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The Spirit of Teaching

MARK R. SCHWEHN

I

Thirty-five years ago the distinguished American colonial historian, Bernard Bailyn, published a small essay that deeply influenced the manner in which an entire generation of social and intellectual historians came to think about education. Entitled "Education in the Forming of American Society," the essay argued for a view of education that now seems to be very much a commonplace, namely that education should not be reduced to "schooling" but that it should instead be regarded as "the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations." Having argued with characteristic subtlety for this latter view, Bailyn proceeded to show how schools in the English colonies arose in response to the reconfiguration of other institutions—indentured servitude, apprenticeship, the family, and the church—that had for a long time been the primary agents of cultural transmission.

It is very unlikely that we would have needed Bailyn to tell us of this today. The personal experiences of any college teacher will quickly demonstrate the extent to which his or her work is in part defined by the operation of institutions of cultural transmission other than the college or university. We all notice that more and more of our students show the effects of abuse, neglect, and divorce. We all worry over the quality of secondary and elementary schools. Few of us have not complained at one time or another about the decline of theological literacy among our students and the rise of a certain kind of visual sophistication. And do we not find ourselves asked repeatedly to "minister to the whole student" or to "educate the whole person" when this often means increasing expenditures for support services like psychological counselling and drug abuse centers? All of these experiences lead us to sense in the fabric of our daily lives the extent to which the allocation of our resources, the shape of our curriculum, our choice of study materials, our level of expectation, our vocabulary, and even our pedagogical style are shaped by a multitude of social institutions outside of the academy.

But although we might agree, on the basis of experience if nothing else, that education should not be and cannot be reduced to schooling, we would probably nevertheless think, at least in our unguarded moments, that teaching refers to something like "classroom activity." In other words, though we are disposed to a more broadly cultural understanding of education, we are also disposed toward a more narrowly professional understanding of teaching. And indeed this latter dis

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UNLESS WE REMIND OURSELVES THAT TEACHING IS A VOCATION THAT EXTENDS FAR BEYOND OUR DISCIPLINARY GUILDS AND OUR SELF-CONTAINED CLASSROOMS, WE RISK MISUNDERSTANDING BOTH ITS NATURE AND ITS PURPOSES.

position was precisely what led to the historiographical situation that Bernard Bailyn sought to improve in his pathbreaking book. The history of education had, according to Bailyn, fallen into the hands of professional teachers of education sometime around the turn of the twentieth century. And once that happened, the whole purpose of histories of education became, in Bailyn's words, "to dignify a new self-conscious profession by arguing that modern education was a cosmic force leading mankind to a full realization of itself." This self-serving agenda in turn led these historians of education to "direct their attention almost exclusively to the part of the educational process carried on in formal institutions of instruction." By so limiting their subject, they "lost the capacity to see it in its full context and hence to assess the variety and magnitude of the burdens it had borne and to judge its historical importance."

I think we might today be in danger of losing our capacity to see the full context of teaching and to judge its historical importance. I therefore want to argue that, unless we remind ourselves that teaching is a vocation that extends far beyond our disciplinary guilds and our self-contained classrooms, we risk misunderstanding both its nature and its purposes. If we think of teaching simply as classroom activity or even more broadly but still restrictively as a collegial activity, we will be inclined to make one of two fundamental errors. We will either reduce it to a set of methods and techniques, turning it into a *techne,* or we will mystify it by turning it into an occult practice that defies rational appraisal or description. In what follows, I want to suggest first that good thinking about good teaching begins with the recognition that teaching is a basic human practice whose excellence depends upon the exercise of certain intellectual, moral, and spiritual virtues. Second, I will argue that though teaching is closer to an art than it is to a *techne,* and though it certainly involves mysterious transactions, it is nevertheless a public activity that is improvable through practice and criticism. Finally, I want to propose some of the most important ways that all teachers can practice the art of teaching well.

II

At some level we all recognize that teaching is a basic human art more than it is a professional practice like medicine or law. I recently asked a group of adults two questions: "Who were the three most important teachers in your life?" and "What, if anything, did these

three people have in common?" Few people included more than one professionally trained teacher in their list of three; they listed instead parents, spouses, friends, neighbors, pastors, siblings, and other relatives. So much for professionalism. But more important, almost no one in answer to the second question about what the three teachers had in common listed techniques or teaching styles.

On the contrary. The three teachers selected were invariably very different from one another in terms of what they taught and how they taught it and even in terms of how well they knew or appeared to know what they taught. But they invariably had in common certain attitudes toward their craft or subject and toward their pupils as well. They moreover had certain qualities of character in common—integrity, truthfulness, compassion, dedication, empathy, attentiveness, and love were frequently mentioned. In brief, people know good teaching when they see it, and when they try to describe it they rarely if ever do so in terms of some favored technique, even though a great deal of literature about teaching until quite recently emphasized technique over almost everything else.

These observations suggest that contemporary common sense accords with the most ancient wisdom about the vocation of teaching. Even today, and against some of the most powerful impulses of modernity, people quite spontaneously connect the vocation of teaching more firmly to the arts of moral and spiritual formation than to the rigors of academic specialization. Or, to put it a bit differently, today's students, young and old alike, have not lost sight of an important truth that many academicians have forgotten; namely, that teaching is finally a religious calling that involves the cultivation of certain moral and spiritual virtues that are indispensable to learning of any kind anywhere.

For most of Western history, from the Platonic academy through the great medieval universities and up to the period of the Enlightenment, teaching and learning took place under religious (predominantly, but by no means exclusively Christian) auspices. Truths that we have forgotten today were for most of our history taken for granted. Teaching and learning were thought to be communal endeavors, not private pursuits. Moral, spiritual, and intellectual excellence were of a piece, not three separate and distinct varieties of virtue.

Today, throughout the academy as well as the broader culture, we take a different set of "truths" for granted, and we order our academic life around them. Most colleges and universities keep the student affairs office and the academic affairs office sharply separated from each other. This almost universal organizational arrangement within academia manifests a firm determination to keep the life of the mind segregated from the rest of student life. This practice is in turn consistent with the widespread view that excellent qualities of mind and noble qualities of character are not only separable but, to some degree, inversely correlated. So, for example, at several universities where I have taught, it was a commonplace to remark that though Professor X or graduate students Y and Z were brilliant and hence admirable, one would not wish to entrust one's children to their care for more than five minutes.

Though this kind of remark sounds familiar enough to us in twentieth-century America, it would have seemed strange, even barbaric, to fifth-century Greeks. Aristotle would have referred to Professor X and graduate students Y and Z as being "merely clever." They would have been thought to lack practical wisdom, and they would have therefore been seen as *both* ignoble *and* intellectually deficient. Many educators think that within the curriculum "values" or "ethics" constitute special subject matters and that we therefore need to establish distinct courses or programs or departments for these concerns. But here again, untutored, popular intuitions are more discerning: the cultivation of moral and spiritual virtues is necessarily every educator's business.

In sum, college teaching today has been twice removed from the central purposes of higher learning. It has first been demoted to a position distinctively subordinate to the task of "making knowledge" or "doing research." And it has then been construed narrowly as synonymous with classroom instruction that deliberately eschews ethical training. When college professors complain that they do not have enough time to "do their own work," they mean that they do not have enough time to compose or to write or to experiment or to do research. They are too busy doing what? Teaching! But this manner of speaking relegates teaching to something outside of the purview of "our work." It also reveals habits of action and patterns of expectation that are understood to define for all time the meaning of academic excellence but that are in fact only a century old. Before we can think practically about good teaching, we must first restore teaching to its place as the one activity in terms of which all of the other academic activities—advising, publishing, consulting, researching—are understood, interpreted, and appraised.

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This act of restoration is a fundamentally religious task. And for Christians, this undertaking includes the recovery of a tradition of education that, in the words of Jean Leclercq, understood the love of learning as the desire for God. The modern research university, which trains the vast majority of all college and university teachers, developed under largely secular auspices. As a result, the end of education became mastery of some domain of the world. And making knowledge became the defining feature of the academic calling. Max Weber put the whole matter succinctly when he suggested, in his celebrated address "Academics as a Vocation," that the fate of our souls depends upon whether or not we make correct conjectures in our research. In addition, he quite explicitly banished ultimate questions from the purview of higher learning, insisted that virtues like friendship and charity had no place in the proper conduct of academic life, and argued that academic rationality was purely instrumental, concerned exclusively with the relationship between means and hypothetical ends. Academics, on this secular account of teaching and learning, had no business concerning themselves with character formation or even with the transmission of knowledge and skills. Instead, their proper calling was purely and simply the advancement of knowledge within a specialized field of leaning. And this task, in order to be conducted properly, had to be divorced from both the ethical and the spiritual dimensions of life. These latter concerns were properly pursued, if at all, within the confines of churches and the private pleasures of family life.

In our present situation, a Christian view of teaching and learning must develop in opposition to these secular strictures. Some of the heirs of Max Weber and of Weber's teacher Friedrich Nietzsche have attributed quasi-divine powers to teachers, have suggested that we not only "make knowledge" but that we, individually or collectively, fashion our own worlds at will. Christians do not believe that they make the world. Nor can they ever hope technically to master it. Education therefore becomes the communal pursuit of the truth of matters, not the manipulation of the cosmos.

Teaching and learning are finally acts of piety, arising from religious affections like awe, wonder, and gratitude in the presence of the gifted given-ness of creation. The task of teachers, regardless of their academic discipline, will be to enable students to achieve a kind of human excellence that integrates the moral, the spiritual, and the intellectual instead of separating the practice of these virtues into distinct and sometimes antithetical domains. This vision of Christian pedagogy is best summed up in the words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux: "Some seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity; others seek knowledge that they may themselves be known: that is vanity; but there are still others who seek knowledge in order to serve and edify others, and that is charity."

III

Only on the basis of a religious account of teaching can its true character be fully grasped and properly articulated. That articulation will, to some degree at least, both confirm and justify the popular sense of good teaching as involving the practice of certain moral and spiritual virtues. But the religious account should state these matters even more strongly. Virtues like piety, humility, charity, and faith are not simply moral virtues that, when accompanied by the exercise of certain intellectual virtues, yield good teaching. Rather, moral and spiritual virtues have cognitive significance. There simply is no intelligible division between moral and intellectual excellence. The two are mutually interdependent.

The founder of the Platonic Academy wrote almost all of his philosophical works in dialogue form principally for the purpose of a similar demonstration of the interdependence of moral and intellectual virtues. The dialogue was and remains the vehicle best designed to dramatize the movement of inquiry as an act of life, involving characters in conversation, not intellects in isolation. The *Meno,* Plato's only dialogue on the subject of education, features a title character whose failures to learn are more frequently the results of flaws in his character than they are the results of lapses in his logic. Meno needs to change if he is to come to know the truth. Insofar as the truth comes to Meno, he does change—he becomes less arrogant, more self-disciplined, more courageous—not just his ideas but his way of living. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle the cognitive from the moral, since the moral and spiritual virtues improve thought itself as well as action.

This large claim is easier to illustrate than it is to defend abstractly. My own discipline is history, and I remember very well how moved I was when I read J.H. Hexter's *The Historical Primer.* Hexter was and remains one of the most terrifying polemicists of the historical profession. He once parodied H.R. Trevor-Roper's interpretation of the English Civil War as a conflict between the little piggies who went to court and had roast beef

MUCH OF WHAT PASSES FOR LAZINESS AMONG TODAY'S STUDENTS REALLY INVOLVES A LACK OF HUMILITY, STEMMING IN PART FROM A LACK OF PIETY OR RESPECT FOR THAT ASPECT OF GOD'S ONGOING CREATION THAT MANIFESTS ITSELF IN WORKS OF GENIUS.

and the little piggies who stayed at home and had none. I used to have nightmares in graduate school about having my seminar papers criticized at the American Historical Association convention by Hexter. But Hexter's polemical zeal is driven in large part by his deep aversion to sloppy reasoning and carelessness with evidence. He puts this whole matter more positively himself at the end of *The Historical Primer* when he lists charity as the supreme historical virtue. By charity he means a taking care of the thoughts, the deeds, and the lives of others. Being careful.

My own practice as a historian has repeatedly vindicated Hexter's view, and has shown me time and again the cognitive value of charity. I have in mind here criticism I have received or that I have repeatedly leveled at myself regarding my thinking about, say, William James, a figure long dead. "You have really not done James full justice in your discussion of his religious views." Or again, "you really need to be more charitable to James in your analysis of his courtship and marriage." Notice that the vocabulary of moral and spiritual virtue—here justice and charity—easily insinuates itself into appraisals of thought as well as action. If I have grown to treat my colleagues and my students with justice and charity, am I more or less apt to treat historical subjects such as William James in the same manner? I am surely more apt to do so. And would such treatment increase or decrease the quality of my historical *thinking?* Again, I think that the exercise of charity toward my historical subjects is bound to make me a *better historian*—more cautious in appraisal, more sympathetic with human failings, less prone to stereotype and caricature. And insofar as this is so, the manner of teaching others to think historically ought to cultivate, at least through force of example, the virtue of charity.

Perhaps the virtue that is most essential to teaching and learning is humility, a Christian virtue to be sure, but not *distinctively* so. Much of what passes for laziness or the proverbial "lack of motivation" among today's students really involves a lack of humility, stemming in part from a lack of piety or respect for that aspect of God's ongoing creation that manifests itself in works of genius. I recently asked my students why they had not thought through a particular passage from St. Augustine on friendship and loss. I knew, because I had by that time grown to know these students very well, that they cared very much about the matters that Augustine was examining. I had not realized, however, that some of my students were easily convinced, based upon a quick reading of the text, that Augustine was simply mistaken

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or overly agitated about these matters. Others complained that Augustine was unnecessarily obscure. All of them dismissed the passage in a peremptory fashion.

Current educational theory would suggest, in the face of these student comments, that I had failed properly to motivate them to want to learn about friendship and loss or that I had not managed to make Augustine accessible to them. I *had* probably failed in these ways. But my students could have overcome my failings had they been sufficiently humble, had they presumed that Augustine's apparent obscurity was *their* problem, not his, and had they presumed that his apparent inconsistencies or excesses were not really the careless errors they took them to be. Humility on this account does not mean uncritical acceptance: it means, in practical terms, the *presumption* of wisdom and authority *in the author.* Students and faculty today are far too often ready to believe that Kant was just, in a given passage, murky or that Aristotle was pointlessly repetitive or that Tolstoy was, in the battle scenes of *War and Peace,* needlessly verbose. Such quick, easy, and dismissive appraisals preclude the possibility of learning from these writers. Yes, some of these judgments might turn out in the end to be warranted, but the practice of humility at least prevents them from being made summarily. *Some* degree of humility is a precondition for learning.

IV

If we are to think well about our teaching, then, we must begin with some thorough discussion of our own characters through a consideration of those human virtues that promote the excellence of *all* teaching. But is it not also true that much of what makes for good teaching is context-specific, depending upon our academic disciplines, the level of knowledge of our students, the size of our classes, and so forth? Can we really say that the good teacher of an advanced seminar in analytical chemistry proceeds in the same way or should proceed in the same way as a teacher of freshman English?

The answer to all of these questions is the same: "Yes and No." Yes, we would expect all good teachers to be humble and charitable. But no, we should not expect all of them to teach in the same manner. This is the trouble with much of the literature on teaching technique, which makes it seem as though certain methods are uniformly or universally applicable. Conversation about teaching techniques is fine; I engage in it all the time, and I have learned almost everything I value about teaching from watching my teachers and my colleagues and listening to them talk about how they teach. But finally no one can give me a technique that will tell me whether, when, and how to apply a given technique in a given class. That is why good teaching is an art rather than a *techne* or a science. It depends upon a great deal of self-knowledge, upon no small amount of experience, and, here we come to the virtues again, upon the exercise of prudential wisdom.

Even so, I was myself compelled, in the course of my account of the pedagogical virtues, to draw upon my own discipline of history. And I do think that it is important, especially in these days and times, to bear in mind that our teaching at each and every moment involves a discipline and points toward some subject or another. Though the liberal arts as a whole are not defined by a subject matter, this truth can easily obscure at least one other truth if it is pushed too far, namely the truth that in each and every liberal arts class there is very definitely a subject, a collective focus of attention and comprehension. Sometimes this is a text, at other times an experiment, a natural phenomenon, a social action, any number of things.

It is especially important for teachers to bear this latter truth in mind these days, since we are being urged by many of our colleagues to correct for what is now generally perceived to have been an era of "teacher-centered" learning by inaugurating an era of "student-centered" learning. Jane Tompkins's article, "Pedagogy of the Distressed" may be the most widely known and discussed instance of this tendency to privilege student text selection, student questions, and student leadership in the classroom. The proper rejoinder to Tompkins is not, I think, simply to reassert the importance of the subject, as I have done thus far. Rather, we should describe the complex web of interactions among teachers, students, and subjects in terms of a series of questions like those raised by Joseph McDonald as follows:

> *Real teaching...happens inside a wild triangle of relations—among teacher, students, subject—and the points of this triangle shift continuously. What shall I teach amid all that I might teach? How can I grasp it myself so that my grasping may enable theirs? What are they thinking and feeling—toward me, toward each other, toward the thing I am trying to teach? How near should I come, how far off should I stay? How much clutch, how much gas.*

Or, perhaps better still, as Margret Buchmann has written in her fine book, *The Careful Vision,* "Teaching demands recognizing that students and teaching subjects can neither be known altogether, nor once and for all. The more teachers think about their subjects, the less they are sure of their ground, becoming clearer about the limits of their understanding and coming to share in the 'learned uncertainty' of scholars. The more they contemplate their students, the more they will become aware of the fact that their knowledge of them is imperfect and constructed, a fallible vision also because people change, and are supposed to change, in school."

In brief, we must maintain two seemingly incompatible things at once if we are to be credible teachers of the liberal arts: first, that these arts have no defining subject matter; second, that liberal learning is nonetheless to a degree subject-centered, that in another sense these arts, in any given instance of their exercise, always have a subject. Perhaps our principal pedagogical challenge these days is to maintain these two positions at once in the face of congeries of post-modern hermeneutics that would invite us to deconstruct our subjects altogether or to dissolve them without remainder into the imagination of the teacher or the responses of the students or both. This is not the time nor the place charitably to take up the several interpretive strategies offered to us by post-modernity, to discover together what may be valuable in each one, and to enter into critical conversation with them.

We might nevertheless attempt a preliminary answer to *this* question: what resources are still available to us as warrants for the tacit assumptions upon which a great deal of liberal learning rests, *e.g.* that texts have something to teach us, that their meanings, though perhaps inexhaustible, are nonetheless discernible through disciplined inquiry and available through interpretations that really are better and worse, and that we become more fully human and perhaps more fully humane as we come to extend and enliven the conversation that they collectively represent? What, in short, can prevent our texts and other materials from becoming what they have in fact become, in operational terms at least, at so many universities: at best intricate historical formations and at worst occasions for psychophotography or imaginative license.

THE MORE TEACHERS THINK ABOUT THEIR SUBJECTS, THE LESS THEY ARE SURE OF THEIR GROUND, BECOMING CLEARER ABOUT THE LIMITS OF THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND COMING TO SHARE IN THE 'LEARNED UNCERTAINTY' OF SCHOLARS.

I would suggest that all that remains as a stay against these confusions of our time is a set of several religious traditions that regard at least some texts as revelations, as manifestations of the divine diagnosis of and remedy for the human condition, as sources that have claims upon us, to which claims we must be in some sense or another obedient or otherwise responsive if we are to comprehend them. There is again a vital difference, one that has enormous implications for pedagogy, between regarding the things of this world simply as instruments to be used for our purposes and regarding them as possible sources of transformation, as texts and rituals and natural processes that might well change our purposes so as to modify our sense of ourselves and our place in the world. Religious people and teachers who understand their vocations in religious terms have cultivated habits of attention and devotion that have taught them to accept, to receive, and to understand the world as well as to seek occasionally to transform and improve it. And this means that the teacher can and should share with the student a common obedience to the authority of the subject, a common discipline of attentiveness, rather than to become the final authority by presuming to be the author of the knowledge he or she is teaching.

If we would be excellent teachers of the liberal arts, then, we need first to be excellent and resourceful human beings. We need, second, to honor our subjects, along with honoring ourselves and our students. But we also need at all times to bear in mind the end of liberal education. Liberal learning surely involves the cultivation of certain arts and skills of analysis, criticism, and interpretation. And it frees students and teachers *from* unexamined tyrannies that hold dominion over their souls and minds, even as it frees them *for* love of the world through responsible and life-long engagement with fundamental human questions. Liberal learning therefore includes, as we have seen, both the improvement of the mind and the cultivation of those virtues that are indispensable to the pursuit of the truth of matters.

Leon Kass has cast this same objective into an idiom that points to an understanding of liberal learning informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition by suggesting that the end of a liberal education is to make both students and faculty more thoughtful. The word "thoughtfulness" conveys, as Kass noted, both the notion of being filled with insight about important matters of human concern and the notion of being considerate of others. The same double meaning applies to the corresponding vice: to be thoughtless is to be both

THERE IS A VITAL DIFFERENCE, ONE THAT HAS ENORMOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY, BETWEEN REGARDING THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD SIMPLY AS INSTRUMENTS TO BE USED FOR OUR PURPOSES AND REGARDING THEM AS POSSIBLE SOURCES OF TRANSFORMATION.

foolish and inconsiderate. For Jews and Christians who are committed to the unity of the virtues, it should not be possible fully to be thoughtful in one sense without being thoughtful in the other as well.

V

I said at the outset that we must at all costs avoid both reducing teaching to a set of techniques and shrouding it behind a thicket of mystical verbiage. I think it will be agreed that I have avoided the first mistake. But have I altogether avoided the second? Have I not suggested that the more teachers think about their teaching the less sure they are of their ground? And have I not spoken of teaching as an art, calling for the constant application of practical wisdom? And have I not admitted that good teaching requires a good bit of self knowledge, and that it is to an important degree context dependent? Do these several observations taken together risk mystification? Or, to raise a more practical question, does this account of teaching render teaching an activity that is impossible to evaluate fairly?

Let me be blunt: my account of teaching here probably does suggest that most faculty evaluation programs currently in place will be woefully inadequate. But it would be a grave mistake to draw from this admission the conclusion that we should not evaluate teaching. On the contrary, faculty must subject themselves to regular evaluation of their teaching as a matter of justice and professional integrity. They should not subject themselves, however, to perfunctory evaluations that result in shoddy appraisals and an erosion of collegiality. Or, to put it positively, we need radically to review our evaluation procedures to bring them into alignment with our sense of the complex nature of the art of teaching.

In a recent, exemplary article in the Spring, 1995 issue *Theological Education,* Mary C. Boys suggests that we think of faculty assessment rather than faculty evaluation. The Latin root of the word assessment, she points out, is the word *assidere,* meaning "to sit beside." She therefore argues that assessment should be viewed as a collegial process that approximates a mentoring relationship between the faculty member being assessed and the faculty members doing the assessing. In addition to student evaluations, all such assessments should minimally include the faculty member's own assessment through a portfolio or portrait and the sponsorship of a series of conversations on teaching. In my judgment, Boys's article sets out in great detail a process of appraisal that is commensurate with the complex art of teaching itself. Indeed, if we were half as careful about the manner in which we assess teaching as we are about the manner in which we assess scholarship, teaching would seem much less mysterious and scholarship would seem more so. Instead, having proclaimed that it is impossible competently to evaluate teaching, we tend to rush through teaching assessments and then pronounce them unfair, inadequate, and counter-productive. This is, on almost every campus, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

VI

Many who might agree almost entirely with my comments thus far on teaching, its nature, its purposes, and the methods by which it might be effectively appraised, might well object that it is impossible to realize any of the ideals set forth here in their present pedagogical situation. Our students seem less responsive than ever. Our classes are too large to build the kind of communities of inquiry and to cultivate the kinds of virtues outlined above. We teach only large introductory lecture courses in fields like chemistry and mathematics, and most of the examples offered heretofore are drawn from the humanities and the social sciences. And our schools, whether or not they are church-related, seem to have adopted the standards and the practices and the virtues that are characteristic of secular research universities. Thus, the reward systems within our own colleges and universities militate against a religious conception of the academic vocation. In brief, many might rightly wonder whether those who are most sympathetic to the proposals offered here are least likely to be able to realize them in practice.

These are serious worries and objections. But they point to their own answers and resolutions. First, if we think of teaching as the governing concept by which we teachers understand and interpret all of our collegial activities, we realize that our calling invites us to order our communities in such a way so that the virtues of learning and the learning of virtue can flourish. This task includes a vast range of projects, most of which do not involve direct classroom activity. They include efforts to amend the reward system so as to bring the criteria for appointment, promotion, and tenure into closer conformity to the distinctive ideals of Jesuit higher education.

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They include endeavors to bring the curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular lives of students into harmony with one another. They include the design of courses that are team-taught and that engage students in collaborative ventures that habituate them into patterns of discernment and action that are virtuous.

The most important component of our Freshman Program in the honors college where I teach is, for example, the requirement that all of our entering students work together to write, produce, and perform their own musical production (see the accompanying description). More than any other feature of our first-year course of study, this "Freshman Production" instills within our students mutual trust, friendship, and humility, virtues that are indispensable to their learning together. One might achieve the same measure of success through service-learning requirements, through creatively designed collaborative research projects, and through a very large and varied number of programs that are based in residence halls and that require joint endeavor. I have often thought that an imaginatively managed intramural athletic program that included reflection as well as team play could accomplish many of the same objectives that we here at Valparaiso University realize through the performing arts. In any event, the key to advancing the model of pedagogy set forth above is the recognition of the many points of opportunity to do so within any community of higher learning.

We are still left with the formidable problem of overcoming some of the "bad habits" that young scholars acquire in graduate school. Our research universities do a wonderful job of instilling virtues like clarity (but not charity), honesty (but not humility), and self-discipline (but not friendship) within young men and women. We must find ways of strengthening the good habits even as we add to these another set of virtues and even as we mobilize the virtues of secular learning for the sake of larger goals. This is not so much a "culture war" as it is an inventive effort at retrieval and renewal. We must retrieve and remobilize the best of the Christian intellectual tradition of learning for the sake of renewing within young scholars the animating purposes and ideals that led most of them to seek graduate education in the first place.

Several projects are now well under way to accomplish these latter objectives. One of them, the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, focuses upon church-related institutions of higher learning and includes within its national network several Jesuit schools—Boston

Theater as Liberal Arts Pedagogy

The Freshman Production at Valparaiso

MARK R. SCHWEHN AND JOHN STEVEN PAUL

About twenty years ago, Christ College, the undergraduate honors college of Valparaiso University, decided to include an unusual requirement as part of its first year course of study. Over the course of ten weeks, the sixty-five entering students had to produce and perform their own musical theater production. Its theme would ideally be informed by the common readings that then provided the main intellectual substance of the course. All of its music had to be original. All of the students had to appear at least once on stage. This creative and collaborative activity was designed initially to complement the analytical and expository part of the course. But it soon exceeded those comparatively modest expectations. By now, the so-called "Freshman Production" has become what most students and faculty regard as the most important educational experience of the first semester.

An Imaginative Education for An Educated Imagination

When the idea for the Production was first conceived, we had hoped to build and strengthen a sense of community through this endeavor, and we have thus far succeeded. Every year, sixty-five adolescent strangers learn to discover one another's gifts, to celebrate the diversity of those gifts, to rely upon one another, and to see that the excellence of the performance depends upon such diversity. This experience is educationally superior to many lectures and several books on the subject of the potentially constructive aspects of a diverse community. And the production reinforces in subtle but forceful ways the view behind the fact that we grade the first semester's work on a pass/fail basis—namely, that though conflict is correlative to healthy communities of learning, competition is inimical to them.

This kind of education through theater does indeed involve conflict, along with a great deal of very hard work, and no small

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College, Creighton, Fairfield, Gonzaga, Holy Cross, Loyola Marymount, Loyola in Maryland, Marquette, and Xavier (Cincinnati). The program strives to train young, postdoctoral scholars for positions in church-related institutions of higher learning, and it sponsors a variety of seminars, institutes, and mentoring programs to cultivate within faculty who are already teaching at church-related schools some of the habits of thought and pedagogical action that are advocated here. Teaching well requires the presence of local and national communities of conversation and wisdom like the Lilly Fellows Program and like the association of Jesuit schools that stay in touch though *Conversations*.

ABSENT A DEEP COMMITMENT TO THE TRUTH AND A DEEPER CONVICTION OF IT, OUR VOCATION WILL DIMINISH TO MERE CAREER.

Though the art of teaching is, I believe, of unprecedented critical importance at this time in our history, we must be careful not to claim too much for ourselves as individual teachers. My last word is therefore one more reminder: both the corporate vocation of a Christian college and our individual vocations as teachers and scholars depend upon faith. In God's hands and not in our own rest the final fruits of our endeavors. We cannot fully regard our teaching as a calling without a reckless confidence in the promises of the One who calls us to our common tasks. Absent faith, our calling will become an intolerable and lonely burden. Absent a deep commitment to the truth and a deeper conviction of it, our vocation will diminish to mere career. And absent both of these things, faith and truth, we will become what Max Weber foresaw as the final corruption of the worldly asceticism—specialists without spirit and sensualists without heart. Let us pray that, whatever successes and failures the future may hold, God may use our own pedagogical efforts, however weak and fretful they may sometimes be, to bring about the fuller presence of the peaceable kingdom. And may we hear in our teaching and our learning, our reading and our writing, our knowing and our doing even now the faint articulations of eternity. ■

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amount of disappointment. The student writing committee invariably develops two or three splendid ideas. But it must adopt only one of them. Many students must therefore not only give up their preferred choice; they must work industriously for several weeks to advance what was once someone else's rival idea. This same process of intense argument governs the writing of the script itself, the composition of the music, the set design, the choreography—all the things that make the show. But at some point, after hours of negotiation and a good deal of anger and frustration, all (well, almost all) students become deeply invested in the overall quality of the production. They move, however painstakingly, from conflict to common purpose, back to conflict and eventually to the final performance of the production itself.

The creators of the Freshman Production had at least hoped for this much. But they had not anticipated the way in which the experience of making a play together would make students better readers and writers. Surely liberal learning involves the effort seriously to entertain ideas and images that seem initially strange, sometimes altogether obscure, and often threatening. And this process in turn involves approaching texts and other materials with an attitude that is at once humble and suspicious. We now notice that our students, once they themselves must invent characters who are "consistent," connect endings to beginnings, and carry forward thematic emphases through an entire two-hour performance, become much more intrigued by questions that invite them to discover the structure and overall intention governing a text written by Plato or Jane Austen. In brief, their own experience of making something makes them at once more respectful and more critical of the works of literature, philosophy, history, and theology that they are reading concurrently with their work on the production.

Nor had we anticipated the extent to which the Production, in the aftermath of each annual performance, would shape the atmosphere and the conversation among the entire honors college community as well as among a large part of the University community beyond it. These musical dramas have very different themes and tones from year to year. Recent themes have included love and friendship, the deterioration of the family, the prospect of eco-catastrophe, the culture wars, the increasing threat of random violence, the problem of exclusion and community, urban decay, terrorism, and the dilemma of religious pluralism. Thus, for most of the month of November, the mood of the College is totally transformed by the energy and imagination of the entering students. Our rather pedestrian Refectory, a modest all-purpose room, becomes a brave new world complete with elaborate backdrops, sound systems, lights, multi-tiered stages, murals, and an improvised orchestra pit. Students linger for hours about the Commons, the Reading Room, and other available spaces in Mueller Hall, the Christ College Building, with copies of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (a typical week's reading) in one hand and copies of the script for the production in the other. Some are obviously in costume, and others may or may not be.

The honors college has about 175 sophomores, juniors, and seniors, almost all of whom were once in their own Fresh-

WE HAD NOT ANTICIPATED THE WAY IN WHICH THE EXPERIENCE OF MAKING A PLAY TOGETHER WOULD MAKE STUDENTS BETTER READERS AND WRITERS.

man Production, and almost all of whom attend one of the four performances staged by the first-year class each year. They have staged over the years shows with such titles as "Peanuts, Popcorn, and the Peloponnesian War," "Pursuit of Happiness," "Six Feet Under, or A Grave Matter," "One Hero to Go," "Something to Believe," "The Price is Life," and "Auditions for God." After the premier performance of any Production, comparisons and contrasts are instantly in the air, some of them invidious, others trivial, many of them sophomoric (literally and figuratively), all of them suggesting fundamental questions about the intricate connections between a community and its art (from ancient Athens to the present), between the several creators and the final work, between the larger culture and a given, very localized, highly perishable, but intensely felt element of it. The civil but intense pursuit of these questions is surely a vital part of the experience of a liberal education.

The communal response to the Freshman Production has been so various, continuous, and intense that we have had to institutionalize it to some extent. Three years ago, we reserved the hour for our weekly college symposium the Thursday evening after the Production for a critical response from a panel of sophomores followed by a rejoinder by a panel of freshmen. These panel presentations, which soon open up to the entire assembled collegiate community, are always filled with conflict, enthusiasm, and (occasionally) great insight into the kinds of things that matter most to today's students. So, for better or for worse, and in sometimes raucous exchanges, the community grows to know itself better, to see what the deepest concerns and impulses that move its members look like and feel like and sound like. Learning to keep your head and your temper in the midst of this kind of public self-examination, to be at once charitable and critical, civil and contentious, is an essential part of a liberal education.

Theater finally initiates young people into intellectual life, especially to those two frequently opposed dimensions of the life of the mind that the late Richard Hofstadter called piety and playfulness. Part of liberal learning, a larger part of it than we have customarily recognized, involves the training of the affections and the education of the imagination. Students tend to lose themselves in the collective venture of making theater, thereby sometimes achieving a balance between the spirit of playfulness and the demand for serious coherence and integrity. These are hard matters to express with precision. As Aristotle would have said, harmony here involves a mean relative to the individual, a mean that can only be found through experience and settled through practice in the midst of a supportive community. To feel the right way in the right circumstance for the right reason in the right manner: these are delicate but crucially important moments in the process of becoming fully human and humane.

Arts of Inquiry and Arts as Inquiry

Though we should not claim too little for theater as liberal arts pedagogy, we should not claim too much for it either. The Production has been a formative practice in the life of this particular community in large part because of other features of both the College and the University that were already in place when the program was conceived. First, at Valparaiso University, the teaching of the performing arts has always been understood, especially by the Director of the University Theater, primarily as a vehicle for liberal learning, secondarily as an occasion for professional preparation and recruitment. From the very beginning, the Theater Director has supervised the Freshman Production.

Second, all of our first-year honor students take one course each term that occupies eight semester credit hours in their program of study. That course, "Text and Contexts: Traditions of Human Thought," consists of five hours each week in small seminars discussing a wide variety of texts, two hours at the end of each week in a large plenary session listening critically to a lecture on the week's text and responding to it, and an additional hour per week (actual time spent on this project expands considerably as the performance approaches) for the drama workshop. This huge course, which by itself fulfills general education requirements in English, history, philosophy, and theology, gives us ample curricular space in which to work out the production. Third, the enrollment is small and the working spaces are intimate. Fourth, the Lutheran character of Valparaiso University means that we attract significant numbers of students and faculty who at some level understand liturgy and worship and who therefore are disposed to regard a combination of play and piety as at least vaguely familiar and even congenial.

This distinctive configuration of practices at Valparaiso's honors college, however, should not deter others from adapting the Production, in whole or in part, within very different contexts. Some version of it might work very well during an intensive orientation period, during the short term in a 4-1-4 academic calendar, or as a residence hall project. Any such theater project should arise naturally from and be carefully shaped to the special strengths and purposes of the group that undertakes it. And, of course, it should be seen as a way of enlarging the pedagogical repertoire of liberal education, as something far short of a panacea but considerably more than just another "teaching device."

To tell the whole truth, the importance of theater as pedagogy in the life of Christ College is something that we discovered only with twenty-twenty hindsight. We by now have had twenty-five years of history to contemplate retrospectively. In sum, we have a tradition, whereas initially we had only a grab bag of ideas some of which quickly perished and others of which endured. Students have taught the faculty again and again that the pleasures of friendship and the pursuit of wisdom are bound up deeply with one another. And the production has taught us that disciplined activities that engage the imagination as well as the intellect, the body as well as the soul, and the affections as well as the reason, are critical to liberal education by any name anywhere.

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Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts

The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, established in 1991, addresses two critical problems faced by church-related institutions of higher learning in the United States. First, though many church-related colleges and universities are seeking to recover or refortify a sense of purpose and identity, there has been no sustained national conversation expressly designed to renew and deepen a sense of corporate vocation among these schools. Second, settings for the formation of younger scholars who wish to pursue their vocational commitments at church-related colleges and universities scarcely exist in the United States.

The Lilly Fellows Program consists of two distinct but integrated programmatic initiatives. First, it has established and will steadily expand a national network of church-related institutions of higher learning and sustain among them a discussion of Christian understandings of the nature of the academic vocation. The network represents a diversity of denominational traditions, institutional types, and geographical locations. Representatives from the network institutions meet annually for a national conference. Additionally, several workshops and mini-conferences are scheduled annually on the campuses of the network institutions. A biannual newsletter reports network activities, provides listings of young scholars interested in teaching at church-related institutions, and includes reports from conferences and workshops.

Second, the Lilly Fellows Program offers young scholars in the humanities and the arts a chance to renew and deepen their sense of vocation, and to enrich their postdoctoral intellectual and spiritual life within a Christian community of learning. Each academic year Postdoctoral Fellows are appointed for two-year periods, selected from candidates interested in considering the relationship between Christianity and the academic vocation. The Fellows are prepared, through a variety of teaching experiences, through participation in a weekly colloquium, and through regular association with mentors, to seek permanent employment within church-related institutions of higher learning.

The Program also sponsors one Senior Fellow, selected from nominees from the network schools, to spend the year on the Valparaiso University campus, working closely with the Lilly Fellows Program. The Senior Fellow engages in research and writing, is a resource person for the Postdoctoral Fellows, participates in a year-long colloquium, and contributes to the annual conference the following fall.

For more information about the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, contact: Arlin G. Meyer, Program Director, Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383. Telephone: (219) 464-5317/5770 or FAX: (219) 464-5159.

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