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The Ursinusiana Project:
How the Religious History of Ursinus College Yielded
Today's Liberal Arts Curriculum

Karen A. Boedecker

April 26, 2010

**Submitted to the faculty of Ursinus College in fulfillment of the
requirements for Distinguished Honors in Religious Studies.**

I. Introduction

Earlier this year I spoke with a prospective student that I was interviewing in the Ursinus Admissions Office. I related my own personal experiences at Ursinus and, as I usually do, zeroed in on what is commonly referred to as “the freshman experience.” I explained the way the freshman dorms were set up, the orientation process, and what I personally believe to be the core of an Ursinus education – the Common Intellectual Experience. As I rattled on about these things and why they are important I began to consider how far I’ve come in the last four years and what exactly brought me to where I am today.

The first week of school freshman year I recall talking with some of my hall mates about various things that concern eighteen year olds. Our discussion mostly revolved around what we knew we all had in common since we’d only been acquainted for a few days. We started with complaining about the summer reading, went on to who was going to go try to find a party that weekend, and then finally to why we all chose Ursinus. One person had turned down Penn, another Harvard, and yet another a full ride at the Ohio State University. Some hadn’t considered other schools and some just came for the bio and pre-med programs. I loved the fact that all of us came from the widest range of backgrounds imaginable and that we were all planning to go into an even more varied range of fields, but what really blew my mind was that a place like Ursinus College could bring us all together that night through something as simple as an ancient Mesopotamian epic – over the summer we had all read *The*

Epic of Gilgamesh. The whole concept of a course like the Common Intellectual Experience is unique in and of itself, but bringing together ten years' worth of Ursinus students through a common appreciation for the liberal arts has created an unparalleled sense of community.

I'd never really thought too much about Ursinus' roots beyond the basics that all freshmen learn during the academic convocation at orientation. However, my father is one of those academic types who will read up on anything and everything he encounters in his daily life. Once I decided to attend, Ursinus was no exception. His readings on the German Protestant Reformation shed a lot of light on why things are the way we are here at Ursinus. I learned a good amount of pre-history (everything from who Ulrich Zwingli and Zacharias Baer were to why it is that the College doesn't have big fancy buildings or any of the other bells and whistles commonly associated with academic institutions) and brushed up a bit on the founding of the school itself. What I was left with was a lot of what my friends refer to as my "fun facts" but, I see now, just as little perspective as I began with.

When I first approached Dr. Nathan Rein about the possibility of doing a Summer Fellows project about the religious history of Ursinus and how our former affiliation with the German Reformed Church has impacted the identity of the school he reminded me that I had overlooked something very important. In all of my excitement about finding out what the implications of the Heidelberg Catechism had on the whole concept of a liberal arts education I managed to forget that there was once a time during which Ursinus was affiliated with the

German Reformed Church (now the UCC), that we are no longer affiliated with them, and that something happened during the last 141 years that changed that. When I left Dr. Rein's office that afternoon I had a whole new crop of questions swimming around in my head, but the subject that came to the forefront was that of *change*. Within that broad subject came such focuses as what I began the summer researching – that is, when was compulsory chapel abolished and what repercussions came of it? It never occurred to me to study why there was a compulsory chapel program in the first place.

I spent most of the summer in the Ursinusiana Archives searching for documents that I thought would give me answers, and in a way they did. I learned the specifics of the chapel program, its place in the College's history, and how people reacted to the alterations that were made in the 1960s before it was completely abolished. As satisfying as my search was, there were still questions left unanswered – the problem was, I didn't know what those questions were.

When I began the next step of my project last fall I met with Dr. Rein to discuss my frustrations. I felt that I'd hit a dead end in the archives and that I wasn't able to figure out how everything fit together and why it was relevant. After a long discussion we decided that I needed to take a break from Ursinus' history in order to get some perspective. During this time Dr. Rein suggested that I take a look at Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* to see what one of the most well-regarded religious and sociological theorists had to say about the fundamentals of religion and religious ritual. As it turns out, Durkheim was the key to further developing my project. I forged ahead with the

sociological and religious theories of Durkheim and saw enough similarities that I was able to apply some of his ideas in such a way that I could develop my own theory that links Ursinus' identity to its religious trajectory.

My project is divided into two parts. The first part is a heavily annotated timeline. I have organized all of the bits and pieces I encountered during my time in the archives in a clear and concise manner that addresses each historical occurrence that led to the abolition of chapel. I hope that this timeline can serve not only as a reference for the casual reader who is interested in the religious history of the College but also as a guide to my analysis in the second part of the project.

Although constructing the time line proved to be the most time consuming piece of my project, my analysis is by far the more important of the two sections. After reading Émile Durkheim's theories I spent a long time exploring the relationship between Durkheim and Ursinus. My analysis synthesizes my discoveries and molds them into a coherent theory that addresses not only the role of religion at Ursinus (the topic that had originally piqued my interest) but also the identity of the College itself and how Ursinus College came to take its place amongst other top liberal arts colleges.

My project is by no means complete. During my time in the archives I kept a blog that was open to the public. The most valuable insights I received were from the readers of the blog and I couldn't have made the analyses that I did without those comments. I had to abandon the blog because of the limited time that I had available, but I recognize that because I was not able to read other

peoples' comments as I worked through my project it only reflects my own views. I encourage everyone who reads this project to think very hard about Ursinus' identity and how that identity has formed individual experiences at the College. I welcome anyone who does not like or agree with my conclusions about the College to do some exploring on their own and develop alternative theories and conclusions because my project is merely a starting point.

II. Timeline

1832

- Todd's School established.

1848

- Freeland Seminary established.
- Eastern Synod held at Hagerstown. Dr. John Henry Augustus Bomberger appointed chair of a committee to consider progress of the German Reformed Church.

1849

- Synod held in Norristown. Dr. Bomberger's committee makes a report that strongly reflects his stance on creating a new order of worship for the Church. Dr. John Williamson Nevin, the President of Marshall College (and later Franklin and Marshall College), is appointed chair of the committee that is charged with the task of creating this new order. Bomberger, a member of the committee, petitioned for a "pulpit" liturgy (commonly referred to as "low church") while Nevin was in favor of an "altar" liturgy ("high church").

1857

- Findings of Nevin's committee presented at Synod in Allentown. "The committee had attempted to satisfy both bodies of opinion within itself and the Church at large, but it did not succeed."¹

¹ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College: A History of Its First 100 Years* (Collegeville, PA: Ursinus College, 1985), 2.

1866

- Bomberger presents his minority report (representing those in favor of low church liturgy) at the Synod in York and is heckled by supporters of Nevin's ideas.

1867

- One of Bomberger's writings, called "Reformed, not Ritualistic" is published in response to Nevin's "Vindication of the Revised Liturgy." Bomberger warns in his writing that "the 'new' theology of Nevinism would not only destroy the distinctive nature of the historic faith but weaken its hold upon its believers and lead to defections."^{2 3}
- The Myerstown Convention is called for supporters of Bomberger and his low church ideas. One of the main foci of the group was to establish a college that was in line with their ideals. A sense of urgency to save the low church movement was felt when "several ministers...and several students and faculty members at Franklin and Marshall became converts to Roman Catholicism. The times called for extreme efforts."^{4 5}

² Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 4.

³ Later, when the *Ursinus Bulletin* becomes the first regular communication from the College, Bomberger will continue to write scathing criticisms of Franklin and Marshall as well as other colleges and universities that he does not approve of. Bomberger was not a pluralist by any means and had little patience for those who saw the religious world differently than he did.

⁴ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 5.

⁵ For those who were truly committed to the Reformed movement, especially those who supported the low church faction, a conversion to Catholicism was the ultimate blow. The Catholic Church represented everything that these men hated, most notably a strong belief in ritual. Any religious group that overlapped with Catholicism was just as bad as the Catholics themselves.

1868

- Bomberger releases the first issue of the *Reformed Church Monthly*, a publication that was the brainchild of the Myerstown Convention the previous year. The publication and Bomberger's efforts were helped with staunch support from Dr. Jeremiah H. Good and Dr. George W. Williard, a professor at and the president of Heidelberg College respectively. The *Monthly* worked to heavily promote Ursinus and the seminary that was to be affiliated with it.
- Six representatives from the Business Committee that was formed at Myerstown meet in Philadelphia and decide that :

“ WHEREAS, there is an increasing demand in the Reformed Church for educational facilities, and whereas we have no such school in this section of our Zion distinctively Reformed and adapted to the wants of our sons, both intellectually and morally, therefore

RESOLVED, that we found and establish at such a place as hereafter be determined an institution of learning that shall afford young men the advantage of a collegiate education.”⁶

- The first Board of Directors for the future Ursinus College is named.

⁶ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 6.

1869

- Abraham Kline of Philadelphia is elected the first president of the Board.
- Freeland Seminary and the land surrounding it is purchased for \$20,000 to make way for Ursinus. This was ideal for the College because of the close proximity of Trinity Christian Church.⁷
- Bomberger and the Board of Directors decide that in their application for a charter the school shall take "the name, style, and title of Ursinus College"⁸ in honor of Zachariah Baer, a respected German theologian and the author of the Heidelberg Catechism. Later in the College's history a further explanation of the name "Ursinus" is published in the *Ursinus College Bulletin*. In 1885, the *Bulletin* notes that

"the Founders of the College desired by the selection of the name *Ursinus* as the title of their Institution to declare the spirit, purpose, and aim which moved them to work, and to bind themselves and their school, by a sacred pledge, to the principles of evangelical Christianity, in its true historical character, of which

⁷ Ursinus, while affiliated with the German Reformed Movement (now the UCC), has never had any official ties to Trinity beyond it being the preferred place of worship for the first several generations of Ursinus faculty and staff. Trinity Church is still fully operational in its original location adjacent to the College. The church shares much of its history with Ursinus and a lot of familiar names can be found in the cemetery.

⁸ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 7.

Ursinus was so zealous an advocate, and so faithful an expounder.

No education is believed to be worthy of confidence, or equal to the task it undertakes, which ignores those principles, or refuses to be animated and ruled by them.

Whilst the *College* is a legitimate offspring of the Reformed branch of evangelical Christianity and is virtually amenable to the constitution of the Reformed Church, it is not in any narrow sense a sectarian school. Its educational advantages are open to all. And all who are in sympathy with Gospel principles of truth and duty will find a congenial home within its walls.”⁹

- On February 5 Ursinus College is chartered in Harrisburg and granted its “Act of Incorporation” which is, in fact, a university charter.¹⁰
- On April 6, 1869 the management of Freeland Seminary is transferred to Ursinus College.

⁹ “College Notes.” *Ursinus College Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (1885): 1-2.

¹⁰ It is important to note that while Ursinus was “church-related” it was not established or ruled by the Church at any time in its history unlike its rival college Franklin and Marshall. This prevented Ursinus from receiving Church funds for the establishment of the institution and instruction but, in later years, yielded a clear path for the College to receive federal and state support.

- Based on his strong commitment to the College, impressive fundraising efforts, and recommendations for faculty, JHA Bomberger was appointed Ursinus College's first President. Bomberger was hesitant to take the job and there is no official record of his acceptance but by the time instruction began at the College the following year Bomberger occupied the position. In later years, Ursinus would come to be known "Dr. Bomberger's College."

1870

- Instruction at Ursinus begins on September 6, 1870. In his inaugural speech, Bomberger spoke about his beliefs that "the teacher was to build character as well as mind," his commitment to "the old, completely prescribed pattern of courses in the liberal arts, the American equivalent to the trivium and quadrivium," and his disapproval of the unstructured program that had been developed at Harvard by President Eliot.¹¹
- The course catalogue for Ursinus' first year of instruction is released and includes a section on religion and religious life at the College:

"In proper harmony with the principles of Evangelical Christianity upon which this Institution is founded, and to the service of which it is consecrated, the Faculty will regard it as their highest duty to give

¹¹ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 13.

faithful attention to the religious interests of the students under their care, and to labor for their spiritual welfare. This will be done in no sectarian spirit, but in full accordance with an enlarged charity which recognizes the claims of all branches of the Evangelical Protestant Church, as the only legitimate representative of Christian Catholicity. The scholastic duties of each day will be opened and closed with suitable devotions, which every student will be required to attend. All the students will be required, also, to attend worship on the Lord's day, whether in the Chapel of the College, or in some adjacent church."¹²

- Bomberger records a typical day at Ursinus College during its first year of instruction. This account includes a description of the earliest chapel services at Ursinus:

"At 8:45 AM the large bell again rings, summoning Professors and students to the large recitation room (not yet used for chapel) for morning-prayer and roll-call. After calling the roll, a chapter is read from the

¹² *The Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Ursinus College, for the Academic Year of 1870-71*. Norristown, Penn.: M.R. Wills, Book and Job Printer (1871): 11.

Bible, a hymn sung, and prayer offered. These devotions are conducted in strict accordance with the simple usage of the Reformed Church. Any requisite statements or announcements are then made by the Faculty."¹³

- The *Reformed Church Monthly* announces that Ursinus would be establishing a "Free Theological Department."
- At the Eastern Synod, held in Martinsburg, Nevins' high church party disputes Ursinus' proposed theological program. They were "able to secure the passage of a resolution declaring Dr. Bomberger's action in teaching theology 'disorderly' and enjoining him to desist."¹⁴
- At the General Synod, held later that year in Cincinnati, Bomberger defends his Theological Department on the basis that the order to desist was unconstitutional. Bomberger and Ursinus won the right to continue to program by a vote of 100 to 78.

1880

- The Pennsylvania Female College closes after 27 years of instruction. The College had been the sister school of Freeland Seminary and its closing meant that there would no longer be an institution of higher education in the area that was available to women.

¹³ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 18.

¹⁴ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 24.

1881

- Ursinus College becomes coeducational upon the admittance of Minerva Weinberger, daughter of faculty member Dr. Shelly Weinberger, and Bertha Hendricks, daughter of Reverend Joseph H. Hendricks who was the pastor of Trinity Christian church. Both women graduated in 1884.

1885

- The *Ursinus College Bulletin* (precursor to the *Weekly* and later the *Grizzly*) is first published. The *Bulletin* included everything from updates about the College for alumni to reports on other low church colleges that were flourishing in other parts of the country. As Ursinus was in the midst of serious financial problems that threatened the continuation of the institution, the *Bulletin* published a brief piece about why the College needs to be sustained:

"We need not only educated men, but also Christian men. Ursinus is devoted to Christian education. It aims to send forth men indoctrinated in truth, sound morality, and virtue. Only such are a blessing to the world. The stream must be pure that can cleanse society of its ulcers."¹⁵

¹⁵ "Reasons Why Ursinus College Should Be Supported and Continued." *Ursinus College Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (1885): 3.

1887

- Even as the theology and general programs gained popularity and enrollment increased it was impossible to ignore that the establishment of other theology curriculums in other institutions had become something of a trend. In an issue of the *Bulletin Bomberger*¹⁶ reminds readers that

“Under its Charter, Ursinus College is authorized to establish any department of a complete liberal education, including what is most commonly called Theology. In other words, it holds a University charter. It has present purpose, however, of availing itself of the privilege thus conferred, beyond the establishment of the Theological Department. Instead, therefore, of this department being a Theological school wholly distinct from the College organization and independent of it, it is an organic part of it...”¹⁷

¹⁶ It is impossible to tell who wrote articles for the *Bulletin*. I will assume that the more authoritative pieces about the operations of the College were not written by the students who worked on the publication but by the President of the College who was perpetually trying to appeal to alumni and friends of the College in order to drum up financial support for Ursinus during the leanest of times.

¹⁷ *Ursinus College Bulletin* IV, no. 2 (1887): 25.

1888

- An article in the *Bulletin* suggests the first time that the College or people affiliated with the College might need reassurance that Ursinus' religious roots, while not officially tied to the Reformed Church, were still relevant:

"Some of our modern schools of higher culture seem very sensitively to shun religion, and ignore or exclude it as not belonging to a College education. They appear to regard it beneath the dignity, the breadth and depth of academic or philosophic liberty and learning to be hooded by the cowl of pietism or cramped by the superstitious devoutness of Christianity. Hence their philosophies become so sublime and metaphysics so profound as to soar far above or dip far below any personal theism...Such college culture is unworthy of any century, and most reprehensible in the nineteenth of the Christian era. It cannot fail to yield bad fruit."¹⁸

¹⁸ "Collegiate Culture." *Ursinus College Bulletin* IV, no. 7 (1888): 108-109.

1889

- Twenty years after it is first chartered, Ursinus falls into the routine of its first official religious programming. A detailed account is provided for alumni and friends of the College by the *Bulletin*:

“At eight o’clock in the morning a general Bible-class, composed of resident students, and any others who choose to attend, is held in the College chapel. Prof. Ruby conducts it. The selections of Scripture studied are those of the International Series. This service has an interested attendance. All the resident students are required to be present, it is true. But that must not be taken in the harsh peremptory sense. The compliance is cheerful, virtually voluntary, and evasions or excuses are rare occurrences. The *must* is assented to as a bird consents to fly with its wings, or a man to work with his hands. Next comes the privilege of attending public worship in some adjacent church. There are several churches in the three villages contiguous to each other with the college in the central one. One is located immediately opposite the college grounds. The others are within east and, in fair weather, pleasant walking distance. Each student may

select the one he prefers regularly to attend. All are *required*, in this case again, to make a selection and to be in their place. But the rule seems to set so softly upon them that it is not felt to be a chafing yoke. It may be that one or another wisely makes a pleasure or necessity, - but as practice makes virtue easy, so compliance with the law soon kindles love for it...

Once a month, or oftener, if other engagements allow, at half past three o'clock in the afternoon, the Vice-President, Rev. Dr. Super, and Prof. J.S. Weinberger give the students Bible-Talks on special topics, which have proved attractive and profitable...Attendance upon this is, of course, voluntary, but a large proportion of the young men of the college find pleasure in being there...

These facts suggest that their own inferences, and most assuredly none of these will be that a Christian Sunday at college need be a day of gloomy asceticism, or of puritanic pietistic severity (such as anti-religious papers often caricature), but a season of purest pleasure and most salutary rest and recreation."¹⁹

¹⁹ "College Sundays." *Ursinus College Bulletin* V, no. 7 (1889): 117-118.

- The campus community chooses colors for the school after several years of Augustus W. Bomberger (Class of 1882) hinting that the College should have colors to identify itself with proudly. Appropriately, the colors chosen reflected Ursinus' religious roots and name sake. The *Bulletin* reports:

"At a mass meeting of the students held on Tuesday, May 8th, it was resolved after some discussion that a suitable combination of black, old-gold, and red should be adopted as the distinctive insignia of our Alma Mater. It has since been discovered that these colors pre-dominate in the coat-of-arms generally attributed to the Heidelberg Catechism, the the choice is accordingly regarded as an exceedingly happy one."²⁰

1892

- Bomberger Memorial Hall is completed and dedicated on the afternoon of June 23. The building had been funded by the College's first benefactor, Robert Patterson, who had given more than \$50,000 to the school to build a new chapel, laboratories, and classrooms.

²⁰ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 39.

1896

- Professor of English Samuel Vernon Ruby collapses and dies surrounded by members of the Ursinus community just before the daily chapel service begins.^{21 22}

1898

- At the Board of Directors decides to move the School of Theology from Collegeville to Philadelphia.²³²⁴

1902

- The *Ursinus Bulletin* becomes the College's general newsletter and the *Ursinus Weekly* becomes the campus newspaper, reporting on events on campus and giving students a designated space to share opinions and ideas.

1907

- Ursinus' School of Theology is merged with the Heidelberg Theological School, thus removing the strongest link between Ursinus College and the German Reformed Church.²⁵²⁶

²¹ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 70.

²² The graduating class of 1897 dedicated the yearbook to Professor Ruby. The name *Ruby* stuck and is still the name of the annual yearbook today in 2010.

²³ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 71.

²⁴ The easy and swift (a matter of months!) decision move of the Theological School suggests a somewhat small but still significant split between Ursinus' secular and religious courses of study that existed even when the College still had a largely Christian program for all students.

²⁵ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 71.

²⁶ While this is a somewhat bold move on the part of the College, Ursinus had little obligation to its Theological School. Even though Bomberger had defended Ursinus' right to the program at a Synod years earlier the College, having never had any official ties to the German Reformed Church, didn't need to appease anyone. The move was strictly a logistical one and no person or group is recorded as having been offended by the merge.

1937

- Robert Patterson's heirs try to sue Ursinus College for the \$150,000 that had been bequeathed to the College by Patterson on the basis that in his will he stipulated that "in event of the failure of the officers and faculty of the College to truly and faithfully teach, maintain and carry out Evangelical Reform principles" then the trust would be forfeited by the College and divided amongst his heirs. The case was heard by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and, as it turned out, Patterson's heirs were not able to produce a valid testimony. In fact, "the appellants were unable to demonstrate to the court that they knew what 'Evangelical Reform principles' were or to show that the College had...changed position or practice."^{27 28}

1962

- President Donald Helfferich, Dean William Petit, and various other faculty and staff members became founding members of Ursinus' "Core Committee." Their responsibility was to do a thoughtful review

²⁷ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 144.

²⁸ Ursinus had undergone many changes between its founding and the beginning of Norman McClure's presidency when this case was brought against the College. The chapel program was the most religious tradition at the College but little has been written about it for the span between Bomberger's and Helfferich's presidencies. This law suit is the only indication that I've been able to find that suggests that the program had been constant over the years, but since Ursinus' community is so small I will also go ahead and assume that any changes would have been well documented in one capacity or another. The long and short of it is that compulsory chapel and what went with it were essentially untouched for Ursinus' first 90 or so years.

At this point I would also like to recall the basis on which the College was founded and Dr. Bomberger's piece "Reformed, not Ritualistic." It must not be forgotten that Ursinus is deeply rooted in the Reformed movement and there would have been very little tolerance for any rituals in *addition* to chapel, so it is possible that the only way that Ursinus could have violated Patterson's trust would be if the College had abolished the chapel program.

of the Ursinus curriculum, including the compulsory chapel program.

Helfferich noted that the purpose of the committee was

“to assure, as far as can be assured, that an Ursinus graduate will have come to see his college study and experiences as all part of a meaningful and inter-related whole and thus influence both his occupational competence and his relationship to others in the human community.”^{29 30}

1963

- Student Carl Peek reports in the *Ursinus Weekly* that there had been recent discontent in the campus community regarding the compulsory chapel program. Peek brings into question the religious aspects of chapel and calls for the program to become voluntary:

“Can a college have compulsory chapel and still be called a Christian college? I think not, and evidently from all reports available, some of the members of the Board of Directors have been asking the same

²⁹ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 182.

³⁰ Helfferich's commitment to diversity in the curriculum and the liberal arts mirrored that of previous presidents of the College. Although it was not apparent at the time, the expansion of the curriculum would expose Ursinus students to certain “human” themes in a purely intellectual setting as opposed to the covertly religious chapel setting.

question of themselves and have been coming up with many of the same answers.

The point of the whole situation is, can a Christian by definition, force another man to attend what is basically a church service contrary to another man's belief. The answer, in my mind at least, is very clear. Chapel should not be compulsory two or three times a week, or even two or three times a semester; if it should be at all, it should be on a purely voluntary daily basis.

Naturally it can be argued that we accepted the ground rules, including compulsory chapel, when we came to Ursinus. In an academic institution, however, thought concerning the ground rules of everything, is supposed to be stimulated - free and open thought - without fear of punishment or threats. And, it seems to me, the powers that be, should take into consideration the thoughts of the students about chapel more than they say they are doing.

Granted, some of the ideas "we the students" come up with may irritate the smooth polish of the traditional system, but this kind of thought is what most colleges are looking for. Progress comes only

when the new crosses the old and creates a hybrid, so to speak."^{31 32}

1964

- The Spring semester of 1964 opens with an announcement that major changes will be made to the chapel program after extensive review by the Men's Student Government Association (MSGA), the faculty and staff of the College, and the Board of Directors. The first of these changes eliminate chapel on Fridays and cuts chapel attendance to two days a week (which days were determined by class standing) for each student.

" Certain changes in Chapel procedure will become effective in the 1964 Spring semester. Chapel services will be discontinued on Fridays. Freshmen and Sophomores will attend Chapel services on Monday and Wednesday at the usual time. Juniors and Seniors will attend on Tuesday and Thursday. Four cuts and

³¹ Peek, Carl. "Peek Around Campus: Chapel." *Ursinus Weekly*, 21 October 1963, p. 2.

³² Peek's call for a re-evaluation of the old chapel program is one of the first to be published in the *Weekly* during this time period. It is important to note that he is not calling for something as radical as abolition of the program at this point. Students at Ursinus in the 1960s were more interested in their place in the world as global citizens than they were in their place in religion. The chapel program, if it were revamped to Peek's standards, had the potential to become a very progressive public forum.

four make-ups will be allowed per semester, an addition of one each.

This action has come about as a result of the MSGA Report submitted to the Faculty, Administration, and Board of Directors of the College last spring. The report asked that some change be made in the procedures used in the compulsory Chapel program.

These changes are the first results of the Report and although they may be viewed with some hesitation by a few members of the student body, particularly juniors and seniors, they are reportedly only the first steps in renovating the Chapel system.

The faculty committee on Chapel is still meeting so further changes may be forthcoming."³³ ³⁴

- By the end of the Spring semester the student body had mostly adjusted but there were still those who were indignant about the two days a week that they had to attend chapel. A scathing cartoon, directed at the administration, was published in the *Weekly* that featured a caricature of the administration holding a mallet and

³³ "Chapel Changes Announced." *Ursinus Weekly*, 13 January 1964, p. 1.

³⁴ Interestingly, the faculty committee on Chapel never made a formal report at any general faculty meetings. I assume that the reports were made directly to the Board of Directors since they had a great deal to do with policy changes on campus but unfortunately I have not been able to gain access to the Board minutes.

forcing a cross labeled “chapel” down the throat of a student who is bound by ropes and chains. The caption reads “Swallow it son, it’s good for you.”³⁵

1965

- At a faculty meeting near the beginning of the 1965 Fall semester Dr. Alfred L. Creager, college chaplain, requests that faculty consider participating in the chapel service after several years of declining participation. Dr. Creager “stressed the opportunity [that] Chapel offers to members [of the faculty] to whatever is on their minds.”³⁶
- The Core Committee’s “Ursinus Plan” is adopted by the College and implemented in 1966. The Plan was a somewhat radical move for a small, conservative college like Ursinus. The bulk of the plan involved creating “pivotal” and “radial” courses. The pivotal courses, the predecessors to the core courses that a 2010 Ursinus student might take, required each student to take at least one course in three separate divisions – Humanities, Social Science, and Science and Mathematics – and two courses in the Language division. To satisfy their radial course requirements students were to take at least twelve credits in a department outside of his or her major. These requirements were to ensure that each student that matriculated

³⁵ See appendix

³⁶ Alfred Creager, Ursinus College Faculty Meeting – Regular Meeting, October 6, 1965.

would have ample opportunity to explore every facet of the liberal arts program. The Plan was met with some hesitation, but ultimately "What brainstorming and discussion had released was an innovative energy which produced a will to try new patterns, a hospitable atmosphere for experimental education itself."^{37 38}

1966

- A very strongly worded letter, signed only by "The Refractory," is published in the *Weekly* following a chapel service led by Dr. Creager. The letter renews student interest in and discussion about again updating the chapel program.

"Dear Editor,

Compulsory chapel is taken pretty much as a matter of course at Ursinus. "Chapel"; the word has religious overtones, which cannot illegitimize it, for Ursinus remains part of the UCC. However, with the heterogeneity of beliefs present, proselytizing would be quite unforgivable. The expounding of a more lived man's views on ethical and relational problems may be well worth while, and even thought provoking.

³⁷ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 183.

³⁸ Many past faculty and administrators had professed their commitment to a classical liberal arts education, but this is one of the first times that a College official had mentioned experimental education. Helfferich's interest in revamping the liberal arts program at Ursinus was the first step towards the overhaul of Ursinus' liberal arts philosophy that Presidents Richter and Strassburger implement during their tenures.

Indeed, an advertisement for some humanitarian organization is more than acceptable. But on the other end of the spectrum lies an area of concern quite as fatuous as a fire and brimstone revival meeting at 9 o'clock on a Monday morning in Bomberger chapel.

Last Monday's speech by Dr. Creager was undisguised propaganda for all of the conservative traits in the school that chapel stands for. What is worse, it was so poorly reasoned, almost insulting, especially considering the good grace with which it was accepted.

In a previous speech Dr. Creager quoted the rules and regulations for Mt. Holyoke College from some generations back saying that we weren't so badly off after all. This week he decides that our rules and regulations are a product of trial (and error?) suited to our needs in our future life. Is it impermissible then that we live now, that we begin the empirical process of self dependence before we are launched into the cold cruel world? Granted, of course, that complete independence from, after dependence on an artificial system becomes chaotic; nevertheless there must be something wrong with this smugly self-reighteous I-

told-you-so-ist attitude, if enforced chapel services like this one are necessary to quell an unthought of rebellion against this, the best of all possible environments.

And when we of the synthetic environment are unprepared to face a synthetic definition of pure study, a contradiction results that looks like the last step in a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Right?

So, as Buggsy might say, we have two choices left; to apply to New College with thirty demerits for skipping chapel, or to rest our weary heads on those soft hymn-books, and dream of freedom.

At last a "service" that was less than soporific! Professor Fergeson has wakened the indolent in chapel...but not by disserting on how to be good, or even thrifty, but by refuting the existence of God.

To forestall any attempts at censorship by the environment makers, I would like to propose the formation of a student board to pass on the chapel homily topics as to whether they are acceptable or not, coupled with a suggestion box to find what would be of interest to the students of this, our College.

Signed,

The Refractory"³⁹ ⁴⁰

1967

- At a faculty meeting on February 2 Dr. Gerald Hinkle announced further changes to the chapel program. There were no recorded responses from the faculty present at the meeting.⁴¹
- Two weeks after Dr. Hinkle's notice to the faculty, an announcement appears on the front page of the *Weekly*:

“ Thomas Dean, President of the Men's Student Government Association, and Diana Van Dam, President of the Women's Student Government Association, announced jointly that following this spring vacation there will be a new form in the chapel programs.

³⁹ The Refractory (pseud.), letter to the editor, *Ursinus Weekly*, November 10, 1966.

⁴⁰ The Refractory has a lot to say in this letter, but much like other letters received by the *Weekly* they do not call for getting rid of the chapel program. As much issue as they take with the way chapel is run, at the end of their statement these students fall into the trend of their contemporaries by proposing a compromise.

⁴¹ The lack of any strong reaction by the faculty at the meeting surprises me. Based on my review of the other faculty minutes from meetings held around this time period it seems that the teaching staff of the College were a rowdy bunch that had opinions on everything. The absence of any major emotional outburst suggests that the faculty of Ursinus could, for the most part, have cared less about which direction the chapel program was headed in.

The required attendance regulation will be continued on Mondays of each week for freshmen and sophomores and on Tuesdays for Juniors and Seniors.

There will be a voluntary worship service on Wednesdays at the customary chapel hour in a place yet to be selected.

The Councils' presidents stated that the new plan is the result of a period of serious study by several members of the faculty and by both formal and informal groups of students."⁴²

- The same week that the chapel changes are officially introduced to the student body in the *Weekly*, a constructive letter to the editor, signed by Barry Feierman and Charlotte Frost, appears in the periodical. This letter is not nearly as hostile as the one received from "The Refractory" and suggests a reasonable compromise that would get the Ursinus community more involved:

"Dear Editor,

It has been quite some time since anyone has commented on Chapel. Here is a suggestion.

⁴² "Chapel Changes." *Ursinus Weekly*, 15 February 1967, p. 1.

If Chapel is to remain compulsory for students, would it not be more advantageous to hear from a wider variety of speakers? For the College to present any program to the students that utilizes such a small portion of the potential available is a compromise and a waste of education for both faculty and students. Chapel time should be used to present a variety of ideas in many disciplines. Students should have an equal opportunity to participate.

Some of the talks have become rather stagnant. If Chapel is considered worthwhile, and it could be, let the students of Ursinus hear something worthwhile.

Signed,

Barry Feierman

Charlotte Frost^{43 44}

- After the spring vacation, students arrived back on campus to the newly whittled chapel requirements – one day a week for each student – and an article in the *Weekly* that had a lot more commentary

⁴³ Barry Feierman and Charlotte Frost, letter to the editor, *Ursinus Weekly*, February 15, 1967.

⁴⁴ The alphabetical similarity between Charlotte and Barry's last names is not a coincidence. In chapel there was alphabetical assigned seating and many students met each other this way. Ursinus is known for its many alumni couples and there is a distinct pattern in which the women's maiden name will often be similar to her married name because she met her spouse in chapel. Charlotte and Barry are a prime example of this – they are among the ranks of our Ursinus couples.

and insight about the new changes. The article quotes Dr. Hinkle, diffuses rumors about Ursinus' relationship to the German Reformed Church (at this point known as the United Church of Christ), and insists that the new policy does *not* mean that chapel at Ursinus is not on its way to oblivion:

“ ‘For at least a decade there have been groups evaluating chapel at both a student and faculty level,’ explained Dr. Hinkle to a Weekly reporter. “At times the administration has appointed groups to evaluate it. The groups usually divided themselves into one part that felt chapel had a historic and contemporary value and that some form of worship went hand in hand with campus education. The other group felt that a student can be required to sit but not to worship.’

Not only Ursinus but sister United Church of Christ colleges have been contending with the same controversies and compromises have resulted. Ursinus has also made a compromise. A variety of ideas were considered but the result of the administrative compromise was to require the UC students to attend chapel once a week with one day set aside for voluntary worship. The required service

which will be known as assembly one and two will hold a cultural and universal appeal. The voluntary service will be for those who want to reflect religious beliefs and spend fifteen minutes in devotion. No one will be required to be offended.

More Speakers Possible

The new system might also result in a greater number of different speakers since chapel will not be designated as strictly religious or cultural. Rev. Creager makes it an effort to get a broad representation of the faculty but perhaps the ordained minister feels most comfortable in chapel and this speaks more frequently.

The question of why Ursinus has chapel service has been asked. A belief held on the Ursinus campus is that the United Church of Christ grants funds on this stipulation. This is entirely untrue. Ursinus wants to express a church relatedness. This is something all colleges do for themselves. A chapel service is a very good way to do so. The decrease in required chapel services is not an indication that chapel is to be

abolished but that a compromise for quite some time was being called for and an effective one was made."⁴⁵

- Students returning for the Fall 1967 semester found that the name "Chapel" had been dropped in favor of "Assembly."⁴⁶

1968

- At the end of the 1967-68 academic year an editorial appears in the *Weekly* announcing that Assembly will be discontinued the following academic year. The writer, Judy Schneider, is highly critical of the program but recognizes it as having been a good forum for students to address the whole community:

" Next year there will be no more assembly. Chapel, as it was called up until this year, has passed into oblivion. Its fate has been marked, however, for years. Two years ago chapel was bi-weekly; last year, it diminished to once a week; this year, the name chapel was dropped.

⁴⁵ Wagner, Loretta. "Hinkle Calls Chapel Cutdown "Compromise"; Promises Cultural Emphasis in Future." *Ursinus Weekly*, 2 March 1967, p. 4.

⁴⁶ The name change for the program was too late to save it. By this time there had been enough grumbling about chapel from all facets of the community that even making it a secular program based in intellectual conversation would not be enough for the school. Many had suggested compromises for the program over the past couple of years but change had come too slowly. Compulsory chapel was already doomed - changing the name was another step in phasing it out altogether.

Until this year, the service was a quasi-religious, seldom inspiring service. Assembly dropped the religious format, but the degree of inspiration and dullness remained about the same. In general, chapel's passing is not mourned. But one feature of this chapel-assembly program will have no replacement. Notably on at least one occasion this year, a student has had an opinion to express, and the assembly proved to be his excellent airing ground.

The case in point occurred first semester when Janet Houska spoke in favor of changes women's rules. It must be noted that after her excellent plea, no student was permitted to arrange with a professor to speak during his chapel time. Such a restriction again proves the futility of assembly. As a result of this talk, actual changes have been made in women's rules, i.e. smoking is now permitted in the reception rooms, Wilkinson Lounge is now open at specified hours, and next year, girls will be permitted to wear slacks in the reception rooms. For those of us who favor having open men's dorms, this change may not seem so revolutionary. But, we must admit that a change for the better has taken place.

No matter how few of these student-oriented programs were possible under the framework of chapel, this feature is one of the few losses we will feel.

A natural replacement for such expression (it shouldn't be considered only as a replacement!) is of course, the *Weekly*. Our aim is far from presenting only the news. This has never been the only goal we have; student and faculty opinion is always welcomed..."⁴⁷

- In October the *Weekly* formally recognizes Assembly's replacement – the Forum program. Students were to be required to attend two of six Forums throughout the semester. Forum would have more of a cultural emphasis than a religious one.

" In conjunction with a proposal made by the Student Government Association and approved by both the Faculty and the Board of Directors, required Assemblies have been replaced by a Forum Program that will address ethical, moral, and aesthetic topics. All students will be required to attend at least two of the six programs scheduled for the Fall semester.

⁴⁷ Schneider, Judy. "Editorial." *Ursinus Weekly*, 23 May 1968, p. 2.

There will be attendance-takers assigned to each forum, and classes will be cancelled during the meetings of the four daytime forums.

Dr. Creager, chaplain of the college, has said that the new program reflects the administrative feeling that religion on the campus should be oriented toward education. He says that the United Church of Christ is more interested in being associated with a first-rate liberal arts college rather than one where religion is forced. Dr. Creager added that there will be a voluntary religious program in the upper room of the library on Friday afternoons at 12:30pm.⁴⁸

- In December of 1968 three students write an article for the *Weekly* fondly remembering the days of Chapel not for the religion but for the pranks. The writers declare that the decline in practical jokes on campus was because there was no longer a time or place in which the entire Ursinus community could meet together:

"Pranks seem to have declined in recent years.

Why? Perhaps because the students so rarely get

⁴⁸ "First Forum Speaker." *Ursinus Weekly*, 3 October 1968, p. 4.

together as a group any longer, thus reducing the incentive to be imaginative. For it is an undeniable fact that some of the best pranks of the past were performed in that one place where the students were required to meet: chapel.

Many ingenious methods were invented by Ursinus students to keep chapel from being too outrageously dull. One of the best was the "three alarm caper," recounted for the Weekly by Dr. Helferrich. One fine day, a group of students hid three alarm clocks in the chapel, each set to go off about five or six minutes apart. All of a sudden: Bringggggggg! By the time the commotion from the first alarm had settled down, the second alarm would explode. And when the third alarm went off, the service was destroyed for good!

Other great chapel disrupters that are still vivid in the minds of some of our distinguished faculty members, Dr. Donald Baker and Dr. Robert Howard. Incidents such as:

- the time two mangled chickens were discovered in the Bomberger chapel piano by Dr. William Philip.

- the time a headless turtle was hung from the ceiling of Bomberger and caused a great deal of disturbance to chapel-goers.
- the time students loosened all the screws on the chapel seats and the assembly had to be cancelled because religion was unsafe that day.
- the day the dignified picture of Dr. Bomberger was given a new feature – a can of Budweiser imposed over his hand.
- or the day Dr. Carolyn Doan, who had the habit of analyzing a hymn line by line whenever she was the speaker found the hymnals removed from the pews. Embarrassment!!!"⁴⁹

1995

- Dr. John Strassburger becomes the thirteenth President of the College.

2000

- In the Fall 2000 semester the Common Intellectual Experience (CIE) is introduced to Ursinus' Class of 2004, the first graduating class to complete the program. CIE, a faculty initiative that received support

⁴⁹ Griffith, Georgette, Michael Micolic, and Janet Stemmler. "Many of the Greatest Pranks Took Place in Chapel." *Ursinus Weekly*, 19 December 1968, p. 4.

from President Strassburger during its inception, replaced a required liberal studies seminar that first year students were required to take but differs in the fact that it's two semesters long and that each section of the class reads the same texts.

III. Analysis

Ursinus College has established itself as an esteemed institution of higher education over its 141 year history. Although it was founded by members of the German Reformed Church, the College has long prided itself on being unaffiliated from any higher governing body. The independent nature of Ursinus has allowed it to form its own identity over the course of its history and this autonomy has proved to be beneficial to the College as it sustained itself over the decades.

The piece of Ursinus' history that I will be analyzing in this paper is the identity of the institution. Despite the fact that Ursinus has always operated independently, it has very specific religious roots. Through the first one hundred years of the College's existence students were required to attend chapel each morning in accordance with the founders' low-church ideals. During its early years, chapel became a ritual that made Ursinus strong in its identity. After its abolition in the late 1960s Ursinus was left without a means of affirming its identity on a regular basis and needed to establish a new ritual with which to affirm its identity. Through many alterations to the original chapel program, many temporary rituals, and finally a major curricular change Ursinus College found a new type of ritual that would define the community – the Common Intellectual Experience. In this paper I will use sociological theorist Émile Durkheim's ideas about the relationship between ritual and society as a tool to formulate my own theory. Most importantly, I will identify similarities between Ursinus' identifying rituals and Durkheim's theory in order to better understand

the relationship between the College's chapel program, the Common Intellectual Experience, and the 30 year interim between the two.

Émile Durkheim was born in 1858 in a small town of Epinal, located in north eastern France.⁵⁰ Durkheim excelled in high school but it took him two tries to be admitted to the École Normale Supérieure where he studied philosophy and history.⁵¹ Although his formal training was not in sociology, Durkheim was able to utilize both of his areas of instruction for the rest of his life in order to form his own school of thought. Upon leaving the École Normale, Durkheim accepted a chair of social sciences and education that was created specifically for him at the University of Bordeaux which led to the publication of the first books of his career, including *The Rules of Sociological Method* which was extremely controversial.⁵² In *The Rules* Durkheim goes so far as to suggest that "social facts are more important than individual ones,"⁵³ a comment that increased discussion about the importance of the study of sociology amongst scholars. By age 44 Durkheim had achieved such notoriety that he was made a professor at the prestigious University of Paris. While he was in Paris, Durkheim spent ten years extending his knowledge of the function that religion has in the larger social sphere and eventually published *The Elementary Forms of Religious*

⁵⁰ Daniel Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 86.

⁵¹ Pals, *Eight Theories*, 87.

⁵² Pals, *Eight Theories*, 87.

⁵³ Pals, *Eight Theories*, 85.

Life,⁵⁴ one of the most influential books he ever undertook and the work that I will be using in my analysis of Ursinus' religious history.

The nature of Durkheim's analysis in *The Elementary Forms* is very specific. The theorist focuses on what he considers to be the most fundamental pieces of religion and religious practices. Because Durkheim is concerned with the very basics, he makes sure to strip away the extraneous information that distinguishes one religion from another. In order to do this he focuses his theory on what he considers to be one of the most primitive forms of religious life; aborigine Australian tribal rituals.⁵⁵ Using the field research of anthropologists Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, Durkheim set out to further explore and explain certain trends and traditions that had been observed in Australia.⁵⁶ At the end of his study of the Australian aborigine rituals, Durkheim arrives at a point in which he writes his own definition of religion. Émile Durkheim claims that

“a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart are forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Pals, *Eight Theories*, 87.

⁵⁵ Pals, *Eight Theories*, 96.

⁵⁶ Pals, *Eight Theories*, 98.

⁵⁷ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1915), 62.

Notice that Durkheim's definition of religion encompasses not only beliefs, practices, and church but also "*all those who adhere to them.*" One of Durkheim's most important focuses in his work is on community and community living. According to Durkheim, community life requires some sort of sacredness. This sacredness that is kept separate from the rest of the day to day life reinforces a sense of relatedness that is found amongst the community itself. This feeling of having something in common with the rest of the community is just as important to a religious tradition as worshipping the sacred thing.

The importance of community is not something that is new to Durkheim's theories – in fact, it is central to his entire school of thought. In 1895 Durkheim claims in *The Rules of Sociological Method* that there is no such thing as an individual. As Daniel Pals explains it, "A society...is an accumulated body of facts – of language, laws, customs, ideas, values, traditions, techniques, and products – all of which are connected to one another and exist in a manner quite 'external' to individual human minds."⁵⁸ Since these facts exist outside of the human mind they are here before an individual is born. When the individual is born then he or she is born directly into these facts and is raised in such a way that the individual is "molded" by them. When an individual dies the pieces of society do not – they live on in the society, carried on by those who are still living. All social institutions exist in order to ingrain social facts and the importance of the community. For instance, Durkheim had a strong belief that "the purpose of schools is not just to give technical training in certain skills but also to pass along

⁵⁸ Pals, *Eight Theories*, 92.

the values of self-discipline and community welfare and to promote them over the selfish personal interests of individuals."⁵⁹ A community's survival relies heavily on educating young children about their place in that community. Take a look at elementary school curriculums; what child does not learn about the firemen and policemen that are there to protect him and the grocer that is there to feed him?

In his study of the aborigine tribes in Australia, Durkheim refers to the larger social communities as "clans." He explains that

"...the individuals who compose it [the clan] consider themselves united by a bond of kinship, but one which is of a very special nature. This relationship does not come from the fact that they have definite blood connections with one another; they are relatives from the mere fact that they have the same name. They are not fathers and mothers, sons or daughters, uncles and nephews of one another in the sense which we now give these words; yet they think of themselves as forming a single family, we do so because they recognize duties towards each other..."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Pals, *Eight Theories*, 94.

⁶⁰ Durkheim, *Religious Life*, 122.

Social groups (not naturally blood related groups) create, reinforce, and are reinforced by a sense relatedness. This sense of relatedness and commitment to the clan is what helps sustain the group over time and keeps members from seeking other clans and making commitments to them.

Ursinus College is similar to the aborigine clans that Durkheim refers to but it does not function the same way that a traditional clan does. In Durkheim's analysis clans are all encompassing societies that are isolated from other clans.⁶¹ An individual who is born into a certain clan does not ever leave the clan as long as the group functions in a healthy and self-sustaining manner. At a college like Ursinus there are many people who hail from a wide variety of countries, states, towns, neighborhoods, et cetera. By the time they arrive on campus to begin their tenure in the Ursinus community, members have already established themselves in a number of other social groups that can also be classified as pseudo-clans. Despite all of this, people at Ursinus come for something that they are not looking for elsewhere, especially not at other colleges. Perhaps the person is seeking an undergraduate degree or a career. Maybe they are trying to get "the college experience." It doesn't matter what brought them to Ursinus, what matters is that they are dedicated to the community as they pursue whatever it is that brought them in in the first place.

Because people dedicate themselves to this single community as they pursue whatever it is that they are looking for I will designate Ursinus as a clan even though it does not officially fit Durkheim's original definition. Students,

⁶¹ Durkheim, *Religious Life*, 128.

faculty, staff, alumni, and others who are affiliated with the school are all related through the school. They walk the same paths, use the same buildings, and will often times identify themselves to people unaffiliated with Ursinus through the commonality of Ursinus. There is a sense of affinity that goes beyond having a common alma mater, although those ties are still important. In order for Ursinus to function as a clan (in a traditional Durkheimian sense or otherwise), there needs to be some sort of tool that will seal the loyalty of its members. The mechanism that sustains these ties that Ursinus community members have with one another is a common communal practice. The ritual that originally played a role in the formation of the Ursinus clan is the compulsory chapel program that took place from the College's first year of instruction in 1870 through the end of the 1960s.

Before we examine the ritual of chapel itself we must analyze the conditions under which the Ursinus clan was established. In 1849 the German Reformed church held the Eastern Synod in Norristown, Pennsylvania. Dr. John Henry Augustus Bomberger, who, at a previously held Synod, had been appointed chair of a committee to evaluate the progress of the Church, made a report to the Synod that suggests that the Church create a new order of worship. The Synod agreed that it was time to evaluate a new order and assigned Dr. John Williamson Nevins, the current President of Marshall College (later Franklin and Marshall College) as the chair of the committee that would create the new order. Bomberger, a member of Nevins' committee, petitioned for a "pulpit" liturgy that was less reliant on ritual (low-church) than the "altar" liturgy that Nevins' group

was in favor of (high-church).⁶² Both men presented their sides separately. Over the fifteen years that followed the formation of the initial committee there was an extreme split between the supporters of each side.

In 1867 the Myerstown Convention was called in support of Bomberger and his low-church ideas. One of the major focuses of the group was to establish a college that would follow and teach the pulpit liturgy that Bomberger had developed. By 1868 Bomberger's project had gained support from many, including Dr. George W. Williard, the President of Heidelberg College. This vote of confidence from Dr. Williard was important because Heidelberg was one of the most well-regarded and established colleges that was affiliated with the German Reformed Church. Dr. Williard's support for Ursinus meant that Bomberger was on the right track. In 1869 Ursinus College was officially chartered in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and on September 6, 1870, instruction at Ursinus began. In Dr. Bomberger's inaugural speech he spoke of his belief that "the teacher was to build character as well as mind" and of his disapproval of the educational program that Harvard had recently developed.⁶³ This attitude towards higher education has been apparent on campus ever since.

Although Ursinus had been chartered and was steadily enrolling new students, the College still faced the same adversity that Bomberger had when he had initially spoken out against Nevins and the altar liturgy. Through the first thirty years of its existence (and especially the first ten years of instruction),

⁶² Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College: A History of Its First 100 Years* (Collegeville, PA: Ursinus College, 1985), 2.

⁶³ Calvin Yost, *Ursinus College*, 13.

Ursinus struggled to survive as it was challenged by both members of the German Reformed Church and its unstable finances.⁶⁴ To say the least, Ursinus College's future was extremely unsure.

Bearing in mind the troubled infancy of Ursinus, let us return to Émile Durkheim as he further develops his theory. Once Durkheim sufficiently explains what a clan is he moves forward and deconstructs what it is that sets one clan apart from another. According to Durkheim, "the species of things which serves to designate the clan collectively is called the *totem*. The totem of the clan is also that of each of its members."⁶⁵ The totem that Durkheim refers to is the symbol that represents the clan:

"From the analysis to which we have been giving our attention, it is evident that it expresses and symbolizes two different sorts of things. In the first place, it is the outward and visible form of what we have called the totemic principle or god. But it is also the symbol of the determined society called the clan. It is its flag; it is the sign by which each clan distinguishes itself from others, the visible mark of its personality, a mark borne by everything which is

⁶⁴ For more information regarding Ursinus' pre-founding, founding, and early years, refer to the timeline in the previous section.

⁶⁵ Durkheim, *Religious Life*, 123.

a part of the clan under any title whatsoever, men, beasts, or things.”⁶⁶

Durkheim’s theory only accounts for the most basic and primitive religions and rituals, so he does not allow room for a more complex society that has as many facets as a clan like Ursinus College. Instead of true totems, I propose that Ursinus has what we will call quasi-totemic symbols that are representative of the clan but do not absolutely stand for the entire community. These quasi-totemic symbols encompass several things, including the campus itself (but not necessarily specific buildings). Ursinus has always been located on the same campus. This constant and unchanging fact qualifies the land that Ursinus is on and, arguably, the Borough of Collegeville, as quasi-totemic symbols that represent the community.

Additional symbols are the colors of the school (red, old gold, and black), and Zachariah Baer, the well-regarded German theologian who wrote the Heidelberg Catechism and who the College was named for. Coincidentally (or perhaps not), the colors of Ursinus also happen to be those of the coat of arms associated with the Catechism. These two quasi-totemic symbols are actually the closest to being true totems. Durkheim writes about how sometimes ancestors or something related to the ancestors of a clan “serves as a totem directly. In this case, the clan takes its name” from the ancestor or a representation of the

⁶⁶ Durkheim, *Religious Life*, 236.

ancestor.⁶⁷ In this case, Baer (who Latinized his name to Zacharias Ursinus, as was the trend amongst his contemporaries) is the ancestor of the Ursinus clan and the colors of the Heidelberg Catechism's coat of arms are representative of him. As close as these symbols are to the totems of the aborigines, the fact remains that Ursinus is too complex of a society to only have one true totem. For the purpose of moving this analysis forward we must content ourselves with the concept of multiple quasi-totemic symbols.

We understand that the totem (or quasi-totemic symbol) is the physical representation of the clan, but what is its function? The totem is worshipped by the clan and is set apart from the normal, profane pieces of everyday life. The totem and the rituals that surround the totem are considered sacred and therefore kept separate because of its sacredness. This sounds like a very logical function, but Durkheim points out that there's more to the totem than what is immediately apparent:

"So if it [the totem] is at once the symbol of the god and of the society, is that not because the god and the society are only one? How could the emblem of the group have been able to become the figure of this quasi-divinity, the group were two separate realities? The god of the clan, the totemic principle, can therefore be nothing else than the clan itself,

⁶⁷ Durkheim, *Religious Life*, 125.

personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as the totem."⁶⁸

In much plainer terms, if the totem represents the clan and the clan is worshipping the totem then the clan is really worshipping itself. But why does the clan worship itself? The clan worships itself as an affirmation of its own importance to the individual and to secure the loyalties of those who identify as part of the clan. This self-worship is the communal practice that works as that mechanism that will keep the clan together and prevent individuals from straying. This is especially important for a socially constructed group like Ursinus. In a setting like Ursinus there is not an absolute link between the individual and the clan. Community members were presented with options before they ultimately chose Ursinus. Owing to this fact, the College cannot function in the same manner as an all-encompassing traditional clan like those of the Australian aborigines. There needs to be some ritual apparatus that will strengthen an individual's ties to the clan from the outset, otherwise there is a risk of disaffiliation.

Let us now return to JHA Bomberger and Ursinus College to see how this fits together. As we established before, the controversy surrounding the founding of Ursinus was on a spiritual and religious level. Bomberger and his followers were by far the minority – the majority of those who chose sides went

⁶⁸ Durkheim, *Religious Life*, 236.

with Nevins' already established altar liturgy and went to be educated by his faculty at Franklin and Marshall College. Once the minority that had followed Bomberger had established its own group and its own institution of higher learning it needed some form of that communal practice to work as the means of keeping everyone together and preventing people from returning to Nevins and his high-church ideals. Because the disagreement between Bomberger and Nevins was about ritual and the mode of worship, the obvious communal practice to cement the low-church supporters together in their new clan would be the very thing that defined the group in the first place; pulpit liturgy.

Once Ursinus College was chartered and began instruction there needed to be a prescribed place for low-church practices amongst the already hectic schedules of the students and faculty. Carving out time for the clan's affirmations and reaffirmations to its mission took the form of the chapel program. Requiring that all students, faculty, and staff participate in chapel was a way of bringing to individuals together to create a sacred space. The required and regularly scheduled sacred ritual of chapel worked to develop individual relationships with the quasi-totemic symbols that represent the clan. By extension, individual devotion to those quasi-totemic symbols is the same as individual devotion to the clan. The Ursinus community coming together to participate in the chapel program is just the same as the Ursinus community reaffirming that it is a strong group that will survive indefinitely, even after the clan members leave the community or die.

Ursinus' chapel program was very simple and reflected Bomberger's low-church ways. There was little ritual involved⁶⁹ and the pattern of worship did not change over the 100 years of its existence. President Bomberger himself wrote about the chapel customs in an account of day to day procedures of the College in 1872:

"At 8:45 AM, the large bell again rings, summoning Professors and students to the large recitation room (not yet used exclusively as a chapel) for morning-prayer and roll-call. After calling the roll, a chapter is read from the Bible, a hymn is sung, and prayer offered. These devotions are conducted in strict accordance with the simple usage of the Reformed Church. Any requisite statements or announcements are then made by the Faculty."⁷⁰

Bomberger's acknowledgement that services were held "in strict accordance with...the Reformed Church" is extremely important, especially considering the environment in which the College was founded. Through strict adherence to the

⁶⁹ I realize that my use of the word "ritual" can be problematic here. When I talk about community rituals I am using it as a very broad term that includes any sort of sacred time, space, or worship. The rituals that Bomberger did not approve of were those that took place within individual services, such as taking communion. More information can be found in Bomberger's "Reformed, not Ritualistic" which he wrote in 1867 as a response to Nevins' "Vindication of the Revised Liturgy."

⁷⁰ Yost, *Ursinus College*, 18.

Church's rituals the members of the community felt that they were proving themselves to the naysayers. The College might have succeeded in this capacity, but the most important function of the program was the reassurance that was provided to the community members while Ursinus was still struggling to find its place. In the following years, chapel's purpose shifted so that it served almost exclusively as a way for community members to reaffirm their commitment to the clan.

As we prepare to examine what comes next in this equation, I would again like to point out that Émile Durkheim uses what he considers to be the most basic and primitive tribal cultures in his theory. Durkheim's chief interest is the continuity and consistency of religious practices and rituals. He does not account for change in a more sophisticated society. Since Ursinus is a complex clan, at this time I will deviate further from Durkheim's original theory. I will use what I know about Ursinus' history to elaborate on his ideas and create my own theory about how a clan like Ursinus responds to change.

Ursinus College, like many socially constructed and constantly changing communities, has a tendency to mirror external social changes. The College quietly absorbed these alterations to its initial character for decades without needing to face the possibility of modifying its identity, but this peacefulness began to come to a close in the 1960s. Amidst all of the cultural shifts that were beginning to permeate the decade, there were two major trends that had significant bearing on how the College operated.

The first major shift that the College felt began after World War II. With the G.I. Bill of Rights, enrollment at Ursinus skyrocketed. New faculty had to be hired and classroom equipment secured, but that was only the beginning. With the enrollment of so many older students in the program the dynamic of the entire campus was beginning to shift. Calvin D. Yost, a graduate of the Class of 1931 and a faculty member of the College, recalls that "the veterans had matured in the hard school of a war-torn world and had come to think and question with a maturity not often found in a youngster of eighteen fresh from high school basketball championships and junior proms."⁷¹ The constant questioning combined with having seen firsthand the effects of war yielded a different brand of student at Ursinus. These students were very serious about their academics and often regarded extra-curricular activities and responsibilities to be nothing more than "kid stuff."⁷² The rumblings of change were quiet, but they were there and they were poised to erupt. After the hostilities in Vietnam broke out it became clear that the nation's youth, including Ursinus students, were beginning to reject the social norms.

Once the Vietnam war was under way, Ursinus began to feel another shift. The campus was still enrolling veterans, but those coming home from overseas combat were being met with a different kind of college campus. Counterculture was on the rise and although Ursinus was still somewhat conservative, the mostly white, middle class student body matched the main demographic of their

⁷¹ Yost, *Ursinus College*, 162.

⁷² Yost, *Ursinus College*, 162.

peers across the nation who were protesting the social molds that they felt they had been thrust into. Things were relatively quiet in Collegetown, but students were finding their voices in the *Ursinus Weekly* and it was becoming clear that for them, traditional religious rituals were out and what might be termed "spiritual freedom" was in.

At this time there were still people on campus who took little issue with the nearly 100 year old chapel program, but those who wanted to alter the tradition (or even opposed it altogether) seized the public forum and the attention of the Board of Directors. The Board, along with the Men's and Women's Student Government Associations, were forced to re-evaluate the compulsory chapel program. If one thing was clear it was that not all students felt that they should be required to attend a religious service. Many felt that the ritual had become outdated and religiously exclusive. Carl Peek, a regular contributor to the *Ursinus Weekly*, used his column in the student newspaper to stimulate one of the earliest discussions about the program:

"Can a college still have compulsory chapel and still be called a Christian college?...The point of the whole situation is, can a Christian, by definition, force another man to attend what is basically a church service contrary to another man's belief. The answer, in my mind at least, is very clear. Chapel should not

be compulsory...if it should be at all, it should be on a purely voluntary basis."⁷³

Peek's concern was not with the existence of the actual program but rather with the exclusivity of the course of worship that had not been modified to reflect the broadening demographic that the College was beginning to attract.

Over the course of the 1960s there were several changes made to the chapel program in an attempt to appease the community, but these changes weren't so much to the program itself as they were to the schedule. Those in charge of executing the overhaul were not changing the format of the program but rather the requirements. Beginning in 1964, students were only required to attend chapel two days a week, the designated days depending on the students' class standing. In 1967 those requirements were cut again, this time to one day a week for each student, and the program was called "Assembly" in an attempt to make the connotations less religious and more overtly communal. There was still an optional chapel program available to those who were interested, but even the optional program was only offered one day a week. Finally, at the end of the 1967-68 school year, it was announced that there would be no more chapel; instead there would be a Forum program. Students were required to attend two Forums a semester and the program was designed to be culturally relevant. Speakers and performers were brought in from all over the country and Forum

⁷³ Carl Peek, "Peek Around Campus: Chapel." *Ursinus Weekly*, 21 October 1963, p. 2.

eventually took on an identity of its own, thus leaving the defunct chapel program behind.

The changes to the chapel program over the 1960s were clearly unsuccessful. The College had tried to adjust its mode of self-worship in order to conform to the external social structures that were beginning to take hold on campus in an attempt to heed a cardinal rule of social survival:

“both religion and morals are inseparable from a social framework. We cannot have either without a social context, and as that changes, so must they.”⁷⁴

Unfortunately for Ursinus' chapel proponents, the 1960s did not just hold change but a complete social breakdown. When larger social constructs begin to break down, so do the smaller societies that fall under the umbrella of those constructs. Certain rituals of smaller clans, like Ursinus, are undermined by the altered values that pervade larger society. As a result, changes must be made to try to reflect the new values of the society. If the rituals cannot catch up then they become obsolete.

As Ursinus students, faculty, and staff began to demand something less archaic than a 100 year old pulpit liturgy, the College responded by making the schedule changes to settle the masses as they desperately tried to refocus the program. Meanwhile, on a national level, Americans were beginning to lose faith

⁷⁴ Pals, *Eight Theories*, 91.

in communal rituals and this attitude began to show up in Collegeville. The rebellion against chapel at Ursinus had nothing to do with unfaithfulness to the institution of the quasi-totemic symbols that represented it, but the program was rapidly losing its social power.

With the cross-over between Ursinus' students and the major trends of American youth, things are becoming muddled so I would like to take a moment to re-focus and summarize the situation for the sake of our developing theory. When traditional, organized religion was rapidly decreasing in popularity in the 1960s, Ursinus' clan followed suit and tried to match the trend. For a school like Ursinus, one which has religious roots but is still fully independent in character, this meant isolating rituals that reflected those religious roots. The College had no obligation to the United Church of Christ (formerly Bomberger's German Reformed Church) so the Board had the freedom to act as they deemed fit. The ritual that was targeted was chapel. Because the larger social order was changing, it makes sense that the clan wanted to take this ritual that reflected religiousness and modify it to try to make it fit better. What cannot be understated here is that *Ursinus had always been an independent institution*. As a result of this independent nature, there was a very limited religious scene and the rituals affiliated with it were not strong enough to endure change. On the one hand Ursinus' clan was not deliberately trying to trump the representative quasi-totemic symbols, but on the other the community was not falling apart at the seams when the ritual was diminished. So what happens to a clans identity when it gets rid of sacred rituals of self worship that cease to be relevant?

Based on our earlier analysis of Durkheim it is tempting to say that Ursinus is a fluke. If we are to closely follow and abide by Durkheim's theory then it stands to reason that when rituals like chapel lose their social power and their ability to hold people together then the results are disastrous. It would be easy to return to the more primitive examples that Durkheim gives and conclude that if an individual cannot connect with a specific ritual that ties them to the totemic symbol then they have no way of connecting to the clan. Before we allow ourselves to be swept away by Durkheim's theory, we must again recall that the College had no true totem in the first place and that Ursinus is a much more complicated and sophisticated society than the aborigine tribes that Durkheim wrote about.

Let us now return to my last question about what happens to the Ursinus clan's identity after abolishing the primary mode of self worship. Ursinus, as an ever changing body, has some advantages over Durkheim's traditional clan. Through all of the hardships that the College faced in its early years, the people affiliated with it had to learn how to adapt. This ability to adjust quickly, combined with the fact that there was never a true totem to worship, meant that the College didn't one hundred per cent rely on the worship of a quasi-totemic symbol after the institution's true identity had been established. I suggest that the College became secure in its identity as a legitimate institution of higher education not when it was chartered, but when JHA Bomberger passed away and,

after a short interim, Reverend Henry T. Spangler became President in 1893.⁷⁵ The first transfer of the presidency was one of the most trying times for the College, and once the clan had made it through that period those affiliated with it felt empowered to forge ahead. This secure identity and ability to adapt quickly proved to be advantageous for the school and shows up fairly consistently through the College's 141 year history.

* * *

Eventually the void left by chapel would have to be filled in order for Ursinus to survive future challenges, but in the meantime there were temporary groups and communities that replaced it. The steadily rising popularity of varsity sports and the increased interest in Greek organizations helped hold the community together. Additionally, President Donald L. Helfferich's Ursinus Plan provided a sense of camaraderie amongst the students.

The Ursinus Plan featured the predecessors to today's core general education requirements. There were "pivotal" and "radial" courses that students were required to take. Pivotal courses included at least one course in Humanities, Social Science, and Science and Mathematics and two courses in the Language division. To satisfy radial course requirements a student was required to take at least twelve credits outside of his or her chosen major. The Ursinus Plan was one of the first major curricular changes at Ursinus and signaled that the College was committed to making sure that each student received a well-rounded education.

⁷⁵ Yost, *Ursinus College*, 63.

However, the plan also worked as one of the strongest bonds between students of that time period.

What we can conclude from this is that although a sacred ritual of worship can help develop feelings of community, it is not vital to the short term survival of a clan. The Ursinus Plan, athletics and other extra-curricular activities were able to provide a secondary focus for the bulk of the time, and at the beginning and end of each academic year there was convocation and commencement to cement affinities to the clan.

When a sophisticated, socially constructed clan such as Ursinus loses its rituals then it does not necessarily face the possibility of complete self-destruction. On the contrary, a clan like Ursinus' is able to adapt and survive without any sort of reliance on a large scale communal ritual because there are plenty of other practices that are able to step in temporarily while new communal rituals are being developed.

As effective as the temporary filler rituals are, they are still just that: temporary. I confess that I have not been able to study at length the time period that spans the thirty years between the abolition of chapel and the beginning of the twenty-first century, but I have been able to glean a few pieces of information from my personal experience at Ursinus that may be able to shed some light on what happened at Ursinus when the filler rituals began to weaken.

This past year I had the privilege of working in Ursinus' Alumni Relations and Annual Giving Office. One of the projects that I assisted with was working on the Class Chair program as we began to coordinate reunions. As I leafed through

the file of Class Chair volunteers for each reunion I noticed a trend that began to develop in the 1980s and continued through the early 1990s. There was a noticeable decrease in volunteers for the classes of 1980, 1985, and 1990 from previous class years. Curiously enough, our volunteer numbers recovered tremendously for the Class of 1995 and the years following. What happened in between 1980 and 1995 that was so off putting to alumni that so few of them were willing to volunteer as Class Chairs?

By 1980 the chapel program had been gone for ten years and the Forum program had forged a new, separate identity for itself. Athletics, Greek life, and other extra-curricular activities were doing well but a sense of apathy had begun to fill the atmosphere at Ursinus. President Richard P. Richter had begun to make changes to the College but had not implemented the complete overhaul that was needed in order to restore the sense of school pride and affinity that Ursinus students had once enjoyed. In 1995 (the class year that marks our upswing in Class Chair volunteers), President John Strassburger stepped into office and, over the course of his tenure, was able to re-focus the clan. Summer classes, often taken remedially, were dropped in favor of Summer Fellows, a program begun in 1998 that was meant to reward outstanding students and give them an opportunity to excel at Ursinus.

Two years after the implementation of Summer Fellows, the 2000-2001 academic year opened with a curriculum change that had been spearheaded exclusively by faculty of the College. The required first year liberal studies seminar was replaced by a new mechanism that would serve to tie the academic

community together; the Common Intellectual Experience. CIE, as it is called at Ursinus, is similar to its predecessor in a few ways, the main one being that it is also required by all first year students. The major difference between CIE and the previously required liberal studies seminar is that for their seminars students were permitted to pick which topic or concentration they wanted to study. In CIE all of the students read the exact same texts over the course of two semesters. A crucial part of CIE's success is that each year the syllabus is reviewed by the faculty of the College and modified to reflect the changing interests of not only the Ursinus community but the rest of the world. This prevents community interest and commitment from waning the way it did with the rigid chapel program in the 1960s.

Regardless of the alterations that are made to the program annually, the academic community that this course yields is remarkable. When I took Math for the Liberal Arts in my sophomore year I had very little in common with some of the other students in the class, but as soon as the professor mentioned Renaissance art we were all on the same page because we had all studied the same paintings in our various CIE sections.

The sense of academic community that is created by the Common Intellectual Experience is important, but CIE has had a much more extensive affect on the community. Over the ten years of CIE's existence it has become the hallmark of Ursinus. In a March 2010 essay that was published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, President Strassburger details the CIE program and observes that "the the 10 years that the program has existed, Ursinus'

enrollment has increased 40 percent, SAT scores have soared, and applications have increased four-fold.”⁷⁶ Ursinus’ grand entrance into the national spotlight has made it clear that CIE is now just as representative of the College as some of the older quasi-totemic symbols. The intense commitment to and required participation in the Common Intellectual Experience has made the program into a new form of communal self-worship for the College. In this capacity, CIE is just as much a part of Ursinus’ identity in 2010 as the chapel program was from 1870 through the late 1960s.

To reiterate, although a program like CIE appears to be unrelated to compulsory chapel, its function is essentially the same. The Ursinus clan, being socially constructed, is brought together through this mechanism of communal experience which is very similar to the worship of quasi-totemic symbols that took place throughout the College’s first 100 years. As Ursinus continues to carve out a niche for itself in higher education, one of the quasi-totemic symbols becomes the concept of the liberal arts itself. Under President Strassburger’s leadership the Ursinus clan, which had been supporting itself with temporary filler rituals, was again recreated through this new form of communal self-worship.

In retrospect, the liberal arts have always been one of Ursinus’ quasi-totemic symbols even though it was not always apparent. From President Bomberger to President Helfferich to President Strassburger the liberal arts

⁷⁶ Strassburger, John. “For the Liberal Arts, Rhetoric Is Not Enough.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 Mar. 2010, Volume LVI, Number 25.

have played a central role in the development of Ursinus and its academic program. The founding of the College was a trying time and the community needed to worship a quasi-totemic symbol through a ritual that was palpably related to Ursinus and the ideals upon which it was founded in order to reassure community members that the College was a legitimate institution of higher learning. Chapel fulfilled this role of communal worship but it severely overshadowed the true academic goals of the College which were lost until the faculty, under President Strassburger's leadership, took the initiative to unearth those goals and refocus the curriculum. At this point in time there is no reason to believe that the Common Intellectual Experience will not sustain Ursinus College and its identity indefinitely.

IV. Appendix



The Ursinus Weekly

Published a minimum of twenty-two times each academic year
by the students of Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania
Sixty-second year of publication

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