human quest for meaning and the ways in which the Christian tradition has sought to respond to that quest. The book is very articulate, non-academic (in the good sense), and lavishly illustrated with beautiful photography. In an engaging style, McGrath, a professor of historical theology at Oxford University, offers the serious spiritual seeker glimpses into the ways in Western civilization have both thematized the human hunger for meaning and has fed its people with spiritual, largely Christian, wisdom. For people at the early stages of religious awareness, this book can serve as a fine introduction to Western spirituality.

Having said this, I am also of two minds about what I think about the book. On the one hand, the book touches the bases on all the principal theological themes of the Christian tradition. His presentation centers on incarnational themes in chapter seven where he presents Jesus as the interpretive key (logos) through which we can finally and adequately situate our wonder and awe before the mystery of the universe. He emphasizes the importance in the Christian tradition of having a "personal relationship" with the divine. In the Christ not only does the natural order of reality receive its definitive interpretation (chapter eight) but also our destiny, individually and as a species, before the great temporal horizon of the future (chapter eleven). Other chapters take up Christian teachings on the fall (chapter nine), the place of doctrine in the faith life (chapter ten), and the context of these Christian themes against the backdrop of Western civilization (chapters one through six). It is an admirable portrait narrated with skill and eloquence.

On the other hand, the book adopts a particular interpretive angle to these themes which a scholar of religion will be sensitive to, even if a novice to theology will not. I would characterize the theological vantage point from which McGrath paints his portrait as a relatively conservative neo-Barthian confessionalism. While there is nothing wrong with that orientation as such, yet honesty should dictate some acknowledgement that this is particular kind of theology and that it serves in this text as the normative location from which he writes. But nowhere does McGrath discuss this. Indeed, he repeatedly refers to "the Christian" view on the subjects he discusses as if Christianity were a

monolithic tradition. Thus, readers can walk away from the text thinking of Christianity as a set of relatively singular answers to life's questions rather than as a set of interrelated conversations which do not allow as much coherence as he seems to want to force on the subject matter. It is at this point that I think he has sacrificed too much to achieve the narrative coherency he wants.

In line with a neo-Barthian theological agenda, various assumptions seem to permeate the book that are troubling to me as I try to think theologically at the beginning of the 21st century. First, the book is dreadfully Eurocentric. When non-Western traditions are quoted, in good Barthian fashion they are treated as "taillights" illuminated by the "headlights" of Christianity. In a world where the majority of Christians now live south of the equator and where syncretistic Christian spin-offs are increasingly the norm, I wonder how convincing this hardline demarcation of Christian identity is. Second, McGrath seems to engage in dialogue with other sources of insight in the West, particularly the natural sciences, but the portraits are strangely one-sided. Science routinely fails adequately to explain life and Christianity routinely seems to rise to the occasion. Thus, a subtle host-guest mentality invades the dialogue where the power differential clearly falls on the side of Christianity, and science must content itself with making interesting observations destined to be subsumed under Christian categories. Again, I believe a more sophisticated set of relationships is better attuned to the times. Third, McGrath rather blithely buys into metaphysical dualism in two different ways. He suggests, for example, that "we are not at home" in the world and that our true place is "beyond." Furthermore, he seems to extend the fall to the whole of creation where death, predation, and struggle are part of what is "wrong" with the world. He posits the hope for a world beyond all such phenomena at the end of time. Again, these are certainly historically available options within the Christian tradition, but they are not *the only* Christian options, nor, it seems to me, are they even the most attractive ones for a world in the midst of a full blown environmental crisis.

I would recommend this book, then, to people making their first ventures into Christian theology, but I would want also to see it contextualized within the more complicated

cultural world that we inhabit. Pluralism is too pervasive a reality that we can hope to speak with one voice any more. Barthianism as a theological orientation seems strangely dated in this day and age, almost antiquated, I would venture to say. We have become too aware of the limits of human truth speaking to return to this theological stance.

(This is a section added to the review to address it to people preparing for ministry. Don Luck wanted this part added and to run it in the Trinity Journal)

So why does McGrath write Christian theology in this manner? And is this mode of discourse best attuned to our times as we seek to bring the Christian witness to the world? First, the why. Perhaps it is too much to ask of an introductory text that it evidence more sophistication about social location and religious epistemology. Nevertheless, the cultural context in which we theologize literally shimmers with postmodern nuance. Even untrained Christian thinkers understand the constructedness of Christian claims in the midst of a welter of competing claims. Moreover, few Christians can afford to be as arrogant as McGrath sounds in relation to other religious traditions. "The Other" is now our neighbor, our friend, our spouse, our children, our teacher. It is no longer our job to convert the other to support our own epistemological security. In Bonhoeffer's sense of religionless Christianity, it is now time to serve Christ by being open to the invitation of "others," to listen to God's call in their claims.

As an historian of Christianity, McGrath is clear about the theological option I describe above. After all, it flows rather directly from the historical consciousness of the 19th century. Yet he rejects it and opts for a kind of self-contained confessionalism. For example, in his chapter on suffering he lapses into assertions without warrants and circular theological reasoning that calls out for challenge. He argues "if nature is just an accident, the result of blind natural forces, we should not be unduly disturbed by the presence of pain and suffering. It would just be the inevitable outcome of a pointless world, yet another meaningless aspect of a meaningless world." We might ask if our only choice is between absolute meaningfulness and absolute meaninglessness, as he seems to suggest. Or we might ask what he means by such conceptions as "accident," "blind," "inevitability," or "pointlessness,"

words which call out for clarification, and which, of course, are chosen as polar opposites to the providentialism he wants to lead his reader to accept. The circularity of his constructive religious view appears when he offers his warrant for his theology, namely, "For the Christian, this makes sense." (p. 94) In effect, he argues that fully to comprehend Christian claims, one must be a participant in the cultural-linguistic world of the Christian (ala Lindbeck). In other words, to know it, one has to believe it, and only by believing it, can one know it. Such strategies have been on the rise since the late 20th century because Christians believe that postmodern epistemologies no longer require accountability across cultural-linguistic boundaries.

Now the what. What I would prefer to see in contemporary theology is a growing awareness of the relativity of Christian claims. Such awareness will ask of Christians that they engage and feel encumbered by the relative truth claims of "the other" even as they seek to enrich their religious experiences and theologies within their own Christian communities. In H. Richard Niebuhr's still useful phrasing, we are called to respond to all things as if we are responding to God's actions upon us. Cultural-linguistic relativity does not justify theological isolationism. Far from it, it necessitates Christian engagement. Christians must come to hear their voice as simply one among many voices. It is not the voice that silences the falsehoods of "the Other." It is not the witness that must keep "the heathen" in check. It is not the only path to communion with divine, even if it is our way of communing with God. Exclusivity needs to be a thing of the past. This, I believe, is the cultural setting in which we do find ourselves. It would be a poor service to future church folk - both lay and ordained - to train them in an overly simplistic picture of our cultural landscape. Moreover, with the rise of fundamentalisms of many different stripes - Christian and Muslim - to name the two most recently in the news, do we really need a Christian theology so convinced of its rectitude and interpretive adequacy? With attitudes that paint the world in black and white colors coming from all angles in American society - Christian America dedicated to freedom vs. Muslim Middle East dedicated to terrorism - is it not morally questionable to contribute to that mode of thinking?

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