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

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# INTERSECTIONS

**faith + life + learning**

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NUMBER ELEVEN

SPRING 2001

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“Even if the received opinion be ... the whole truth; unless it be suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will ... be held in the measure of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this but ... the meaning of the doctrine itself will be lost or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct.”

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

**The Christian University**

**Academic Freedom**

**The Christian Journalist**

# INTERSECTIONS

faith + life + learning

NUMBER 11

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**INTERSECTIONS**

**SPRING 2001**

**Published by :** The Division for Higher Education & Schools  
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Arne Selbyg, *Publisher*

Tom Christenson, *Editor*

Marisa Cull, *Student Assistant*

Vicki Miller, *Secretary*

**Editorial Board:** Timothy A. Bennett, Wittenberg Univ.; Karla Bohmbach, Susquehanna Univ.; DeAne Lagerquist, St. Olaf College; Anne Pedersen, Augustana College (Sioux Falls).

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## PURPOSE STATEMENT

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

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

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

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## FROM THE PUBLISHER

Sometimes it is tough to be a promoter of Lutheran colleges and universities. You run into some jerks in faculty or staff positions that don't seem to have a clue about what they are doing and why, or you hear that a dedicated institution just finished beating the bushes vigorously for contributions in order to pay their bills and balance their books, and succeeded, but now they have to start all over again to find another short term solution. Or you hear from students and parents who have been treated poorly by the admissions office at an ELCA school, or meet Lutheran pastors who have no sense of the missions of the church colleges and how those missions are linked to the overall ministry of the gospel. You may cry out "How long, oh Lord, how long" will I have to push this stone up the mountainside, and like Sisyphus see it roll down, and know that you have to push it all the way up again, and again, and again.

But then you hear the results of the surveys that show how satisfied with their college education the alumni of the Lutheran colleges and universities are, and how much more often their college education integrated academic and ethical issues, and how they are more active in their churches and service activities than graduates of other institutions. And you attend a seminar with a dozen faculty members from ELCA colleges with deep insights into the holistic educational process, and deep commitment to the students of their institutions. Or you hear an engaging presentation by a bishop of the church that captures the spirit of Lutheran higher education to a tee.

And then you hear from someone who has read the book that the Division for Higher Education and Schools has published, Lutheran Higher Education -- An Introduction, written by professor Ernie Simmons, and has used it in the development of a mission statement for their institution, and now want several copies to distribute to other faculty members. And you get calls from people who have read an issue of Intersections, and want to get on the subscriber list, and talk about how inspirational a certain article was, and how the journal should be distributed more widely. And the editor of Intersections agrees to keep on putting it together, and the university where he works agrees to continue to subsidize it, and you hear that there is now enough good material submitted so the journal can be published more often.

So you know that the stone is not at the bottom of the hill, and that the colleges and universities of the church have made a huge difference in thousands of lives, and that some of the programs you work on are successful and do make a big

difference, and that they can continue to be offered.

And you feel deeply blessed, and know that the colleges and universities of the ELCA will continue to serve God through the services they offer their students, and that the students will be inspired to serve the Lord and their society in their work and lives and vocations. Sometimes it is great to be a promoter of Lutheran colleges and universities.

Arne Selbyg, Director for Colleges and Universities

## **FROM THE EDITOR**

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This issue borrows everything from other sources. Richard Hughes piece originated as a speech given at the inauguration of the new president of Pepperdine University. Nick Wolterstorff's and Storm Bailey's essays originally appeared in *Academe*, the journal of the American Association of University Professors, and Catherine McMullen's originated as a talk given at Concordia College. Should we apologize for being such blatant borrowers?

I don't think we need to worry about borrowing. There's something appropriate in faculty recognizing how much they borrow from others. If we had to rely only on our own original ideas or words in the classroom, we wouldn't have a whole lot to say. More important is how we use what we borrow, how it fits to illustrate the issues at hand, what we are lead to ponder as a result, and what we learn from it.

We've chosen to include these four pieces in this issue of INTERSECTIONS because they focus so well on things of great interest to us. It's amazing to me how much Luther has influenced the thinking of Richard Hughes, for example, and the ways in which Lutheran themes might, by means of him, come to influence the focus of education at Pepperdine. It's also interesting to see how Wolterstorff and Bailey have articulated issues of tremendous practical importance to faculty at all of our institutions. Perhaps new faculty at our institutions, by reading these pieces, will overcome some of the common misconceptions about what faith related education is all about and how it effects issues like academic freedom. Catherine McMullen's article raises questions for all of our disciplines, not just journalism, and about the relations between the good, the bad and the ugly in each of them.

So, we hope you find these articles to be engaging, helpful, and sometimes at least, worth arguing with.

Tom Christenson, Capital University

## THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

*A Lecture Celebrating the Inauguration of Andrew K. Benton As the Seventh President of Pepperdine University: Tuesday, September 19, 2000*

Richard T. Hughes

Shortly before he left office, David Davenport, the sixth president of Pepperdine University, led the entire Pepperdine community in the creation of a mission statement that affirms the following:

*Pepperdine is a Christian university committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and Christian values, where students are strengthened for lives of purpose, service, and leadership.*

Now, as we celebrate the inauguration of Andrew K. Benton as the seventh president of this institution, we must ask the question, "What does it mean when we say that Pepperdine is a Christian university?" And we must ask as well a second question that follows closely on the heels of the first: "How can we insure that Pepperdine remains a vibrant Christian university for as long as this institution shall survive?"

These are serious questions that we dare not ignore, for there are many powerful critics who argue that the idea of a Christian university is an oxymoron, a virtual contradiction in terms. In their judgment, Christianity is restrictive, dogmatic, and exclusive, while the university, at its best, celebrates openness, diversity, and an unrelenting search for truth. How, then, can one combine the ideals of Christianity with the ideals of the academy and do so successfully?

The truth is, there are many outstanding institutions of higher learning in the United States that at one time embraced a commitment to their Christian moorings, but slowly abandoned that commitment as their academic stature improved. While Harvard, Yale, and Princeton head that list, we could point to scores of other institutions that finally abandoned their experiment in Christian higher education.

Today, there are precious few institutions that have matured into first-rate centers of scholarship and learning while maintaining a strong institutional commitment to the Christian faith. The critics of Pepperdine's vision, then, could easily point to the impressive list of failures in the field of Christian higher education as proof that Pepperdine will likely fail as well.

It would be all too easy to ignore those critics as false prophets who simply don't understand what Pepperdine is all about. But we will make a grave mistake if we choose to believe that, somehow, we stand above the powerful forces that hastened the collapse of Christian higher education at so many other worthy institutions. If scores of other institutions have failed to combine the ideals of the Christian faith with the ideals of the academy in a meaningful way, what makes us think that Pepperdine will be an exception to the rule?

In terms of academic quality, Pepperdine already walks in the footprints of many distinguished institutions of higher learning in the United States. Indeed, in September, 2000, *U. S. News and World Report* ranked Pepperdine among the top fifty centers of learning in the United States. For a university that is slightly more than fifty years old, that is cause for considerable pride.

At the same time, the ranking by *U. S. News and World Report* is also a cause for sober reflection on how we hope to maintain, and even enhance, the Christian character of this institution in the years to come. We can make good and noble resolutions all we want, but mere talk will not get the job done. What we need is a strategy that grows from the very heart of this community.

### **A STRATEGY OF COMMUNITY-WIDE CONVERSATION**

The word "strategy" is in some ways misleading, for I am not suggesting that there is some "quick fix" or some gimmick that, if properly employed, will keep Pepperdine on course. Instead, the strategy I have in mind is a strategy of continual theological reflection as, together, week after week and year after year, all of us in this community undertake the task of exploring what it might mean for Pepperdine to thrive as a Christian university. This means that we must think long and hard on the question that inevitably stands at the very heart of this institution: "How can we combine the ideals of the Christian faith with the ideals of the academy and do so successfully?" This is the question that must frame our thinking and our conversation, not just today and not just tomorrow, but for as long as this institution shall survive.

If we hope that Pepperdine will succeed in this experiment in Christian higher education, the conversation on this issue must not be confined to a handful of faculty or a core group of administrators who have a particular interest in this issue. Instead, the conversation must reach out and embrace each and every person in our community--every member of the faculty, every person in the administration, every person who serves on the Board of Regents, every student, and every person who works on the staff of this University.

If the Pepperdine community were to undertake this kind of sustained conversation, we just might have a chance to take our place among that handful of universities that have matured into first-rate centers of scholarship and learning while maintaining a strong institutional commitment to the Christian faith.

With this sort of conversation in mind, the Pepperdine administration established in October of 1999 the Pepperdine University Center for Faith and Learning. The administration charged the Center with providing various venues for members of this community to think creatively on the meaning of Christian higher education. How, for example, can Christian faith sustain the life of the mind? What does it mean to engage in scholarship that is both Christian in orientation but also sensitive to issues of diversity? How might we teach from a Christian perspective while, at the very same time, enhancing our students' abilities to think both critically and comparatively? How can responsible Christian scholars connect their Christian convictions with their teaching and their scholarship in ways that respect the integrity of the academic enterprise, the integrity of their disciplines, the integrity of their students, and the integrity of the Christian faith? Or, to put all these questions in the most succinct possible form, how can we combine the ideals of the Christian faith with the ideals of the academy and do so successfully?

To fulfill its mandate, the Center is hard at work convening seminars and discussion groups where faculty from all five schools that make up this University can reflect on these kinds of questions. In fact, between May of 1999 and September of 2000, a total of 75 Pepperdine faculty participated in these seminars. We now seek to extend the work of the Center by offering seminars where faculty can interact not just with other faculty, but also with students, staff, and members of the administration on precisely these kinds of issues.

In time, and with adequate levels of funding, we hope to offer grants for some of our very finest scholars who have a vision for top-flight, faith-based scholarship. And we hope as well to bring to this campus visiting scholars who model cutting edge academic work that is grounded in a Christian frame of reference.

In my judgment, there is no more important work at Pepperdine University today than the work of the Center for Faith and Learning. I say this because the Center's work is an investment in the soul of this institution. It is not an investment in brick and mortar, though clearly without brick and mortar we cannot survive. Instead, the work of the Center is an investment in the hearts and minds of the people who make up this university. This is the only sort of investment that can help insure that Pepperdine will move into the future as a Christian university of the very highest order.

I want now to make some suggestions that perhaps will contribute to the quality of the conversation that the Center seeks to facilitate.

#### **DIVERSITY**

In the first place, scholars at institutions like Pepperdine commonly commit themselves both to the Christian faith and to the life of the mind, but often struggle to connect these dimensions in a meaningful way. After all, the academy invites openness, diversity, and critical scholarship, while the Christian religion demands a highly particularistic faith commitment. The question we must therefore ask is this: how is it possible to nurture one's commitment to a highly particularistic religion like Christianity, and nurture at the very same time a commitment to values like diversity and genuine openness to perspectives that differ from one's own?

The answer to that question has much to do with the paradox of the Christian faith. That paradox begins with the incarnation--the notion that an infinite God appeared in finite human flesh--and then goes on to manifest itself in a myriad of other ways. In the Christian tradition, for example, life always springs from death, the deepest levels of fulfillment always emerge from self-denial, leadership always grows from servanthood, and the ability to affirm diversity always springs from an affirmation of Christian particularity.

How might this paradoxical character of the Christian faith

play itself out in the context of the life of the mind? Jesus underscores the particularity of the Christian tradition when He says of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me."

And yet, this very same Jesus also taught,

*You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:43-48)*

The truth is, Jesus consistently reached out to the powerful and to the marginalized, to Jews and to Greeks, to men and to women, to slaves and to free Roman citizens, to prostitutes, to tax collectors, and to thieves. Today, His compassionate concern extends to every man and woman in this multicultural world in which we live: Asians and Africans, Hispanics and Native Americans, Buddhists and Hindus, Jews and Christians. When it comes to compassionate concern, Jesus leaves no one out.

This means that if we ask Jesus to define for us the meaning of diversity, we must be prepared for an answer that is absolutely inclusive. In Jesus' world, all human beings are infinitely valuable. From the rich young ruler to the woman caught in adultery, Jesus took everyone He encountered with complete and radical seriousness.

And so we are left with the question, Can we serve Jesus and celebrate diversity at one and the same time? If we understand anything at all about Jesus, the question answers itself. The truth is, we cannot serve Jesus *without* serving the diversity of peoples and cultures that abound in our world.

But there is more, for on the question of diversity, Christian faith goes far beyond the intellectual tradition that sustains diversity in the modern, secular academy. That tradition simply holds that "All men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." This is a marvelous beginning, but Christian faith moves beyond equality and rights to love, service, and

compassion.

Christians are told, for example, to love not only our friends but also our enemies--those whom we are inclined not to like, or those whose folkways or religious traditions may cause us considerable discomfort, or those whom the rest of society tends to leave behind for whatever reason. Thus, Jesus tells us,

*When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, [and] the blind. (Luke 14:12-13)*

Over the years this tradition of Christian compassion has played itself out in some important ways. For example, in spite of the fact that America's most notable revolutionary leaders affirmed the proposition that "all men are created equal," they failed to see how that proposition might demand liberation of their slaves. In contrast, the Quakers, driven by the biblical tradition of love and compassion for all human beings, had freed their slaves by the time America declared its independence from Great Britain.

In our own tradition of Churches of Christ, this same biblical tradition inspired Barton Stone and his followers who lived in the vicinity of Cane Ridge, Kentucky to free their slaves as well. And they took this action long before most white people in the American South had even considered emancipation of slaves as an option. Thus, Joseph Thomas, a preacher in the Christian movement in the early nineteenth century, reported in 1810-11 that

*The christian companies in this settlement and about Cane Ridge have been large; but within a few years, many of them, who held black people as slaves, emancipated them, and have moved to the state of Ohio. I will observe that the christians of these parts abhor the idea of slavery, and some of them have almost tho't that they who hold to slavery cannot be a christian.*

It is undeniably true that many Christians across the centuries have failed to live out the Christian mandate for love and compassion for all human beings. But the fact that so many Christians have failed in this regard in no way invalidates the vision itself. The teachings of our Lord still stand, whether Christians implement those teachings or not.

It must be clear by now that while the modern secular



academy values diversity, so does the Christian faith. And yet, the Christian scholar must always bear in mind that when we compare the Christian university with the modern secular academy, the grounds for the commitment to diversity are not the same. The secular academy prizes diversity because it affirms the democratic faith that "all men are created equal." On the other hand, Christians prize diversity simply because they affirm the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ.

This particularity--this radical commitment to this very particular person called Jesus the Christ--is precisely what scandalizes the critics of Christian higher education. But the critics fail to see that Christians can affirm diversity in radical and far-reaching ways, not *in spite of* their commitment to the Christian particularity, but precisely *because of* that commitment.

In spite of all this, many critics of Christian higher education will no doubt suggest that our argument thus far has really begged the fundamental question. It is one thing to extend service and compassion to a diversity of human beings. It is quite another thing to take seriously their ideas, their cultural traditions, even their religious perspectives. This, the critics argue, is the crucial step that many Christian colleges and universities are unwilling to take.

The critics may be correct in their observation regarding some Christian institutions of higher learning. But they are wrong if they think that Christian scholars have no biblical mandate for taking seriously the ideas--even the religious traditions--of the wide variety of people who inhabit this globe.

The plain truth is that Christians are called to take other human beings seriously. In the context of the academy, this means that we must listen carefully to their points of view, always asking what we might learn from those who come from cultural, political, and religious traditions that are different from our own. Listening does not necessarily mean agreement. But listen we must. As Christian scholars, we can do no less.

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

I want now to ask about a second value the academy holds dear, the notion of academic freedom.

Critics sometimes argue that Christian institutions of

higher learning can't extend academic freedom in truly meaningful ways because of their highly particularistic religious commitments. I grant you, there are many Christian colleges and universities that refuse to embrace genuine academic freedom for their faculties. But institutions like these simply don't reflect the genius of the Christian faith.

I want to suggest that there are no institutions anywhere in the world better prepared to extend academic freedom than Christian institutions of higher learning. I say this because of the nature of the Christian gospel. Let me explain.

The Christian gospel begins with the affirmation that no human being is God. To the contrary, every human being is finite, fundamentally flawed, and inescapably sinful. No one, therefore, can possibly perform enough good works or muster up enough righteousness to earn a seat in the kingdom of God. Instead, justification or forgiveness comes to us only through the grace of God which we receive through faith and not by works. As Paul wrote in Galatians 2:15-16,

*We who are Jews by birth and not "Gentile sinners" know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

This is the core of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther often used a Latin phrase to capture the genius of the Christian gospel: "*simul justus et peccator*" or, in English, "simultaneously justified *and* a sinner." I can perhaps best explain the meaning of that phrase by contrasting Luther's vision with my own childhood misunderstandings.

When I was in the fifth grade, growing up in San Angelo, Texas, I always walked to school and had to cross a very busy street before I reached my final destination. I vividly recall reminding myself on many occasions that if per chance I were struck by a car and killed on the way to school, I must remember to pray God's forgiveness for all the sins I had committed since my most recent prayers. If I managed to get that petition in before I expired, I had a chance at going to heaven. If not, I knew I would be doomed to eternal damnation.

Many years later, in a class on the book of Romans at Harding College, I learned that the gospel of Jesus Christ completely undermined those childish misunderstandings. My epiphany came when the professor unpacked Paul's assertion in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now *no* [italics mine] condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." *No condemnation*. What a magnificent concept! This passage means that my salvation does not depend on the frequency of my prayers or the quality of my works, but solely and entirely on the grace of a loving God.

And yet, the fact that we are not condemned does not mean that we are no longer sinners. This is the crucial point that we must grasp and the point that Luther sought to make when he used the phrase, "*simul justus et peccator*" or, "simultaneously justified *and* a sinner." As a Christian, I am perpetually redeemed. But as a human being, I never cease to be a sinner. *Simul justus et peccator!*

Luther found this doctrine enormously liberating because it freed him to take seriously his finitude, his frailties, and his inescapably sinful nature. He never took the gospel as a license to sin. But the gospel did mean that he no longer had to pretend to be a saint. For that reason, he sometimes advised his followers to "sin boldly."

The implications this notion holds for the life of the mind--and for academic freedom in the context of a Christian university--are staggering. While our finitude means that the Christian scholar *may well* misunderstand, miscalculate, or draw erroneous conclusions, the Christian paradox, *simul justus et peccator*, means that the Christian scholar *is freed* to do all these things.

Don't misunderstand. The Christian gospel is not a license for sloppy scholarship. But it does free us to take our finitude seriously, to recognize up front that we will make mistakes and that, indeed, we may well be wrong. This recognition enables the Christian scholar to approach his or her work with humility, to confess mistakes quickly and forthrightly, and to pursue the search for truth with zeal and determination, knowing that complete and final truth lies always beyond our grasp.

Or again, the depth of our humanity has determined that no human being--not even a Christian scholar--can finally escape the most radical doubts and the most radical kinds of questions. But the Christian paradox--*simul justus et peccator*--means that the Christian scholar is freed to confront those questions honestly. No longer must we

repress those doubts or pretend that we have perfect faith and perfect tranquility. Instead, we are freed to confess with the father of the boy with the evil spirit in Mark 9, "Lord I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Put another way, the Christian gospel enables us to be real. I cannot imagine a stronger foundation for responsible academic freedom than this.

Finally, we must be clear on one more crucial point. In the previous section, we saw that for the Christian, an affirmation of diversity finally rests on the foundation of Christian particularity. So it is with academic freedom. The Christian scholar claims academic freedom precisely because that scholar takes seriously the particularity of Jesus the Christ. Here we encounter once again that amazing paradox that is so central to the Christian faith. We are freed to question because we affirm, and we are freed to doubt because we believe. Those who fail to discern the paradox of the Christian gospel will never understand how Christian faith can sustain academic freedom and the life of the mind. But those who have eyes to see will find in the Christian gospel an incredibly powerful support for the kinds of radical questions which every serious scholar must raise.

I hope by now that the kinds of questions the Pepperdine Center for Faith and Learning hopes to foster are apparent. Chief among those questions are these: How can Christian faith sustain a commitment to diversity? And how can Christian faith enhance the quality of academic freedom?

#### **ON TAKING SERIOUSLY OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST**

But there is one more question that is vital to the work of Pepperdine, and it is this: how can we put to productive and meaningful use the relationship this University sustains to the Churches of Christ?

We commonly say that apart from our relationship with the Churches of Christ, Pepperdine would cease to be a Christian university altogether. And that is very likely true, for the Church of Christ is our mooring, our anchor, our very tangible connection to the world of Christian tradition and Christian faith.

But is this the only rationale we can offer for maintaining our relation with Churches of Christ? If so, then we have sold this tradition very short indeed.

The far more pressing questions are these. How can the heritage of Churches of Christ *sustain us* in the work of higher education? Are there resources in the heritage of Churches of Christ to which we can appeal as we seek to enhance diversity and academic freedom? Or again, how can the heritage of Churches of Christ help sustain the life of the mind?

These are questions we must address. For if we ignore these questions, the day may come when faculty at this institution will judge our relationship with Churches of Christ as irrelevant at best and, at worst, as a hindrance to the life of the mind and the work of higher education. If the faculty eventually make that judgment, then we can rest assured that Pepperdine's relationship with Churches of Christ will have become an empty formality, lacking both substance and content.

So what might we say about this tradition? Does it possess resources that can sustain us in the work of scholarship, teaching, and learning? The answer to that question must be a resounding "yes."

Before I proceed with this line of thought, I want to acknowledge up front that I am not naïve about the history of this tradition. I am painfully aware that there is much in the history of Churches of Christ that works against diversity, that undermines freedom of thought and freedom of expression, and that offers little support for the life of the mind.

But having said that, we must also confess that there is much in this tradition to which we *can* appeal on behalf of the work in which we are engaged.

First, Churches of Christ emerged in the early nineteenth century as a unity movement. The founders of this tradition--Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone--lamented the fact that so many Christian churches on the American frontier viewed other denominations with such hostility. Campbell and Stone, therefore, gave birth to a movement that aimed for unity in diversity. Stone, for example, admonished his followers in 1830,

*Be careful not to wound the feelings of the least christian of any name. View all the children of God as your brethren, whatever name they may bear. What if they have received wrong opinions of truth? This is no reason why you should despise or reject them.*

This is a powerful model for an institution like Pepperdine that seeks to enhance a diversity of peoples and perspectives.

Second, Churches of Christ emerged in the early nineteenth century as a freedom movement. If they had any hope of uniting Christians while respecting a diversity of perspectives, then Campbell and Stone knew they had to grant to all men and women the freedom and the right to search for truth for themselves. This was no mere strategy, but a conviction that grew from their awareness of their own sinfulness and their own limitations. Stone therefore wrote in 1829,

*I have too much evidence of my liability to err to make my present opinions a test by which to judge the hearts of my fellow Christians.*

Further, Stone and Campbell knew how easy it is for religious people--indeed, for any people--to succumb to traditions that stifle the mind and cut off fresh and creative thinking. Accordingly, Campbell wrote,

*I have endeavored to read the scriptures as though no one had read them before me; and I am as much on my guard against reading them to-day, through the medium of my own views yesterday, or a week ago, as I am against being influenced by any foreign name, authority, or system, whatever.*

But perhaps the strongest statement one can find in the annals of Churches of Christ on behalf of intellectual and spiritual freedom is a statement from John Rogers, the preacher for the Church of Christ in Carlisle, Kentucky in the early nineteenth century. In 1830, Rogers penned these simple but powerful words.

*The fatal error of all reformers has been that they have too hastily concluded that they knew the whole truth, and have settled back upon the same principles of proscription, intolerance and persecution, against which they so strongly remonstrated. . . . Having, then, full in our view, this fatal rock, on which so many reformers have split, may we studiously avoid it. We have no reason to conclude, we know all the truth. . . . We have nothing to lose in this inquiry after truth. We have no system to bind us to human opinions.*

These are not isolated statements that reflect a minority

voice in Churches of Christ in the founding years, but statements that have reflected the genius of this tradition for two full centuries. And it is precisely this genius--this "heart of the tradition"--that allows us to build a truly great university on the foundation offered to us by the heritage of the Churches of Christ.

If we hope that the heritage of Churches of Christ can really provide a foundation for the life of the mind, then we must make certain that all the people who work and study at this institution have some familiarity with the meaning of this tradition. This is why the Center for Faith and Learning devotes a segment of each and every seminar to helping faculty, staff, students, and administration to understand more fully how the heritage of Churches of Christ can, indeed, help sustain the life of the mind.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

So now, we return to the question with which we began. What does it mean when we affirm Pepperdine's mission statement that plainly asserts that "Pepperdine is a Christian university"?

It means, first of all, that Pepperdine as an institution takes its stand on the Christian faith. But second, it means that precisely because of its commitment to the Christian faith, Pepperdine seeks to enhance diversity, maintain academic freedom, and nurture the life of the mind. And finally, it means that Pepperdine seeks to strengthen its relationship with Churches of Christ, not only because we know that apart from that relationship, the Christian character of this institution would likely collapse, but also because we know that the Churches of Christ can provide us with invaluable supports for the work in which we are engaged.

We therefore press ahead in our attempt to make of Pepperdine University a truly great center of teaching, learning and scholarship. We are confident that we will succeed in this task, not in spite of our commitment to the Christian faith, but because of that commitment. This is why we confess in our mission statement that "Pepperdine is a Christian university committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and Christian values." When we make that confession, we affirm once again the paradox of the Christian faith that we are freed to question because we affirm, and we are freed to doubt because we believe.

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*Richard Hughes is a professor of Religion and the director of the Pepperdine Center for Faith and Learning.*

# IVORY TOWER OR HOLY MOUNTAIN? FAITH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

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**Nicholas Wolterstorff**

Is it wrong for a college or university to attach religious qualifications to the academic freedom of its faculty? Before I answer that question, let me explain what I take academic freedom to be. Perhaps it's easiest to see what it is by considering what constitutes an infringement on it. Infringing on a professor's academic freedom consists of impairing, or threatening to impair, her academic position or standing in some way or the other: firing her or threatening to fire her, refusing to promote her or threatening to refuse to promote her, preventing her from serving on important committees or threatening to prevent her from so serving, rejecting her candidacy for some post or threatening to reject it, and so forth.

But of course many such impairments or threats do not constitute infringements on academic freedom. What has to be added is something about the grounds for the actual or threatened impairment. Infringement of academic freedom typically happens when the actual or threatened impairment occurs on account of the person's position on some issue, or on account of her publicizing her position. This issue may or may not be within the person's academic field; it's all too usual for the threat to be issued on account of the person's position on some religious or political issue.

The fact that the academy has to make judgements of competence requires that we say more than just that, however. For an infringement of academic freedom to occur, the impairment of a person's academic standing has to be based on some other aspect of the positions he holds rather than their scholarly competence or incompetence. It has to be based on what I shall call the ideological content of his position. If the university refuses to promote some young professor because of the scholarly incompetence of the positions he holds, although it would be impairing his academic standing on account of certain of his positions, such impairment would not constitute infringement on the person's academic freedom.

The distinction between disapproving of the ideological content of what a person says and judging it incompetent is, of course, fraught with difficulty in application. Not that the distinction can never be confidently drawn; certainly it can be. Nonetheless, those who talk as if the several academic guilds--the guild of historians, the guild of philosophers, and so on--have arrived at ideologically

neutral criteria of competence, and if it's easy to distinguish the employment of these from ideological discrimination, seem to me to be living in a fantasyland.

Let me now join together the two components of what it is to infringe on a person's academic freedom to which I have called attention: to infringe on a person's academic freedom is to impair or threaten to impair that person's position or standing in the academy on account of the ideological content of the position she holds or publicizes on some issue.

## **QUALIFIED FREEDOM**

In practice, the right to academic freedom is no more absolute than the civil liberty of free speech. The formulation concerning free speech in the U.S. Bill of Rights is absolute, but if one looks at a law that emerges from judicial decisions having to do with free speech, it's clear that the free speech is a qualified liberty. Judges address the facts of the cases before them, and the law emerges from their decisions.

The same sort of thing is true for academic freedom; it is no more absolute than is the civil liberty of free speech. The guideline for the practice of the academy is not the stark formulation I offered above, but that formulation as duly qualified.

When a court declares that it is acceptable for the government to impose some restriction on a person's speech, is the court saying it's acceptable for the government to infringe on free speech? That falls strange on the ear; the connotation on *infringe* suggests that infringing on someone's right is a bad thing to do. Better to say that the court's decisions function to qualify a freedom. I shall speak of academic freedom in the same way. Although it's never a good thing to infringe on academic freedom, every educational institution does and should attach qualifications to that freedom. The issue will always be which qualifications are appropriate.

## **EIGHT CONSIDERATIONS**

In considering academic freedom in religiously based institutions, I can think of eight considerations that seem

necessary or useful to bear in mind. Some of these considerations relate to the social setting in which we deal with the issue of academic freedom; others are matters of semiphilosophical background.

### *Modern Society*

In the first place, questions of academic freedom arise for us within the context of a modernized society that recognizes distinct spheres of social and cultural life. Some of my readers will understand that I am alluding to Max Weber's theory of modernization; because I cannot assume that all are familiar with the theory, let me say just a word about it.

Weber saw the essence of modernization in the emergence of differentiated spheres of activity--specifically, the social spheres of the economy, state, and household, and the cultural spheres of academic learning (*Wissenschaft*), art, law, and ethics. Weber claimed that the dynamic of rationalization, after disenchanting the world and confining the ethic of brotherliness to the realm of the private, brought these spheres to the light of day by differentiating them from each other and securing the relative independence of action within them from outside influence.

Whether or not Weber was right to claim that rationalization accounts for the differentiation of spheres is not relevant to the subject matters at hand. What is relevant, however, is the basic claim that modernized societies--of which ours is certainly one--are characterized by such differentiation. For it is only in such societies that the issue of academic freedom, in anything like the form it takes for us, can arise.

Weber's assertion that, spurred on by rationalization, life within the differentiated spheres follows its own inherent laws unless distorted by outside influence is something I will return to later.

### *Religious Pluralism and Democracy*

Second, the issue of academic freedom arises for us not only within a modernized society, but also within a religiously pluralistic one within a liberal democratic polity. The liberal democratic form of polity emerged in the West as a solution to the problem of social order posed when the citizens of a single state embraced a diversity of incompatible comprehensive perspectives on God and the good--some of these perspectives being religious, some

not. A liberal polity accords to its citizens such civil liberties as freedom of conscience, freedom to exercise one's religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. And it refrains from indoctrinating its citizens into any comprehensive religious or philosophical perspective; it treats impartially all the comprehensive perspectives to be found in the society.

### *Civil Society*

Third, the issue of academic freedom arises for us within a society that exhibits extraordinary scope and vitality in its civil dimension. Totalitarian regimes, so as to curb all disruptive impulses, push civil society to the margins by massively expanding the scope of the state: business, banking, manufacturing, and farming all become state-owned; educators become state functionaries, as do clergy in extreme cases; and so forth. American civil society is subject to a good deal of government regulation--giving ground for much grumbling by those on the political right. But it is extraordinary how many of our institutions and organizations do not in any way belong to the government, and extraordinary how few of us are government employees. Equally striking is the vitality of our civil society--a ferment of new initiatives and new organizations of every imaginable sort.

### *Education*

Fourth, the issue of academic freedom arises for us within the context of an educational system that, as a whole, is radically decentralized, full of voluntary organizations and activity, and highly competitive.

### *Religion*

Fifth, it's important to recognize that the religion of many people in American society is what can best be called "holistic." No doubt for some people, religion is no more than a sector of their lives--perhaps a very important sector, but a sector nevertheless, having little to do with the rest of their lives: little to do with their politics, their economic activity, their recreation, or their moral code. But there are many other people for whom religion is anything but a sector; it decisively shapes their political and economic activity, how they rear their families, what they believe about the origins of life, about medicine, about the dynamics of the self, about the nature of justice and the benefits of freedom, and so forth.

## *The Academy*

Sixth, over the past twenty-five years or so there has been an upheaval in the regnant understanding of the academic enterprise. Perhaps the deepest component of the self-understanding that dominated the academy before the upheaval was the conviction that well-formed learning is a generically human enterprise. To put the point pictorially: before entering the halls of learning, we were to render inoperative all our particularities--of gender, race, nationality, religion, social class, age, and so on--to allow only what belonged to our generic humanity to be operative within those halls.

A second component in the once-dominant self-understanding of the academy was a distinctive hierarchy among the academic disciplines. At the top were the physical science and mathematics; these were the paradigmatic disciplines. At the bottom were the humanities. The social science occupied an unsteady position somewhere in between. Theology? If one thought of theology at all, the place one assigned it depended on whether one judged it to be rationally grounded or not. If it was, it belonged somewhere among the humanities. If it wasn't, it was off the ladder at the bottom.

Behind this hierarchy was a certain understanding of what constitutes the "logic" or methodology of well formed *Wissenschaft*. The thought was that mathematics and the natural sciences sat at the top of the hierarchy because they already exhibited the methodology of well-formed *Wissenschaft*. But that methodology was not unique in principle to them, it was the logic that any academic discipline would exhibit once it attained the status of a well-formed *Wissenschaft*. As to what the logic of a well-formed *Wissenschaft* was, on that there was somewhat less consensus than on the other matters I have mentioned. Nonetheless, the dominant view was that the method of well-formed *Wissenschaft* was foundationalist--more specifically, classically foundationalist.

Although this once-dominant self-understanding of the modern Western academy has not disappeared, it has certainly been shaken, so much so that it is no longer the dominant understanding. I look on what happened as a "first revolution" and a "second revolution." First to go to was the conviction that the logic of well-formed *Wissenschaft* is classical foundationalism. The emergence of metaepistemology, among philosophers, played a significant role in this development; when philosophers

moved to the metalevel, they quickly recognized that classical foundationalism is but one of many options for structuring well-formed *Wissenschaft*, and not the most plausible.

More decisive, however, was a quite different development. Around thirty years ago, a group of scholars trained as natural scientists, philosophers, and historians, began to study the episodes from the history of modern Western natural science to compare the dominant self-understanding of natural science with actual practice. Thomas Kuhn became the most famous of these scholars. What they bumped up against over and over were reputable, even admirable, episodes that simply did not fit the self-understanding of natural science as a classically foundationalist enterprise. One outcome of these discoveries was the breakup of the old hierarchy of the disciplines, which had been based on judgements about the degree to which a discipline exhibited the logic of well-formed *Wissenschaft*. Now there was no longer consensus whether there was even such a thing as *the* logic, let alone on what it might be.

That was the first revolution. The second revolution involved the repudiation of the conviction that well-formed academic learning is a product of our generic humanity. Historically, the academy in the modern West has been populated mostly by white European bourgeois males. Slowly, as a result of various liberation movements in society, its makeup has evolved, so that now significant numbers of the once-disenfranchised enjoy positions within the academy. Some twenty-five years ago, their numbers reached a critical mass, and they were emboldened to say what they had long felt if not thought, or thought if not said, namely, that it is sheer pretense to present the learning of the academy as generically human in character.

The learning of the academy is unavoidably particularist; it is best to acknowledge that, shed one's allusions, and act accordingly. The pluralization of the academy is not a matter of happenstance but of essence. Of course, there are degrees: literature, history, and philosophy are further from being generically human than are mathematics and natural science.

## *Ideas*

A seventh thing to keep in mind when considering the question of academic freedom is that ideas matter to people. Different ideas matter to different people, but for everyone there are some ideas that matter. We all invest

ourselves in the world, and part of our investment is in the fate of certain ideas. Their fate, or their apparent fate, stirs up emotions in us. We get angry, discouraged, or disturbed when the ideas we treasure seem threatened; we feel jubilant when they appear to flourish.

All of this is obvious: people care about ideas. I mention it only because I find it endemic among academics to act as if it is not true. More precisely, academics want members of the public to feel jubilation over their thoughts, but they don't want members of the public to feel anger over them. Academics want to be allowed to say and write whatever they wish with only positive consequences. Of academics alone should courage never be required.

My response is: let's grow up! Stop being adolescent. People do care about ideas. We had better expect that people will sometimes get angry with what we say.

### *Personhood*

Eight, and last, it is profoundly important for society to allow its scholars the duly qualified freedom to work out their thoughts as they see fit. How enormously impoverished, in multiple ways, humanity would be if no such freedom existed. How impoverished are those societies in which such freedom is absent.

A reason of quite a different sort seems to me even more important. The abridgement of academic freedom constitutes a profound violation of the person, and in this world of ours, nothing is of greater worth than persons; correspondingly, no greater evil exists than the violations of persons. The violation of a person is the desecration of one of the images of God. The loss of that person's contribution may mean that the flourishing of humanity is somewhat diminished; much worse is the fact that an icon of the Holy One has been desecrated.

### **DIVERSITY OF LEARNING**

Religiously affiliated colleges and universities all belong to the private sector of American society--to what I earlier called "civil society"--and they are multitudinous. The total number of students enrolled in such institutions is considerably less than the combined enrollment in state institutions and private secular institutions; nonetheless, there are hundreds of religiously based (and affiliated) institutions of higher education in this country. Their existence in such numbers is a prime manifestation of the extraordinary vitality of American civil society. In no

other country in the world is there anything like it.

This striking vitality and variety in the private educational sector, together with the fact that we live in a liberal democratic society (in which the state must refrain from inducting its citizens into any comprehensive perspective on God and the good), means that there is nothing an academic is free to teach in the public educational sector that she is not free to teach somewhere in the private educational sector. But the converse is not true: there are many things an academic in this country is free to teach somewhere in the private educational sector that she is not free to teach in the public sector.

There is, in this respect, a great deal more academic freedom in the private sector of the American educational system than there is in the public sector. In discussions on academic freedom, this point is seldom made; yet it is indisputably true. In the private sector, one can explore and espouse religiously grounded lines of thought that one would not be able to explore or espouse in the public sector. The memory is fresh in my mind of a recent case at my own university, which, though not public, nonetheless sees itself as secular. A candidate for a post in religious studies was rejected because, some said, her lecture was too "confessional."

It would be a tragedy of massive proportions if the extraordinary scope of academic freedom in the private sector of American education were in any way infringed on--if it were abridged or restricted. People like the candidate I just mentioned would be left without a teaching post unless they "shaped up." Some writers tend to think through the contours of duly qualified academic freedom for state institutions and for secular private colleges, and they argue, or just assume, that those same contours ought to hold for all educational institutions. But imposing these contours would not only violate the personhood of many who teach in these private institutions, who believe with all their heart that they are called to live out their religious convictions in the academy instead of confining them to the familial and the ecclesiastical sectors; it would also impoverish our society by seriously diminishing the rich diversity of learning that the American educational system now produces.

But if it is indisputably true that the private sector of American education, including religiously based institutions, offers freedom to a much wider variety of academic than does the public sector, why is it so commonly thought that religiously based institutions



uniquely threaten academic freedom?

The answer to that question is pretty clear. I do think that it is important to compare, as I just did, the entire private sector of American higher education with the entire public sector on the matter of academic freedom. But one has to supplement that comparison of total sectors with talk about particular institutions; it is, after all, not sectors but institutions that hire professors, instruct students, and are governed by administrators.

## BOUNDARIES TO FREEDOM

At most religiously based colleges and universities, a professor's standing in the institution depends in some way or other on the ideological content of what he or she says or publicizes on certain issues. And to a good many writers on the subject, that fact, all by itself, constitutes an unacceptable infringement of academic freedom. It will appear that way especially if one focuses on just one aspect of what goes on at state universities, neglecting the rest--that is, if one focuses on the lack of official religious requirements for faculty at state institutions but fails to note that those some state universities have severe restrictions on what a professor may and may not teach with respect to religion.

Earlier I made the point that just as legally qualified free speech governs our lives as citizens, rather than the unqualified affirmation of free speech that the U.S. Bill of Rights speaks of, so also it is duly qualified academic freedom that we have to deal with in our educational institutions. So the question is not whether it is acceptable for religiously based colleges and universities to attach qualifications to academic freedom. All educational institutions attach qualifications to academic freedom; none allows professors to teach whatever they wish. The question is whether attaching *religious* qualifications to academic freedom is inherently appropriate and, if it is not inherently appropriate, whether the form of such qualifications sometimes take makes them inappropriate.

Ever since the founding of Harvard College, groups of people with shared religious convictions have joined together to found colleges that reflect their religion: a faculty gets assembled, students are enrolled, and a supporting constituency is developed. The religion in question is almost always to some extent holistic; those who confine their religion to the distinct sectors of the familial and the ecclesiastical are much less inclined to found colleges than those who do not so confine their

religion. Colleges in the private sector also get formed for other than religious reasons: St. John's College, for example, was formed out of a secular vision of education as grounded in the Great Books. But far and away the most common foundations have been religious foundations.

Almost invariably, when such a college gets founded, religious qualifications are attached to the academic freedom of the faculty. I see no reason for supposing that such qualifications are inherently wrong. I daresay we all agree that it is perfectly fine, in the context of American society, for a group of people to get together to form a Great Books college--even though such a college will not welcome those who think that an educational program based on the Great Books is a pack of nonsense. So why would it be wrong for a group of people to get together to form a college on one or another form of religion--even though such a college will not welcome those who think that species of religion is a pack of nonsense? Might the thought be the Weberian idea that *Wissenschaft* must now follow its own internal dynamics, so that any influence from the side of religion is now intellectually irresponsible? This point might have had some plausibility before that upheaval in our understanding of learning occurred, but after the upheaval, it seems to me to have no plausibility whatsoever.

I have argued for as double negative: it is *not* inherently inappropriate for a college or university to attach religious qualifications to the academic freedom of its faculty. Just as important, if not more so, so is this positive point: it would be a violation of the very idea of a liberal democratic society if a movement arose to prevent or restrict the formation of religiously based colleges and universities. To prevent or restrict their formation would violate freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. It is characteristic of totalitarian regimes to try and prevent private initiatives in education.

But though religious qualifications on academic freedom are not inherently unacceptable in the American system, what must at once be added is that when we get down to the details--as we must--we find that religiously based colleges and universities do often illicitly infringe on academic freedom. No doubt about it. Whether they more often infringe on academic freedom than do state or secular private institutions, I do not know.

Those who have taught at secular institutions would have to have their heads in the sand not to be aware of the extent to which ideological considerations, as distinct from

considerations of competence, enter in hiring, promoting, and firing. But be that as it may: duly qualified academic freedom is often egregiously infringed on in religiously based institutions. The infringements occur when the religious qualifications are applied unjustly: for example, when they are never fully stated, or not stated clearly at the time of appointment; when their application is arbitrary or irregular; or when there is no recourse available to the victim.

Over the years, I have acquired a broad acquaintance with the religiously based colleges and universities of America. I have learned that the history of these institutions is littered with stories of unjust, often grossly unjust, infringements on academic freedom. The stories constitute a shameful blotch on the reputation of these colleges and universities and put into question the sincerity of those who profess high religious ideals for them. I defend the right of these colleges and universities to attach religious

qualifications to academic freedom within their institutions. But I must, and will, add that all too often, they violate the personhood of their faculty members in the way they apply the qualifications. Often, the person violated is a brother or sister in the faith of those who perpetuate the violation.

My own view, then, is that the best service the AAUP can continue to render to this teeming multitude of American institutions of higher education is to compose and recommend model codes of procedure for resolving issues of academic freedom. Almost always, it is in the procedure, not in the qualifications as such, that the injustice lies. Where there is no rule of law but only the command of persons, where secrecy and arbitrariness reign, where one never knows when and why the ax will fall, there justice weeps.

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*Nicholas Wolterstorff is Noah Porter professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale University.*

## **UNEASY PARTNERS? RELIGION AND ACADEMICS**

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**Storm Bailey**

As a group, religiously affiliated colleges are much like those with no religious connections. Some have a lot of money, but most get by on less. Some have wide name recognition; others enjoy a regional reputation or none at all. Some have sensitive and competent administrators who are on good terms with faculty, and some fall short of that blessed state. Some maintain high standards of academic excellence, but others achieve more modest (if not to say mediocre) levels of academic quality. Religiously affiliated institutions resemble their secular counterparts in these and other ways because they are subject to the same forces and circumstances that affect all of higher education. At the same time, however, the religious identity of these colleges has the potential to set them apart by making a distinct contribution to their character and quality. In the area of community life, for example institutional aspirations and policies are often explicitly linked to religious commitment or identity.

My own college is one of twenty-eight institutions affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These colleges see lives of service, the integration of values and practice, and the ideals of

character and community as essential to their identity. Insofar as people on campus--in or outside the religious tradition--value such goals, pursuing them and achieving them will be perceived as adding to the college's quality.

It is not so surprising when the religious identity of a college or university is taken to contribute to its community life, but observers of higher education seem less likely to view religious commitment as integral to *academic* goals. Many people see religion and academics as uneasy partners, if not completely at odds. This inclination shows itself when we think or speak of schools as being pretty good academically *in spite* of their church or religious affiliation. It is only fair to note that we have a good deal of evidence--historical and contemporary--to justify such reactions. But the question is whether such a state of affairs must be. Are there ways in which the religious commitments of colleges and universities can and do serve their academic aspirations?

The answer to this question is yes on several grounds. Take, for example, the conception of service already

mentioned in the context of campus life. Many church-related colleges were founded as mission institutions--not in a narrowly evangelical sense, but in that of service to individuals and society. Service is central to the academic purpose of these schools. In *Models of Christian Higher Education*, Pepperdine professor of religion Richard Hughes identifies the ongoing theological commitment to service as a chief contribution to the life of the mind in historically Mennonite colleges--which are but one group of colleges among many to have such a commitment. Service is learning in practice, and although neither the practice nor the pedagogy of applied learning is exclusive to church-related educational communities, the religious commitments of such institutions straightforwardly affect their academic quality through their emphasis on service.

I use the phrase "educational communities" advisedly, because it is plain that higher education is a communal activity. Even those who are inclined to view Plato's allegory of the cave--a tale of individual enlightenment--as the paradigm of true learning cannot ignore the fact that the story, like all of Plato's ideas, is offered in dialogue form. Teaching and learning take place in networks of committed relationships. (Plato's own academy was a religious community of sorts that endured for nearly a millennium.) Religion is certainly not the only basis for community, but just as certainly, it is a common one. Is religious commitment, particularly in what has been called the Hebrew-Christian tradition, as fruitful a foundation for academic communities as other shared commitments? Education theorist Parker Palmer and Mark Schwehn, dean of Christ College at Valparaiso University, to name just two, believe that it is.

In *Exiles from Eden*, Schwehn emphasizes the role of community in knowing and, therefore, in learning. The intellectual life, he suggests, is inseparable from the moral life, and the Christian tradition, among others, nourishes both. The pursuit of truth, writes Schwehn, is linked inextricably to care taken with the lives and the thoughts of others. Thus, he argues, the academic life requires such spiritual values as humility, self-sacrifice, and charity. Whole-hearted acceptance of Schwehn's communitarian epistemology is not necessary for the purposes of the present argument. To whatever extent readers recognize the role and importance of community in higher learning, religious commitment can be seen to support that learning.

## INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE

At the institutional level, religious identity serves academic goals by providing a framework for integrating disciplinary pursuits and perspectives. We may be lucky enough to escape the extreme ideological and administrative strife leading to what English professors Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt, in *Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education*, call entrepreneurial disciplinarity, which despairs of identifying any common institutional mission, even within disciplines. But tension between disciplinary specialization and integrated understanding is a perennial academic problem, one that is increasingly acute in undergraduate liberal arts colleges but my no means restricted to such institutions.

Religiously affiliated colleges and universities have, it seems, a great advantage in addressing this problem. Insofar as the core claims of the affiliated religious tradition cut across disciplinary lines, and insofar as those claims are taken seriously, they provide a set of questions that can help to integrate the various elements of a course of study. (These core claims or questions serve this academic function for all members of the college community--whether they are in the affiliated religious tradition or not.)

Of course, if the religious commitment of the institution amounts to no more than lip service, or if the core questions are seen as being imposed on some by others or widely held to be irrelevant to serious scholarly inquiry, then this particular benefit is unlikely to result. It follows that the more substantive the religious commitment, the greater the academic benefit. Substantive religious commitment in an institutions means, in part, having a faculty and administration that take the core questions of the tradition seriously. Respect for these questions and attention to them does not imply an imposed consensus about their answers. In fact, having the broadest possible range of perspectives on the common questions would seem to facilitate the integration of a course of study. And such integration is a hallmark of educational quality.

## ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

If religiously affiliated universities are the natural habitats for applied learning, paradigm learning communities, and bastions against the malaise of fragmentation and disciplinary disintegration, why do we find ourselves so suspicious of their academic potential? What explains our propensity to say, "They are pretty good in spite of the

religion”?

I acknowledged one answer earlier: religiously committed institutions and individuals do not have an exemplary track record. Readers of these pages are as likely as anyone to be aware of offenses against academic excellence in the name of religious commitment. The offenses most often take the form of undermining a key principle of such excellence: autonomous inquiry, or academic freedom. I do not propose to defend religious (or any other) encroachments on academic freedom. Some of them--past and present--simply cannot be justified.

Certain practices might be supported by the claim that religious commitment serves academic goals and therefore may legitimately qualify academic freedom. That may well be so, although all such qualifications face the danger of becoming self-defeating at some point for academic institutions. But I don't wish to add to that long-standing discussion here. Instead, I'll suggest two ways in which religious commitment nurtures academic excellence by supporting academic freedom. My remarks focus on the Christian religious tradition--with which I am most familiar--but their application goes beyond church-related institutions.

### TRUTH SEEKING

The first way in which religious commitment supports free inquiry is by emphasizing truth seeking. This key component of the Christian religious tradition straightforwardly allies it with the most influential modern thinking about free inquiry and expression. In *On Liberty*, for example, John Stuart Mill bases his defense of absolute freedom of expression on the value of truth and the imperative to seek it.

Why isn't it obvious that religions professing to seek the truth, a task served by open inquiry, have a strong interest in academic freedom? One explanation comes immediately to mind: ironically, strong religious commitment is often suspected of being weak on academic inquiry precisely *because of* its dedication to truth. To profess to *have* the truth (as religions do, after all) is, one might suppose, to offer grounds for not continuing to look for it, or to ask questions. Such an approach has too commonly been characteristic of strong religious commitment--both in and outside the academy.

The approach pointedly fails, of course, to take sufficient account of uncertainty. One can do no better here than to

quote Mill: All silencing of discussion, he writes, is an assumption of infallibility. To shut of the airing of the alternative views on grounds that the truth is known is implicitly to claim certainty. But Mill's reminder about fallibility does not constitute an external restraint on the Christian religious tradition as institutionally expressed. The notion of human weakness--including epistemic weakness--is as central to the Christian tradition as any idea. Insofar as the possibility of being mistaken motivates free inquiry in the pursuit of truth, such inquiry might be a hallmark of the Christian tradition and its institutions of learning.

So the Christian tradition--and, by extension, the learning institutions associated with it--has internal reasons for allowing free discussion, even of its own basic truth claims. But it is not only when people suspect they might be mistaken that they ought to welcome questioning; even confidently held true beliefs require it. Mill argues that our highest intellectual ideal is not simply to hold true beliefs, but to hold them in a certain way:

“Even if the received opinion be...the whole truth; unless it be suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will...be held in the measure of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this, but...the meaning of the doctrine itself will be lost or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct.”

The approach Mill recommends seems crucial to fostering active, engaged learning that will result in lives of informed service. If religious commitment, as I said above, stresses the need to seek truth, it would benefit as well from the rigorous free discussion Mill advocates.

My argument that religious commitment supports academic freedom through its emphasis on truth seeking can be read two ways: that it does so in principle, or that it does so in common practice. If read primarily in the first way, my argument will be understood to promote free inquiry on religious grounds. This might seem to be a bizarre sort of preaching to the choir, since readers of *Academe* are, by and large, in little need of persuasion that free inquiry is a good idea. But active religious support for free inquiry is, I think, more common than many people suppose--now and in history. Even if it is not, mentioning the religious argument for greater academic freedom reminds us, at the very least, that we need not choose between our religious commitment and our academic ideals.

## FOUNDATIONS FOR FREE INQUIRY

The final point I wish to make goes one step further: religious commitment may be more than merely congenial to our academic ideals--it may be the foundation for them. Ideals of free inquiry and expression come to us from a political tradition that has, in the estimation of some, fallen on hard times. A core aspiration of this tradition is content-neutral institutional policies (those that, for example, treat all religions in the United States or all ideas in the academy equally). It is especially important, in the liberal tradition, for policies to be neutral about substantive claims of value or the nature of persons. But their need to be so gives rise to a certain paradox, because justifying liberal institutional policies requires an appeal to specific claims about persons and value.

One response to this paradox has been to reject liberal policies--either because neutrality is impossible, or because the claims about the autonomy of persons that traditionally ground them are deemed false. But rejecting such policies is not an attractive option for defenders of academic freedom. If it's impossible to make policies that are neutral all the way down, the alternative is to defend policies that are neutral in practice on the basis of substantive commitments about persons and values. The

religious commitments that give rise to the liberal tradition are certainly not the only basis for doing so, but they are an important one.

The defense of academic freedom demands a foundation. Personal and institutional religious commitment provides one--not uniquely, but unquestionably. Nicholas Wolterstorff eloquently expresses this idea in his article in this issue of *Academe* when he argues that the abridgement of academic freedom constitutes a profound violation of the person. In this world of ours, he writes, there's nothing of greater worth than persons, and correspondingly, no greater evil than the violation of persons. The violation of a person is the desecration of one of the images of God.

Injustice in the name of religion has, tragically, been as common inside the academy as outside of it. But to really make a stand in opposition to injustice, we need religion--or something very like it. Providing such support is potentially the greatest contribution of religious commitment to academic excellence and to the policies that promote and defend it. This contribution should not go unrecognized; nor should it be allowed to remain a mere possibility where it is as yet unrealized.

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*Storm Bailey is assistant professor of philosophy at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.*

## CAN A CHRISTIAN BE A JOURNALIST?

### *A Case for Affirming Journalism as a Calling*

Catherine McMullen

January 1998: I was in my office, minding my own business, when Ernie Mancini called. Ernie, who runs the alumni office at Concordia, wanted me to travel with other faculty to Minneapolis to teach one-day courses for alumni.

As will come as no surprise to those who know him, Ernie was enthusiastic—so enthusiastic that I forgot my vow to practice saying the N word. “What would I talk about, Ernie?” I asked.

“I’ve already got that figured out, Cathy,” he said. “Here’s the title: ‘Can a Christian Be a Journalist?’”

“Cath, you still there?”

Ultimately I did say no—due to scheduling conflicts, not the question. But for a long time after Ernie’s call I asked myself:

What on earth kind of question was that? It sounded to me as absurd as “Can a French professor be a Christian?” or “Can a Christian be an auto mechanic?” Why did he pose the question? I wondered. Of course, he posed the question because Ernie, a passionate advocate for journalism, knew how I would answer it. But at the time I was pretty defensive, as journalists tend to be. Has my beloved discipline and profession truly descended to the point where people assume no one of faith could possibly become a journalist? Are we, as Jim Lehrer fears, “down there with the lawyers, the Congress and the child pornographers in the publics’ respect and esteem” (65)?

I have continued to think about Ernie’s question for several years now, for several reasons: I thought about it as we developed a print journalism major at Concordia and were compelled to try articulate how journalism might be taught at a liberal arts college of the church. I thought about it during the last two or three years of what an editorial in *Christianity Today* called an “epidemic of journalistic felonies” (“When Lies Become News” 42). I think about it every day I teach journalism class and struggle to show my students that journalism is worth their best efforts and my insistence on excellence because it is noble work, blessed work, and as essential to our republic as the voting booth.

Sometimes this is a tough sell. Watergate and the Pentagon

Papers called journalists of my generation to the profession and showed us that we really *could* change the world. To my students, these landmark stories are ancient history. They grew up in the era of the sound bite, in a time when a frightening number of Americans get their news not just from TV, but from late-night comics. They grew up in a post-modern age wherein all institutions are distrusted, including the one whose job it has long been to serve as watchdog on the others. And as anyone who cares about journalism knows, it’s been a rough couple of years. The year 1998—when we were in the middle of planning our program—was for journalists *annus horribilus*:

*In June 1998, The Cincinnati Enquirer ran a front-page apology to Chiquita Brands because one of its reporters had stolen thousands of messages from the company’s voice-mail system.*

*Also in June, CNN and Time admitted they didn’t have proof for their story alleging that the US military had used nerve gas to kill American defectors in Laos during the Vietnam War. Correspondent Peter Arnett got his hands slapped; two producers got fired.*

*The Boston Globe fired a gifted columnist, Patricia Smith, for making up quotations and people in her columns. A few months later, it fired its most popular columnist, Mike Barnicle, for the same offense.*

*The New Republic fired young hotshot reporter, Stephen Glass, for a long list of lies. He made up quotations. He made up sources. He made up statistics and other “facts.”*

And then, of course, came the situation that writer Jon Katz calls “a media recipe from hell”:

*Take the Washington press corps. Add the leaky, backstabbing Washington political and legal communities. Fold in round-the-clock cable news channels with endless hours to fill. Blend with gabby, vain lawyers and reporters eager to appear on TV. Top with a sexually enthusiastic president. Flavor with a needy, opportunistic young White House intern. Then toss in Matt Drudge and the World Wide Web. It’s a mixture guaranteed to make us all lose our appetites. (28)*



Those of us who were then planning the print journalism program were still hungry, but for more substantial fare. So we asked variations on Ernie's question: Does such a proposed program fit the mission of the college? What is the relationship between Christian faith and journalism? What is, for me, the relationship between my love of God and my love of journalism? What tenets of my faith are also tenets of my profession? How can I—as a Christian, a journalist, a teacher—instill in my students a passion for journalism not *tempered* by, but *driven by*, Christian faith?

Those are the questions I've been thinking about for the last few years. The answers to some of these questions might seem obvious; others are far more complex and will never—perhaps *should* never—be answered definitively. But I know now what I would tell those Twin City Cobbers should Ernie re-issue his invitation: I would tell them about David Nimmer, a journalism professor at the University of St. Thomas who begins his classes by asking, "Are you ready to do God's work?" I would tell them that most of the journalists I know consider themselves to be people of faith, and that many are active in their churches. I would tell them that despite the huge salaries paid the talking heads on morning TV, most journalists are obscenely underpaid men and women who cover the school board, the city council, the Concordia basketball game—and that they see no conflict whatever between faith and profession. I would tell them that most journalists are not drawn to the newsroom by glamour, prestige or fat paychecks—and those who are suffer rude awakenings. Most journalists still hold with the old newsroom adage that the purpose of journalism is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. I would tell them that many journalists are called by their well-honed senses of moral outrage at injustice and cruelty, and by their unshakable faith in the healing power of words and the liberating illumination of truth. They are called by their desire to help people honor their obligations to care for one another by pointing out human needs, desires, failures and triumphs.

I would tell them that most journalists begin their careers saying "yes" to Dave Nimmer's question—even if they would be embarrassed to admit it. True to Lutheran tradition, we have here a paradox: We journalists are accused often enough of being arrogant without also claiming to do God's work! And yet it is clear to me that journalism, and hence our society, would be well served by journalists who regard their profession as work blessed by God for the good of his on-going creation.

I have come to believe that I could not have become a journalist if I did not believe in a God who loves and nurtures us, who does not play us like puppets but has given us brains, talent and heart to create a world that could work if we accepted our responsibilities to Him and to one another. Nor could I have become a journalist if I believed that being a Christian means being always pleasant and nice; sometimes faith requires us to yell and holler, to upset the moneychangers' tables.

Philosopher Tom Christenson said it perfectly:

*God help us when the word "Christian" has come to mean "inoffensive," "sanitized," "sexual," or when Christian writers can only write about nice folks in nice towns doing nice things for nice reasons, in nice language. The freedom of the Christian is, among other things, freedom from the suffocating and nauseating law of niceness. (7)*

In the *New Union Prayer Book* is a prayer Reform Jews pray at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement: "God, You do not ask me, 'Why haven't you been as great as Moses?' You do ask me. 'Why have you not been yourself? Why have you not been true to the best in you?'" (325).

I believe we can only be true to the best in ourselves when we live not in the darkness of fear and ignorance but in the light of truth. We can be ourselves when we use the reason God gave us. Or, as Luther said: "How dare you not know what you can know?" (qtd. in Benne "Integrity" 7).

I am tempted to hang my journalistic creed on John 8:32: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." I believe that with all my heart and want to claim it as journalism's great commission. Yet I know that if I commit the journalistic sin of taking Jesus' words out of context, I risk the greater journalistic sin of arrogance. As a wise writer has warned:

*Don't snatch at more than your share of biblical sanction for your calling ... Jesus was talking about the truth that came from commitment to Him and the revelation of God's truth that was incarnate in him. He was really not talking about the truth that you grub around and find by yourself... If the truth will make you free, the freedom you are talking about is pretty much summed up in the ideal of free people in a free society, namely, democratic government. (Baker 27-28)*

Point taken—but a freedom worthy of our efforts!

I believe that God desires that we live in community, and that community is impossible unless we know about one another's fears and joys, tragedies and triumphs. I believe, too, that Christ's death and resurrection free us to ask any question, seek any information. As Ernie Simmons writes in his wonderful book about Lutheran higher education, "The freedom of the gospel of God's justifying grace empowers faith for free inquiry. We are not saved by our intellectual or ideological constructions so that we are free to pursue analysis of the world and search for truth wherever it may lead" (23-24).

I believe in the sanctity of words, in what E.B. White called "the truth and worth of the scrawl." In his book *The Christian as a Journalist*, Richard Baker asks a provocative question: "Why did John take the prologue space to his Gospel to write a poem about the Logos, the Word? What was he trying to say, to affirm? What religious truth was he announcing?" (15)

Baker says John "intended to back up his chronicle to its original beginnings in creation: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" Baker continues:

*The passage has strong hints within it that turn the pages back to the first passages in the book of Genesis. And, turning there, we find another strange apostrophe to the Word. A simple line introduces each of the acts of creation: 'AND GOD SAID ... The act of verbalizing obviously had some strong religious meaning to these writers. Perhaps a fascination with the gift of language. Perhaps some insight into the inseparability of personality and verbalization (15-16).*

Baker points out "the Bible began in the beginning with God and his utterance." He continues:

*Utterance is the business of journalism, and utterance is originally divine. Not everything that journalism utters is divinely inspired by God. There are other bylines in the newspapers and other commentators on the air. But the fact that the mind shall conceive and bear fruit in utterance is a fact that has original religious significance. It is in this sense that the journalist, as he engages in his craft, partakes of certain holy elements, endowed with blessedness from the moment of creation. You do believe in the Word, or you are no journalist. (16)*

These beliefs, then, nurtured by my continuing education

about faith and learning and honed by consideration of what is right and wrong with contemporary journalism, led to what I believe about the place of journalism at Concordia College: First, I believe that the liberal arts truly educate journalists rather than merely train reporters. Second, I believe that because we are a college of the church we have the freedom—as well as the responsibility—to provide leadership in journalism ethics and, in the process, to help journalism reclaim its role as a public service. Third, and most important, I believe that journalism is more than a satisfying career and an essential public service; I believe it is a calling, a true vocation, and that its careful and thoughtful practice is a way of serving humankind and God.

Clearly, journalism is an inherently liberal arts profession; clearly, a liberal education best suits journalists. Journalists need to think critically, to know how to formulate a hypothesis, how to support claims with rigorous research, and how to present facts in their historical, social and ethical contexts. They need to know that the way to get close to the truth about anything is to approach it not from one point of view or discipline, but from many.

A liberal arts college of the church has much to offer journalism. For better or worse, journalists certainly do influence the affairs of the world. Journalism can only improve if such influence is wielded by thoughtful and informed men and women dedicated to the Christian life. Not only does journalism fit our mission; our mission fits journalism.

Before we consider that fit, let us look at a journalism program that would not, could not happen at Concordia: the so-called "Christian journalism" program at Pat Robertson's Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Sheila Dorn, a Regent student who served as editor of the campus news magazine, *The Christian*, describes the program as "a Bible-based approach to news, looking at contemporary issues from eternal perspectives" (qtd. in Fisher par. 4).

Robertson said the program's goals is "to rebuild the wall of righteousness around America... despite the ridicule, despite the slander, despite the plans to assuage and cut off our message" and to "advance the kingdom of God in all areas of journalism" (qtd. in Fisher par. 26).

The problems inherent in such an approach are myriad. But one big problem has emerged that caught Regent University by surprise: The program seems unable to reach the goal of "advancing the kingdom of the Lord in all areas of journalism." That's because the vast majority of Regent's



journalism students conclude that journalism is inherently immoral, that “journalism is simply no place for a Christian” (Fisher par. 6). As a result, most Regent journalism graduates either abandon the profession or gravitate toward “Christian” media.

How Regent’s notion of “Christian journalism” translates into news stories was seen in a 1998 cover story in *The Christian*. It’s worth a close look, for it shows us that the road to journalistic hell is paved with good intentions. The story focuses on vampire and Satanic cults in Tidewater Virginia. It quotes detectives, clergy and religion professors about what the story’s headline calls “the evil that lurks in the darkness” (qtd. in Fisher par. 5). If a mainstream news reporter had turned in such a story, an editor worth her salt would likely say: “Great. You’ve got half a story. Now. Do some more reporting. Balance it. Let’s hear from a witch, a vampire, a Satanist, a former Satanist. Honor the intelligence of the readers by giving them the information they need to form their own opinions.” A Lutheran editor might say: “How *dare* you not find out what you can find out?” But *The Christian*’s reporter didn’t attempt to speak to those sources. Dorn said interviewing such people would have been unchristian because they are evil and that Christian journalists should not give them a platform from which to spew Satan’s lies.

Another editor of *The Christian* says he does not read newspapers or news magazines or watch TV news. He explained: “The media will always be the viewpoint of the world, not of God ... You have to be aware of Satan’s schemes.” (qtd. in Fisher par. 14). He thinks good journalists should never portray Christians in a negative light, because to do so would defy the will of God. Further, many Regent students regard as unchristian any story that causes hurt feelings, shame, embarrassment or anger. In essence, they tend to believe—to the dismay of some of their professors—that their calling to promote their beliefs overrides all other considerations in reporting and writing new stories.

If we take that thinking to its logical conclusion, it would be acceptable—preferable—to commit the very kinds of journalistic felonies that most bother the public—to lie by omission, distort facts, fix quotes, and interview only those sources whose points of view mirror one’s own.

The Regent program reminds me of an analogy drawn by Robert Benne, Jordan/Trexler Professor of Religion at Roanoke College. He was talking about the need for colleges of the church to be academically rigorous and he said: “A

Christian cobbler makes good shoes, not poor shoes with little crosses on them” (“Integrity” 7).

Good journalism is ethically sound journalism; many of the offenses that anger the public and erode their trust in the press are the result not of *journalism* but of lousy journalism. Mel Mencher, a Lou Grant-type editor who now teaches in the graduate journalism program at Columbia University, is famous for his curmudgeonly sayings. My favorite: “It is immoral not to be excellent in your craft” (28).

That means that teaching journalism ethics is inseparable from teaching the craft of journalism; yes, we need to educate students in ethical decision-making, but the first ethical rule is this: Make good shoes. Good journalistic stories are well written, well attributed. Good journalism is balanced journalism; good reporters know not only to present the views of both sides, but that most stories have four or six or eight sides. Good journalism is accurate journalism—accurate in fact, spelling, grammar, quotation, attributions and context. Good journalism sometimes enrages people; good journalism does not have to be offensive, but a news story that offends no one is not necessarily good journalism. Unbalanced, slanted news stories are badly reported news stories; sometimes, what their writers need is not so much a remedial course in ethics but a refresher of Journalism 101.

What, exactly, does a college of the church have to offer journalism in terms of leadership in ethical decision-making? And what about “Christian ethics” would make for better journalism? For that matter, what are “Christian ethics” anyway, and how do they look different from other ethics? And is there such a thing as a Lutheran ethic?

For those of us who are not theologians, trying to define Christian ethics feels like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall. So although I will attempt no explication, let me frame the rest of the discussion with some thoughts on Christian ethics by the authors Harmon Smith and Louis Hodges.

The define ethics as “the search for some kind of rational coherence in the regulation of conduct; it is the human actor ‘getting wise to himself’ (13). The write that “ethics as a systematic discipline is born when we being to reflect rationally and systematically upon characteristic ways of deciding moral questions” (13).

The study of Christian ethics, then, is “the study of the implications for human conduct of the reality embodied in

Jesus, the reality of God's love for man. To study Christian ethics is to ask what are the consequences for human behavior of the fact of God's love for man" (30).

These authors point out that very often the actions of Christians do not look different from others. Indeed, they tell us that "when the emperor Constantine adopted Christianity and found military success fighting under the sign of the Christian cross he had all his troops baptized, but with their sword-yielding arm held out of the water!" (13).

Still, they identify four characteristics of the Christian ethic. First, it is an "acknowledging ethic," a "responsive ethic" (16). That is, humans acknowledge the will of God and responds to it. We try to discover what God wills and then we consider that to be our duty. As Christians we claim that the nature of humankind and of humankind's duty—i.e., the nature of God's will for humanity—is seen through the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, who embodied God's will and thus shows humanity the content of that will. "It is precisely to that content," they write, "that the Christian is to respond morally" (17).

The Christian ethic is also a "corporate ethic" (Smith 19), a community ethic. Smith says "to talk about the Christian ethic ... is not to talk primarily of some list of new rules or of divinely given discursive truths. It is rather to participate in a new way of life, to become part of a new reality, the church... [The] result of God's activity is not new rules but new people living in new community" (20).

Third, the Christian ethic is "a deciding ethic," meaning that the characteristic that distinguishes humans is our ability to think, "I ought." ... Humans then may choose to be either moral (righteous) or immoral (unrighteous) but can never choose to be amoral. To assert that human are moral beings living in a moral environment is to claim "that man is to be understood primarily in terms of his relationships to God" (22-25).

Finally, the authors identify a fourth element of the Christian ethic as love, agape—the love of someone not because of who he is, nor because of what he is, but simply that he is; the love demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ" (25). In sum, Harmon and Smith write, "Christian love is none other than the very giving of the self in service to the neighbor." The distinctive character of Christian love lies not so much in what it demands that one do as in the reasons for making those demands" (26).

And here is what especially resonated with me, for it points out the inseparability of journalism ethics and journalistic

calling: The authors write that "Christian ethics is not a study of codes of ethics but of ways Christians go about deciding. The unique ingredient in the acts of Christians does not inhere in the nature of the thing done, but rather in the reason for doing that thing" (16).

And yes, indeed, there is a Lutheran ethic, here articulated by Benne in discussing four orders to which the Christian is called: marriage and family, work, public life and church:

*Lutheran ethics maintains that these are the places in which all humans are given the obligations to live responsible lives. Christians, moreover, are to see them as divinely given callings in which to exercise their particular gifts for the sake of the neighbor ... They are the places in which we discern our special mission in life, our callings.* (15)

Benne's words are helpful in considering journalism as a Christian calling, a Lutheran calling. Smith and Hodge's discussion is helpful when considering the nature of journalism—the nature of news itself. Every journalist will tell you about being accused of being part of a vast conspiracy to "sell newspapers by printing bad news." I know an editor from Iowa who has a running argument with a friend. When they meet for lunch once a month, the friend begins the conversation by ragging on the editor for all the "bad news" in the newspaper. Finally, one day, the editor's friend surprised him: "Great paper, today," he said, "Finally—some good news in the newspaper!" He was referring to a front-page story about some teenager heroes. It seems a nun was walking in a parking ramp when she was mugged. The teenagers saw the mugging and rushed to the nun's aid. They held the muggers until police arrived and were now being lauded as heroes. "Good news?" the editor replied. "Maybe. But remember—first the nun had to get mugged."

Richard Baker puts it another way:

*The journalist is obsessed by matters of moral significance. Sometimes the ethical responsibility of journalism is seen by reversing lenses. You read in your journal that a mother has abandoned her baby. "I had to do it," she is quoted. "The baby is better dead than looking forward to the kind of life I could provide." How does it happen that the story got into the newspaper? Why is it news? In a negative way, the moral truth is affirmed that infanticide is wrong. Suppose you belonged to a culture that found no moral offense in infanticide and a kind of prudent virtue in the explanation that the mother gave. The story would never*

have made the newspapers. It would have had no moral meaning. All the time, journalism tips it hand in moral matters and reveals what it considers just and good by what it presents as wrong. (34-35)

Articulating the “moral nature of news” is one of the ways in which teach future journalists about ethics. This is certainly possible at secular institutions, but at Concordia—here’s another Lutheran paradox—our freedom to speak about morality openly and loudly makes focusing on ethics imperative. We do this by studying ethical issues in journalism and analyzing the cause and effect of journalistic decisions. We do this not only by requiring a class in journalism ethics—something only half of all American journalism programs demand—but also by placing ethical discussions front and center in each and every journalism class we teach.

We do this by working on case studies, and by providing formal training in ethics theory. But that’s not enough. We have to provide moral leadership. A surprisingly large number of studies indicate that though most news organizations have well-reasoned codes of ethics, too often they are either not followed in crisis situations or are undermined by lack of personal morality. As Robert Bugeja says in a recent article in *Quill* magazine:

*Case studies don’t work because students with underdeveloped value systems and little if any professional experience are being asked to evaluate professionals in crisis situations. Ethics are about motive rather than sequence, circumstance or setting (15).*

“Ethics are about motive.” That’s precisely where calling comes in, where journalism becomes vocation.

“Ethics are about motive.” That’s what Richard Baker is getting at when he talks about the “seemingly secular” profession of journalism:

*You will not find the temples of journalistic activity exactly reeking with the incenses of sanctity. There will be no morning devotions as reporters, editors and broadcasters march out to serve the Lord in their daily lives and work. References to the Deity will be heard frequently, but not in the context of worship and praise. Journalism places its functionaries so close to the raw edges of current history that you will tend to find yourself steeped in the attitudes of doubt and unbelief. Yours is a secular world, often sordid and profane.*

*Trailing a narcotics peddler through the playground, taking notes that turn your stomach at the trial of a rapist-killer—are these the ways to serve your God and fellow man? Is there any religious meaning in the life of a journalist, any ethical meaning? Does God call anybody to this kind of vocation? The answer to all these questions has to be yes. The man who stands on the communications bridge, seeing, observing, telling man the story of himself, is one of God’s most prized servants. Perhaps it’s an ugly story; perhaps the journalist’s world appears possessed by evil. Nevertheless, the journalist’s work is a vocation, a response to a divine call, a coming to attention before commands that are for him absolute and ultimate. (13-14)*

“Ethics are about motive.” When the only motive for engaging in journalism is increasing the profits for stockholders, we are in trouble. No longer, then are journalism’s commands absolute and ultimate. They’re on the auction block. As in any profession, journalism has in its ranks practitioners who are careless, incompetent, dishonest, and unable to view the world without their own distorting filters. But to blame most reporters and editors for the profession’s lapses is like blaming foot soldiers for having lousy generals. The college of the church has another ethical responsibility: To remind the industry of their responsibility as public servants.

That’s the thesis of a book by Jeremy Iggers, *Good News, Bad News: Journalism Ethics and the Public Interest*:

*The fundamental question of journalism ethics—How do we best realize the goal of enabling citizens to participate more fully in democratic life? —has been replaced by the market-driven question, ‘How do we meet what our reader and marketer-customers say are their information and entertainment needs? (78)*

The main problem afflicting much of the media is an unholy blend of new technologies and increased competition driven by profit-greedy, mega-media corporate owners—a problem not easily solved by journalism curricula or codes of ethics. The Presidential scandal story serves as an example. It was the first major news story broken by an Internet gossip mongerer, Matt Drudge, whose half-truths and wild claims were then discussed on 24-hour cable news channels as though they were substantiated facts. Soon, reputable news organizations repeated the gossip. In the early weeks of the story, both airwaves and news columns were lousy with rumor, innuendo, and unattributed quotes from vague sources. Network TV reporters spewed seamy details and “eyewitness accounts” as if they were sworn courtroom

testimony instead of error-riddled leaks. Newspapers, which had a glorious opportunity to remedy TV's careless immediacy with careful, thorough reporting, joined the rumor orgy. Even such respected newspapers as *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* repeated allegations prefaced with "if true"—allegations that later had to be retracted. Steve Coz, editor of *The National Enquirer*, said he did not know how his publication would handle the story. "It's pretty hard to out-tabloid the mainstream press on this one," he said. Writes Hamill: "We had some turning point in American journalism: The president of the United States was being examined with the tools usually reserved for the likes of Joey Buttafuoco" (13).

As soon as the dust settled, journalists began flagellating themselves with whips of remorse. "Where Did We Go Wrong?" asked the *Columbia Journalism Review*. We went wrong when we forgot the things we learned in Journalism 101: Attribute all information, especially that of a controversial nature. Double-check. Then check again. Avoid anonymous sources, but if you must use them, know which axe they hope to grind and verify the facts with at least two other sources. Remember that you are reporters, not judge and jury. There is no honor in being first and wrong, but much in being late and right. We went wrong when we began to think of journalism ethics as unaffordable luxuries to be tossed aside in the heat of competition, when we started telling ourselves the word "alleged" gave us license to make any charge, repeat any accusation. We went wrong when, despite a multitude of readership surveys to the contrary, cost-cutting publishers decided the public doesn't really want in-depth reporting, but distraction and titillation.

But the press didn't suddenly "go wrong" in the White House story. Public opinion polls over the last twenty years have reflected a steady decline in the public's trust of journalists—TV journalists especially, but also their print counterparts. It is not coincidental that the public trust began to wane about the same time that newspapers, television stations and networks began to fall into the hands of fewer and larger owners, including many multi-media conglomerates, whose demand for higher returns on investment slashed newsroom budgets across the country. Former *Chicago Tribune* editor James Squires calls newspapers "the most profitable legal business in America" (qtd. in Hamilton and Krinsky 24); among publicly owned and group owned media companies, profit margins of 20 percent are common, and margins of less than the 1992 average of 16 percent are considered unacceptable (24).

Thorough and insightful reporting is an expensive

proposition. Why send a team of reporters to Rwanda when syndicates will sell you canned features for a fraction of the cost? Why bother with pricey and pesky documentaries if the public will watch Barbara Walters dance La Vida Loca with Ricky Martin?

News editors, fearful of ratings and declining subscriptions and under the gun from corporate headquarters to increase profits, tend to overreact to the vagaries of readership surveys and focus groups. They might well heed the words of journalist Eric Blair—better known to the world as George Orwell: "Freedom is the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

A few years ago David Remnick—now editor of *The New Yorker*—wrote about what happens to news coverage when journalists fear telling people what they do not want to hear: He told about an e-mail sent by the executive editor of the *Miami Herald* to his staff. Here's what he asked them: "If anyone has an idea on what to do with the Bosnia story, I welcome it. I am embarrassed to say I long ago stopped reading this story of enormous human tragedy and significant global consequence." The editor said reporters had failed to make the news *relevant* to the readers, had failed to answer readers' questions of "What does this have to do with *me*?" (42)

Trying to answer such questions only trivializes coverage, Remnick says: "Once an editor starts responding to every cry of 'What about my needs?' the front page will read like a community shopper and the news from Sarajevo will come in the form of AP briefs back near the want ads. Like it or not, part of the job of a great editor is to listen to public desires—and then, if necessary, act against them" (42).

Much is at stake. In his memoir, *A Reporter's Life*, Walter Cronkite writes that modern journalism, especially television, has become so corrupted by the kind of "infotainment" owners think the public wants—by the "profitable bad...driving out the unprofitable or marginally profitable good," that our democracy is in grave danger (376). Cronkite writes that "a free unintimidated and unregulated press is democracy's early-warning system against both the dangers of democracy's own excesses and the approach of tyranny," and he charges that contemporary journalism too often fails to do its job. Cronkite is especially hard on television journalism: "The nation whose population depends on the explosively compressed headline service of television news can expect to be exploited by the demagogues and dictators who prey upon the semi-informed" (380).

Therefore, Cronkite claims, citizens must be educated not to rely on television for their news, but to read good newspapers, weekly newsmagazines and journals. But if Pete Hamill is right, the print media are not doing their jobs, either. Hamill is as hard on the medium he loves as Cronkite is on his:

*With the usual honorable exceptions, newspapers are getting dumber. They are increasingly filled with sensation, rumor, press-agent flackery, and bloated trivialities at the expense of significant facts ... Newspapers emphasize drama and conflict at the expense of analysis. They cover celebrities as if reporters were a bunch of waifs with their noses pressed enviously to the windows of the rich and famous. (30)*

Cronkite and Hamill agree that education is the only way to improve the quality of journalism. The public, they write, need to be educated to become discriminating readers and viewers. Student journalists need to spend more time becoming competent in the basics of journalism: Writing, reporting, ethics. And perhaps most importantly, they write, media owners need to accept their responsibilities as holders of the public trust—which is not to say they should operate their businesses as charities. Cronkite writes: “I want them to make huge profits in the entertainment area—because I want them to pour a sizable share of those profits back into news and public affairs” (382).

The problem is not that reporters want to commit lousy journalism. Pete Hamill says that too many publishers think of reporters and editors as hopeless romantics, committed to the myth of the fearless journalist” (99). “They are actually right,” Hamill writes. “But they should trust that myth. Upon that myth they can build great newspapers that will also be healthy businesses. Newspapers need men and women with fire in the belly, not a collection of bloodless bureaucrats, content to clerk the news” (99).

Never before have we had a greater need for good journalism—and for the owners of media conglomerates to reclaim journalism’s historic role as an early-warning system. In this age of special interest publications and the Internet, our society is in dire need of a medium that serves not only to reflect a community, but also to build, perhaps preserve, Community.

Cronkite points out that our society’s historic belief in the marketplace of ideas will be moot if there is no viable marketplace:

*Today the person seeking only the football scores of the couch potato looking for entertainment-world chitchat is usually exposed to some general news headlines while thumbing through the paper or waiting out the evening news broadcast/ But when there are cable and other high-tech channels to which they can go directly for their sport or entertainment news, even that limited exposure will end. (380)*

Cures for what ails journalism are neither quick nor easy, and as complex as are the solutions for most social problems. Still, there are things we can do—as news consumers, as educators, as journalists—to improve the function, value and quality of the press:

Consumers, rather than mumbling their complaints to themselves, can yell and holler when the news media act irresponsibly. They can direct their disapproval at the news organization and its advertisers; they might be surprised to learn how quickly media and their advertisers respond to pressure from their customers—and how relatively few customers they need to hear from before they do so. An editorial in *Christianity Today* urges readers to criticize, to hold the press accountable, but to do so in an accountable manner: “For Christians, neither reactionary condemnation of the news media nor withdrawal from media interaction are adequate responses” (42).

We in the academy can emphasize, in our journalism programs, the core values of journalism education—reporting, writing, ethics—based on a solid foundation of liberal arts. We in church-related colleges can do some passionate preaching about calling—we can evangelize, if you will, the gospel of vocation. At Concordia, we can make use of our academic freedom not just to teach ethics, but also to demonstrate morality. We can prick the consciences of the mega-media conglomerates that demand high profit margins from their news divisions at the expense of quality. We can develop what *Winds of Change*, a study of journalism education commissioned by the Freedom Forum, calls “a journalism culture,” where journalism’s role and possibilities are respected and revered (Medsger 120). We do this by regarding journalism not as a trade but a complex and interdisciplinary subject worth studying, and as a profession worthy of our best and brightest students. And we make a point of celebrating models of journalistic excellence and holding them up to students and the public:

We could start by telling holding up the story of Dennis Williams, Verneal Jimerson and William Rainge. They are



three black men who spent twenty years on Death Row after having being convicted of the 1978 rape and murder of a young white woman and her fiancé. On July 2, 1996, they walked out of prison, free, exonerated of the crimes by the investigative journalism of three Northwestern University students. Their compelling, solid story forced police and prosecutors to admit they had botched the case because of their eagerness to make arrests. Four men have since been arrested and convicted on overwhelming DNA evidence.

In fact, the Northwestern students' story prompted—some say shamed—the *Chicago Tribune* to launch its own investigative series on injustices in Illinois' death penalty system. So well documented and outrageous were those exposed injustices that the Illinois governor has called for a moratorium on all executions in the state and the President has urged other governors to do the same. Among the other truths that these stories reveal is that no other institution in our society—not the government, not the academy, not the church—is willing or able to do such work. If not journalists, then who? When the students' professor, David Protes, was interviewed by the *Des Moines Register* about his students' feat, he said this: "I personally think it's appalling that a college professor and his students should be the last line of defense for a prisoner before execution" (qtd. in Niederpruem 4).

We celebrate journalism by telling about some of the stories for which newspapers have won Pulitzer Prizes in public service and investigative journalism, and perhaps we read from the Pulitzer citations themselves to illustrate journalism as vocation:

*To Katherine Boo of The Washington Post, for work that disclosed wretched neglect and abuse in the city's group homes for the mentally retarded, which forced officials to acknowledge the conditions and begin reforms.*

*To Eric Newhouse of the Great Falls, Montana, Tribune, for his vivid examination of alcohol abuse and the problems in creates in the community.*

*To George Dohrman of the St. Paul Pioneer Press, for his determined reporting, despite negative reader reaction, that revealed academic fraud in the men's basketball program at the University of Minnesota.*

*To Mark Schoofs of the Village Voice, for his provocative and enlightening series on the AIDS crisis in Africa.*

The list, thank God, goes on and on, back to 1917. The hope is that it continues.

We can make sure they know—students, the general public—why journalists around the world die in the line of duty: Pete Hamill reminds us of the hundreds of journalists who've been killed covering wars in the last 50 years, including 65 who died covering Vietnam:

*They knew that only part of the truth could be discovered in the safe offices of Washington, D.C.; they had to witness the darker truths by getting down in the mud with the grunts. Reporters and photographers did not stop dying when Vietnam was over. They have been killed in Lebanon and Nicaragua, in Bosnia and Peru, and in a lot of other places where hard rain falls.*

*I can't believe these good men and women died for nothing. I know they didn't. They died because they were the people chosen by the tribe to carry the torch to the back of the cave and tell the others what is there in the darkness. They died because they were serious about the craft they practiced. They died because they believed in the fundamental social need for what they did with a pen, a notebook, a typewriter, a camera. They didn't die to increase profits for the stockholders. They didn't die to obtain an invitation to some White House dinner for a social-climbing publisher. They died for us.*

*As readers or journalists, we honor them when we remember that their dying was not part of a plan to make the world cheaper, baser or dumber. They died to bring us the truth (21-22).*

Can an auto mechanic be a Christian? Undoubtedly. Can a Christian be a French professor? Oui. And Christian cobblers make some fine shoes, too, unadorned with little crosses but solid and long lasting and good to the feet. Can a Christian be a journalist? Yes, Ernie, indeed they can. Some of them do God's work.

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*Catherine McMullen is Assistant Professor of English and Print Journalism at Concordia College.*

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