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intersections

Spring 2010



in this issue

Lutherans in an Age of Anxiety

Purpose Statement

| This publication is by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-eight colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is published by the Vocation and Education unit of the ELCA. The publication has its home at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, which has generously offered leadership and physical and financial support as an institutional sponsor for the publication.

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

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

From the Publisher

| After attending the first evening of the 2009 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference, I rushed from the event to travel that same evening to Ohio for my goddaughter's wedding. I had a great time that weekend, and the participants at last year's conference did, too, given the articles in this issue of *Intersections*. If you attended the 2009 consultation, enjoy re-visiting the major presentations. If you missed most of the conference like me or could not attend, enjoy discovering the excellent presentations from last year.

As I write these words, the Board of Regents of Dana College (Blair, Nebraska) has received the difficult news that the Higher Learning Commission denied Dana's request to transfer accreditation to the for-profit entity purchasing the college. The denial effectively terminated the purchase agreement (the HLC would object to my description of the closing of the college as an outcome of the denial, although the linkage is accurate), and the Regents have initiated a plan to dissolve the college. Our network of ELCA colleges and universities has responded splendidly to welcome Dana students and to offer employment opportunities, when possible, for Dana's faculty and staff.

The HLC's denial of Dana's request has sparked the latest iteration in the wars attendant to the expansion of for-profit higher education in the USA. No longer is the for-profit community restricted to beautician, secretarial and other technical schools. Even though Dana's plan to yoke with the for-profit world was thwarted, for better or worse, the for-profit educational community has (I suspect) irreversibly entered the world of liberal arts education. This challenges all of us who care deeply about sustaining excellence in higher education for the liberal arts and professional training. If the Lutheran community has a vocation in higher education, surely it will include helping higher education in the United States learn to do residential, liberal arts education well using a for-profit model, even though most education will continue will continue under non-profit structures...at least until that very 20th century distinction legally and practically disappears.

What more reason do we need to continue the conversation about the Vocation of a Lutheran college?

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intersections

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Todd Drake, *Return of the Booger*
Man, 2005, acrylic on canvas.
Artist's statement can be found on page 15.

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MARK S. HANSON

Living at the Intersection of Fear and Hope

Living at the intersection of fear and hope has been an image that has formed my thinking, speaking, and leading at least since last January. It was then that I traveled with Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) bishops, spouses, and churchwide staff to Jordan, Israel, and Palestine. The trip had been planned for about two years, but what we had not anticipated was the massive incursion of Israeli military forces into Gaza just before our scheduled departure. After much conversation and prayer, we decided to honor the commitment, recognizing that the people we were going to accompany—namely the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)—do not have the option of leaving when conflicts escalate.

I could easily spend this time talking about the intersection of fear and hope in the context of the Middle East and our journey. I trust you know about many of the fears that so persistently hold captive Israelis and Palestinians. I will hold up just three signs of hope in the midst of fear in that context.

We were walking through the streets of Hebron. Jewish settlers have moved into Hebron. Often, the settlers throw garbage down on the Palestinian people as they go to market. As we were walking to the mosque, a man grabbed my arm, “You must come and see my home.”

Up small stone stairs, we walked to his third floor apartment. It was about twenty feet across a rooftop from Jewish settlers. They were separated by a fence and an Israeli armed guard. “Look what they did!” the man yelled pointing to his completely burned-out home. “But this did not burn,” he said, holding his charred Quran. “I can still read the Quran, so I still have hope.”

We visited one of the Lutheran churches in Ramallah. In a classroom of fifth graders, I asked the children what it is like for them to live and study in Ramallah. One young girl said “I wake up crying for my Mom because, in my dream, I see the bombs in Gaza falling on my house.” Fear.

But following our visits to classrooms, we went to the lunchroom where Christian and Muslim students danced together traditional Palestinian folk dances. It was a joyful dance of defiance in the face of war and death. Oh, yes, and the name of the school is Hope.

A third sign of hope from our Middle East visit was my meeting with King Abdullah II of Jordan. I sat down and his majesty immediately put three items on the agenda for our conversation. “Bishop Hanson, I want to talk about how together we can ensure a vibrant future for Arab Christianity; guarantee Jerusalem will be a shared city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims; and deepen Muslim-Christian understanding and relationships throughout the world.”

We continued that conversation when King Abdullah came to Washington, DC to meet with President Obama in April. I look forward to deepening our shared commitment at a conference at Georgetown University in October.

But it was not only our trip to the Holy Land that convinced me that we are living at the intersections of fear and hope. That sense permeated my experiences at President Obama’s inauguration where the daunting challenges facing the new administration were not minimized, but neither were they able to turn back the surging tide of hope that washed over the massive crowds.

Perhaps I do not need to remind you of other factors that contribute to our living at the intersection of hope and fear.

MARK S. HANSON is the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with headquarters in Chicago, Illinois. Copyright 2009 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). All rights reserved.

The turmoil in the economy certainly has contributed to heightened anxiety on college and university campuses, for the churchwide staff in Chicago, for ELCA congregations, synods, and ecumenical partners. We needed to reduce our 2009 churchwide budget by \$7.5 million after the fiscal year had begun, causing a reduction in workforce and executive salaries. You are familiar with these realities from your campuses as endowments shrink, budgets tighten, layoffs occur, and anxieties rise.

In a couple of weeks, we will gather in Minneapolis for our churchwide assembly. It seems human sexuality and the place of gay and lesbian persons in ministry is cause for anxiety for some and hope for others. Yet, I approach the assembly in confident hope because I trust our maturing ability to have civil discourse and to stay focused on the faithful mission that unites us while acknowledging deeply held differences on human sexuality.

At the intersection of fear and hope it is important that we name our fears—name them publicly, communally, and prayerfully. So let us practice. Thinking of ELCA colleges and universities at the intersection of fear and hope, what fears do you hold or perhaps what fears hold you and the academic community in which you serve?

This spring I participated in commencements on three college campuses. I listened for and to the fears being expressed. Certainly, they were what I expected to hear—from presidents, board members, and administrators—fears about the impact of losses in endowment, student financial aid, and enrollment. From students: fears of not finding employment or increased competition for graduate school admissions. From faculty: the fear that the commitment to liberal arts may be sacrificed to meet market demands for more specialized career preparatory course and majors, and the anxiety about financial implications for both tenured and contract positions.

It is important not only to name our fears, but also to know what fear can do to us individually, collectively, and institutionally. To paraphrase a comment Walter Brueggemann made ten years ago, fear can turn us inward and we become possessive of what we have. Fear can make us distrustful of others (particularly those in leadership). Finally, fear can make us downright anti-neighborly.

Systems theorists have been very helpful in describing how anxiety can drive us to react out of the reptilian cortex of our brains, so that we become mean-spirited, defensive, and even aggressive. Both academy and church are affected by the toxicity of the culture wars. Too often erosive currents of ideologies are held and expressed more with divisive bitterness than engaging passion.

Scripture is replete with stories of people living, struggling, believing, and doubting at the intersection of fear and hope. That is certainly a theme in the Easter narratives. In John 20, the risen Christ appears uninvited to his disciples who are behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. This is not anti-Semitic, but a description of the fate the disciples feared for being followers of Jesus. I wonder

how many of us are hounded by that fear in the night, “What if someone identifies me as a follower of or believer in Jesus?”

The risen Christ’s first words to his terrified disciples were, “Peace be with you.” I hear those as words of absolution for the disciples having betrayed, denied, and abandoned Jesus. I believe they were more than words of greeting. They were God’s gift of peace that becomes a source of hope in Christ at the intersection of fear and hope.

Joseph Sittler described the peace of God as both rest and movement. Sittler wrote,

The peace of God as rest, whose gift is to have no anxiety, fulfills itself in a peace of God as movement which goes out with holy concern about everything. The peace of God as rest in God’s acceptance of a person is not a knowledge that the world can deliver, is not in fact concerned with the world at all. But this same peace ... knows that the peaceless world is precisely the place for working out of God’s will for truth, justice, purity, and beauty. (*Care* 39)

With this admittedly long introduction, I want to turn to the question, “What is the vocation of Lutheran higher education at the intersection of fear and hope?” Much could and perhaps should be said about the meaning of “vocation.” To what you already know about the Lutheran understanding of vocation, I will add two quotations that give perspective on vocation. Frederick Buechner describes vocation this way: “The place God calls us to is the place where our deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” (95) Or, as W.H. Auden said in less familiar words: “You owe it to us all to get on with what you’re good at.”

In the time remaining, let me share at least some of the things you are good at in Lutheran higher education and some of the forces or factors that challenge you and us at the intersection of fear and hope.

Testing the Spirits

Lutheran communities of higher education are places to examine both the fears and hopes that meet us at this intersection and ourselves.

To use other words, the vocation of our colleges and universities is to be communities that test the veracity of our fears and hopes, and to inquire about their authenticity—whether these fears and hopes lead to a truer engagement with the world (as suggested by Sittler’s observation of peace or movement) or whether they are deceptive and misleading fantasies that draw us into the abyss of self-absorption.

This examination of the veracity or authenticity of the convictions that our deepest fears and hopes express commonly is

called “critical inquiry” in academic communities. It is not one area of study among many, but the common calling or vocation of all areas of study. Critical inquiry is our vocation as Lutherans in higher education: it is what we are good at. But it does not begin with higher education. Rather, it is grounded in Luther’s approach to how parents in the home teach their children the catechism. We teach our children not only the words of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, but we also teach them to ask, “What does this mean?”

The vocation of a Lutheran college that is so vital to the mission of the ELCA and to the world is to plant deep within students a lifelong unquenchable curiosity about God, the meaning of life and being human, and the centrality of faith. It is also to give students an unquenchable curiosity about the vastness of the cosmos, the intricacies of DNA, the beauty experienced through the arts, the complexities of science, math, economics, the richness of history, the challenging questions of philosophy, and the haunting consequences of systemic domination and exploitation.

The vocation of Lutheran higher education at the intersection of fear and hope is to resist the mighty forces that would draw us down the path of fear. One sign of such a seductive power is that a commitment to unquenchable curiosity is replaced with the satisfaction of insatiable appetites as the end toward which higher education must lead. Our colleague Jonathan Strandjord says wisdom usually comes in one of two flavors: wisdom that seeks to satisfy our desires or wisdom to reduce our cravings. Both are essential to human life. Yet, he cautions, one can lead to a life preoccupied with our own needs and the other to cool detachment, or even isolation. He calls us to another form of wisdom, wisdom that makes us “other-wise.” This wisdom is not the mastery of a specialized subject, but a basic posture, an overarching purpose, an intellect in search of an extraordinary project. Being other-wise is not driven by the need for power or possessions or by the quest to be above the fray. It is instead born of wonder or ecstasy, which takes us out of ourselves, but not out of the world. It places us before the neighbor.

Please do not misunderstand. I am not dismissing the move toward education as preparation for success in the marketplaces of a competitive world. I am, however, putting down a caution flag if that move comes at the expense of critical inquiry, nurturing unquenchable curiosity, and wrestling with life’s big questions. It is understandable that student and parents will ask, “What will I/we receive as a return for a quite substantial investment of money and time in a Lutheran college or university education?” The need to give a response that is measurable and marketable is understandable. But I am pleading that the response not sacrifice what you are good at: your vocation—critical inquiry, wisdom as wonder, in essence a strong liberal arts education.

As you engage in your vocation of testing the spirits at the intersection of fear and hope, there is another factor or force that merits ongoing critical examination: religious fundamentalism. It may be far too gross a generalization, but I would contend that the more overpowering our fears, the more attractive fundamentalism looms as a supposed, if illusory, source of hope. That phenomenon directly challenges what Douglas John Hall calls “a thinking faith,” which I believe belongs to the vocation of a Lutheran higher education and is a sign and source of hope.

Do we have the courage to be that bold in responding to the demands for assurances of certainty today? What makes fundamentalism so attractive in our turbulent world? Listen to Douglas John Hall in *Bound and Free*:

Fundamentalism, whatever the origins of the term, has come to mean a position of such exactness and certitude that those embracing it, or more accurately, those embraced by it, feel themselves delivered from all the relativities, uncertainties, indefiniteness, and transience of human existence. They are provided, they feel, with a firm foundation—a *fundamentum*—greater than their own finitude—greater than any of the sciences, greater than the collective wisdom of the race. (100)

Then Hall reminds us:

God does not meet our demands for certainty with a simple rebut or refusal. God offers an alternative to certitude. It is called trust. God reveals God’s self as one who can be trusted. ... Certitude is denied. Confidence is made possible. Consider that word *confidence*. Literally from the Latin, it means (*con*) living with (*fide*) faith. (101-102)

Hall concludes:

Now faith is a living thing. It is a category of the present. It is not a once-for-all accomplishment. It is not a possession like a Visa card that some have and others don’t. Faith is an ongoing, living relationship and response to God, to the world, and to life. (102)

I believe the vocation of Lutheran colleges is not just to offer a critique of religious fundamentalism, but to offer an alternative. That alternative is an academic community in which a “thinking faith” can be expressed and explored. It is a community in which people of diverse religious convictions as well as people with no faith are welcome into conversations so that our understanding of, and appreciation for, the faith of our neighbor might grow. It is also a community in which we might make common commitments to work together for justice, peace, and care of creation, the vitality of neighborhoods, and the practice of citizenship. In other words, the vocation of Lutheran higher education is to

prepare citizens to seek the common good and to recognize the contribution of religious beliefs and practices toward that end.

I am serving on President Obama's advisory task force on inter-religious relationships. We are putting as much energy into encouraging local communities to create inter-religious service opportunities as we are giving advice on the content of President Obama's speech in Cairo and on policies toward governments that persecute religious minorities. The contributions of colleges and universities to countering the powers of religious extremists should not be underestimated. More than creating a culture of tolerance or abdicating for relativism or eclecticism, it is to exercise your vocation of critical inquiry by engaging in critical pluralism while seeking the common good and the well-being of the neighbor near and far.

I will close with a question that I suspect will be answered by the presenters and discussions throughout this conference. The question is, "What hermeneutic will shape your vocation, the vocation of Lutheran higher education, at the intersection of fear and hope?"

Admittedly, hermeneutics is a word most often associated with the study of scriptural interpretation, the principles that move us from the texts of scripture to the contexts of our lives. I am using hermeneutics a bit more broadly. The Greek root of hermeneutics is related to Hermes, the messenger god in Greek mythology, described as "the patron of boundaries and of the travelers who cross those boundaries, patron of shepherds and cowherds, of thieves and road travelers, of orators and poets. Yes, and of the cunning of thieves and liars." (Burkert)

In your calling as educators, you are encountering and accompanying people who are often testing, crossing boundaries—boundaries of emotional maturity, of separation and forming new communities, of vocational discernment and moral development, and discovering new intellectual challenges.

Hermeneutics is the lens or window through which you exercise your vocation: what you're good at as educators. Hermeneutics is also what you are giving or forming within your students. My concern or at least my question is this: "Does the vocation of critical inquiry lead only or inevitably to a hermeneutic of suspicion?"

Obviously, the phrase "hermeneutic of suspicion" and the question merit a paper if not an entire conference. I frankly do not know where one crosses the line from critical inquiry to a hermeneutic of suspicion. However, the perception that a hermeneutic of suspicion is the dominant lens or window used by faculty contributes to an often ambivalent dance between scholarly communities and their religious constituencies and shadows the question of vocation for church-related institutions of higher education.

Peter Rollins described Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and their intellectual descendants as masters of suspicion who always

sought to expose "the lie" in "belief." Lewis Mudge gave this description of critical inquiry practiced as a hermeneutic of suspicion: "that religious language may not mean what it appears to say at all: it may be a coded version of something else of which we would prefer not to be aware." (4)

So what are the consequences of the hermeneutic of suspicion? What are the signs of its presence? One is that religious communities, including some Lutherans, tend to view the erosive effects of critical inquiry practiced as a hermeneutic of suspicion on religious beliefs, practices, and relationships. Thus, religious communities become suspicious and distrustful of communities of higher learning. In turn, academic communities sometimes—to often—default to a fearful suspicion that academic freedom and scholarly integrity will be lost if higher education is too closely aligned with religious communities and their fears and hopes.

There is perhaps a different twist on the same concern about the consequences of a hermeneutic of suspicion for the vocation of Lutheran higher education: it can lead to a dismissal of the contributions of religion in general and the Lutheran Church in particular to life's big questions. What makes life meaningful? What does it mean to be human? How do we live together on this planet?

I commend to you an article by W. Robert Connor, president of the Teagle Foundation, in the June 9, 2006, issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Titled, "The Right Time and Place for Big Questions," he asks,

Can students' interest in and engagement with religion and spiritual matters, and the questions associated with them, invigorate their liberal education? Based on my conversations with faculty members in a wide range of fields, meetings with students, and class visits, the answer clearly is "Yes." As a result, the Teagle Foundation invited colleges to apply for support for projects that deal with big questions in undergraduate education.

Connor writes,

Despite the number and quality of those applications, however, we can see that there is still reluctance among faculty members to engage with the big questions—many professors clearly feel that they are not adequately trained to deal with them. Faculty members have also expressed concerns that tenure and salary increases will be put in jeopardy if they break out of existing disciplinary paradigms—or that a few students who find that class discussions run counter to their beliefs or preferences could damage professors' careers by filling out negative course evaluations. Teachers sometimes need to be assured that they do not have to answer the questions for their students; rather, their role is just to help students think about them.

Connor continues that a friend recently wrote, “It is less a question of expertise than of feeling comfortable enough to articulate an issue in a way that is cogent and civil, and encourages and doesn’t close off discussion.” I believe the vocation of critical inquiry—of unquenchable curiosity—can be carried out with a hermeneutic of confidence and trust rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Douglas John Hall reminds us that the God of biblical faith is merciful. At the intersection of fear and hope, God does not meet our need for security only with refusal and rebuff. God offers an alternative to certitude: it is called trust. God reveals God’s self as one who may be trusted.

God does not give us the truth, yet God lets truth live among us, incarnate, and lets us glimpse enough of God’s living truth that we may learn the courage to live despite our real vulnerability, impermanence, and selfishness.

Certitude is denied. Confidence is made possible. Consider that word: confidence. Literally in Latin, it means living with faith... Now, faith is a living thing. It is a category of the present. It is not a once-and-for-all accomplishment. It is not a possession like a Visa card. It is an ongoing ... response to the world. (Hall 101-102)

Such a hermeneutic of confidence will not diminish the vocation of Lutheran higher education but might mean the vocation is one of appreciative inquiry—the result of the grace of God—not only critical inquiry. As Joseph Sittler wrote,

What I am appealing for is an understanding of grace that has the magnitude of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The grace of God is not simply a holy hypodermic whereby my sins are forgiven. It is the whole giftedness of life, the wonder of life which causes me to ask questions that transcend the moment. (*Gravity* 14)

The vocation of Lutheran higher education is not only appreciative or critical inquiry, but the creation of communities of discernment. At the many intersections of fear and hope, we must not succumb to contentious, fractious, and partisan divisions, but must seek to discern out of our diversity what serves the common good, what serves the cause of justice and peace.

As Cynthia Moe-Lobeda reminds us, the community has a stake in and a calling to such discernment.

The heart of discernment is to hold ‘what is,’ and ‘what could be,’ in light of the life-giving, life-saving, life-sustaining mystery of God’s ongoing work toward the redemption and flourishing of creation. Said differently, we are to hold our earthly realities in one breath with the power and presence of God, in order to craft ways of living that proclaim God as seen in Jesus Christ. Where vision of life’s realities is obscured by illusions, a task of Christian discernment is *to see* differently so that we might *live* differently. Where dominant forces distort historical realities by describing them falsely, Christian discernment must re-see and then ‘re-describe the world.’ (65-66; Cf. Brueggemann 17)

Is she not describing in part the vocation of Lutheran higher education? More accurately, she is describing our shared calling—our shared commitment. As we exercise that calling in our varied contexts, I believe we become signs of hope. For our shared calling let us remember that faith quells our fears and strengthens our courage as we live and serve at the intersection of fear and hope.

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MARTHA E. STORTZ

Practicing Hope: The Charisms of Lutheran Higher Education

Several years ago, on a night flight from somewhere to somewhere else, I sat next to a man who was returning from a visit to his son in a prestigious East Coast school. We fell into a conversation as deep as the hour was late. It turned out that this man had gone to a Jesuit college. I have some familiarity with the Jesuit network, so when we started playing Jesuit Geography, we had a lot of “hits.” His son, however, hadn’t wanted to go to a Jesuit college, and that made him sad. I asked why: what was he afraid his son had lost?

And without missing a beat, he said: “Going to a Jesuit College taught me three things: 1) Be a man for others; 2) Find God in all things; and 3) Always give back.”

What impressed me so powerfully was how quick and how unconsidered his response was. This was more than something he did; this was who he was. His Jesuit education shaped his identity in indelible ways.¹

What would someone answer who had attended a Lutheran institution—perhaps even yours? How would that shape him or her? And would the answer be as ready? It seems to me someone who’d been the product of Lutheran Higher Education could say many similar things to someone who’d been through Jesuit Higher Education. After all, though one came from Protestant Saxony and the other from the Catholic Basque region of Spain, Luther (1483-1546) and Ignatius (1491-1556) were contemporaries one of another.

Translating Ignatian into Lutheran would be surprisingly easy:

“Be a person for others” would translate to “seeing the face of Christ in the neighbor” and “being the face of Christ to the neighbor.”

“Find God in all things” reflects Luther’s insistence that the finite is capable of the infinite and his rapt attention to the ordinary graces.

“Always give back” corresponds to the signal emphasis on vocation.

The translation can be done. But is this really who we are? More pressing, Is this really who we need to be, to meet adequately the challenges of this culture of fear? Finally, is this our unique gift? What’s the piece that Lutherans bring to the table, that piece of higher education that is distinctive to us? And if we don’t bring it, no one else will.

I want to talk about the *charisms* of Lutheran higher education, so at the outset I need to tell you what I mean by charism. Quite simply *charism* is theological language for gift. Only this kind of “gift” is not something that you purchase, wrap, and give to someone else. *Charism* is not *commodity*; rather, it comes not from what you can afford but from who you are. So when I ask about Lutheran higher education, I’m talking about identity. Who are Lutherans, and what are the distinctive gifts they bring to higher education simply by being who we are?

Let me illustrate with a very ordinary analogy: Invited to a family picnic, I asked what I could bring to the table, and my sister-in-law said: “Just bring yourself. That’s what we need most.” Actually, considering the Byzantine emotional politics of my late husband’s family, she was more right than she knew. I brought a lot simply by not having been raised in that madness: I was part of another complex set of dynamics. By virtue of that

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very identity, I did nothing to create but had been shaped in for decades, I brought leaven to this gathering, just by virtue of being who I was. It's a very pedestrian, but very apt analogy.

Again the question: What do Lutherans bring to the table, that no one else can? And if we don't bring it, it won't be there—or it won't be there in quite the same way.

I want to explore four charisms:

1. In a setting where stability is prized, we present *flexible, responsive institutions* by virtue of our response to be “always in the process of reforming”—*semper reformanda*.
2. In an academy of competing ideologies, we embody a spirit of *critical inquiry*, thanks to the spirit of Christian freedom.
3. In a world of strangers—even enemies, we regard the other as *neighbor*.
4. Finally, we enter a world of poverty as a *priesthood of all believers*.

I want to survey the landscape of each of these charisms in three ways: *why* it's there; *what* it means institutionally; *where* it challenges a culture of fear.

***Semper reformanda*: Flexible, responsive institutions**

First charism: Lutherans are part of a tradition that sees itself as always in the process of becoming, i.e., ever-reforming or *semper reformanda*. The reason why is that we simultaneously have one foot planted firmly in the Gospel and one planted firmly in the world. Let's look at more carefully at that stance.

One foot planted firmly in the Gospel—and by Gospel I don't mean “book.” At their best, Lutherans inhabit the middle ground between biblical literalism and biblical irrelevance.² “Gospel” telegraphs the “good news” that God became one of us in the person of Christ Jesus. God knows life on the planet intimately—and we'd err in limiting that involvement with just the human species. The apostle Paul got the scope of divine concern right: it was not just “the whole human species” but “the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.” (Rom. 8:22).³

The impact of incarnation continues, as we simultaneously have one foot firmly planted in the world, where we look for traces of God's ongoing activity with us and for us. Hauntingly, fourth-century North African theologian Augustine of Hippo called these “vestiges of the Trinity,” *vestigiae trinitatis*. (*de trinitate*, 12.11.16) The Latin is even more concrete: “footprints” of the Trinity.

One foot planted firmly in the Gospel, one foot planted firmly in the world: this stance, this sense of being bi-locational, as George Lindbeck puts it, calls for a kind of stereoscopic

vision, where we are prompted by the Gospel to listen for God's word to us *now*, in this moment, and we are simultaneously looking into the world for traces of God's presence.

Of course, there are footprints of a lot of things in the world: how do we know when we find one that is a “footprint” of the presence of God?

Certainly, this calls for some discernment, and that's where the Gospel comes in. If it comports with the Spirit of God in Christ Jesus, we can call it a good spirit. If it doesn't, it's bad. The apostle Paul named the “fruit” of that Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22). And textual scholars confirm these habits of the heart that contour relationships with God (love, joy, peace), the other (patience, kindness, generosity), and the self (faithfulness, gentleness, self-control). So if these dispositions are manifest, we've got a “footprint” of the presence of God. Because the Creator walked the earth with the creation, these footprints are everywhere.

“This means that colleges depend on a certain critical mass of non-Lutheran faculty, staff and students.”

The charism of being a community that is ever-reforming invites—even demands—a kind of institutional vigilance for insights that lie beyond our own tight-knit Lutheran tribe. Biblical accounts issue a cautionary word: the closest were the clueless. That is, those who considered themselves “closest” to Jesus, those in his inner circle, were also—alas!—the most clueless about his true identity and his real purpose. Pointedly and all too often, the outsiders were the ones who “got” it: a Samaritan woman in John's gospel (John 4), a centurion at the end of Mark's (Mark 15:39), again, in John's, a blind man begging (John 9:8)—and the demons always know precisely who Jesus is, when the disciples were expecting someone else. These stories constitute a caveat to the “insiders.” We need to keep our noses outside the tent, sniffing the wind for signs of God's presence.

This means that colleges depend on a certain critical mass of non-Lutheran faculty, staff, and students who bring the world into the Quad. This is tougher in a seminary context, where Lutheran identity has a different purchase. Seminaries have to be a kind of confessional “hot-house,” often doing a fair amount of remedial catechetics or confessional calisthenics, so that we train church leaders flexible enough to stand both in the Gospel and in the world.

Practicing being *semper reformanda*, always in the process of reform, keeps our institutions flexible and nimble, alert to cross-currents in the culture. It counsels institutions to let form follow function and be bold in editing out structures that stagnate or no longer pulse with mission.

Some examples: look at the way Lutheran institutions of higher education adapt to context. Pacific Lutheran University finds itself in a region that professor Patricia Killen evocatively calls the “none” zone: more people here identify their religious affiliation as “none” than any other part of the country. It sustains a vibrant campus ministry that has developed a kind of “perfect pitch” for a student body that runs the gamut from cradle Lutherans to seekers. Jewish students find a home in East Coast Lutheran colleges and universities, in part because one doesn’t have to hide or apologize for belief. It fits seamlessly within the fabric of academic excellence. I think particularly of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding at Muhlenberg College. DeAne Lagerquist told me about the Centennial Statement St. Olaf put out for its 100th anniversary. When twenty-five years later, the college put out another, some people protested: “Wasn’t the centennial statement good enough?!” Yes—and it was good enough for then.⁴ Whether it was good for now was another story. *Semper reformanda!*

Institutions change at a glacial pace—even, in an era of global warming!—but particularly in a culture of fear. Above all things, a culture of fear fears change. It registers change as loss, whether loss of identity—or loss of spine. Yet, I think it is precisely our identity as a tradition always in the process of reforming that keeps our institutions flexible and our structures pliant, like green wood that bends in a stiff wind.

The freedom of a Christian

In an academy often torn by competing ideologies, Lutheran higher education embodies a spirit of critical inquiry. This is the Lutheran spirit of both/and, or *simul/et...*, expressed most powerfully in Luther’s understanding of the human person, i.e., that we are both saint and sinner, both *justus* and *peccator*. This insight turns out to be not only a pretty accurate description of human nature, but a good way of navigating the strong ideological currents that course through the academy and the culture as a whole.⁵ These often register as binary opposites, brooking no rapprochement, forcing students and colleagues to choose sides. Because only one of them is “right.”

Lutheran institutions tend to be suspicious of ideological absolutisms. That gives us a fighting chance of breaking through some of the most controversial issues of our time. Think of the abortion debate, which divides into irreconcilable differences between

“pro-life” and “pro-choice.” The very positions suggest that the opposition is either “anti-life” or “anti-choice,” a way of setting up debate that paralyzes discussion. I remember walking into a room where I was supposed to address the topic. The rage was palpable, but beneath it was pure fear. As we talked, the anger dissipated somewhat, and we could explore the underlying fear. We discovered that maybe the fear was the same: fear for children, that their potential was being snuffed out, by the practice of abortion, by poverty, by shame of illegitimacy, by the costs of medical care and child-rearing, by cultural practices that were as abortifacient as the practice of abortion itself, practices that subtly discriminate against children and unwed mothers. It was a much more complicated issues that being “for” or “against.” The freedom of a Christian invites people to move behind anger to underlying fear.⁶

Further, this Lutheran habit of the heart holds seeming opposites in a creative and dynamic tension. It imagines both poles to have at least some purchase on the truth and be connected with an “and,” not an “or.” Something can be both “cost-effective” and “missional.” Or “traditional” and “innovating.” Moreover, this freedom to shake loose from shackling opposition breaks through to the possibility of a third way, a *via media*, a path as yet unseen, which might lead all parties out of their entrenched oppositions.

Finally, this charism admits that, as the apostle Paul put it, “we see in a mirror, dimly...” (1 Cor. 13:12). We don’t yet have that promised, eschatological “face-to-face” view. This side of heaven the best we can hope for are “partial truths,” as anthropologist James Clifford puts it. He relates the story of a Cree Indian in Canada summoned to testify at a trial. When asked to the “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” he paused, then responded: “I can only tell you what I know.” (Clifford and Marcus 8) This charism signals humility, openness to a spectrum of options, and a refusal to cling to only one.

A culture of fear fears humility, despising it as weakness. Everything is agonistic, and only one side is right—and everything and everyone else is dangerously, fatally wrong.

Meeting the other as “neighbor”

The third charism in Lutheran higher education concerns our bearing toward the “other.” Coming out of a monastic context, Luther was used to more familial forms of address, particularly male ones. His fellow Augustinian monks would have been “brothers,” his superiors would have been “fathers.” Further, drawing on patristic language, those called to religious life understood themselves as “friends of God,” placing themselves in that privileged, preferential, inner circle of those closest to mystery itself. Late medieval monastics knew a library of literature dedicated to “spiritual friendship,”⁷ and Luther would have been familiar with all of this.

We have to see Luther's designation of the other, not as friend, or brother or father, but as neighbor, then, as intentional. His training in the Hebrew Bible stood him in good stead, for neighbor surfaces frequently in the Levitical codes as the primary way the people of God organize their lives in community. With Luther "neighbor" re-emerges as the primary way of regarding another person, possibly even another way of regarding another element of God's creation. (Ziemke)

This is a powerful shift away from the *blood* that binds families together and the *preference* that links friends. Let me talk briefly about the latter. We choose our friends, and think of the bases on which we do so: similar likes and dislikes, shared hobbies or sports, the same backgrounds. Preference grounds friendship. Not so with neighbors: from difference and out of diversity, we simply share a common space. And because of that proximity, we have to make it work. Neighbors share a public space, a civic space, and Luther's language points to membership in a larger community than either the bonds of a family or a circle of friends.

"... we bear the face of Christ to the neighbor."

Moreover, Luther develops this Christologically, that is, he gives the neighbor the face of Christ. Again and again, he emphasizes that we bear the face of Christ to the neighbor; the neighbor bears the face of Christ to us. Think of alternative possibilities: one could bear the face of judgment to the neighbor, the face of censure, the face of fear, the face of invisibility. Or see all of these aspects in the face of your neighbor. But to see Christ's there—and to bear it yourself!

Colleges in particular bring this kind of diversity together around a common space, the campus. When you think of the central quadrangle, people come quite literally from all four compass points and across a spectrum of diversities to share a common space. It's got to work, and the sort of citizenship that develops among these diverse neighbors creates a vibrant campus life. On this campus, we sit next to the largest Somalian Starbucks outside of Somalia. It sits in the midst of a growing Muslim community. In the final presentation, we'll hear how this institution has responded to its Muslim neighbors around a shared loss.

In contrast, a culture of fear regards all others as threat, even as enemy. In fact, a culture of fear creates enemies—even when they are not there. Examine the aftermath of 9/11: the enormous

sympathy for the United States in the immediate wake of the Twin Towers' collapse, and how a "War on Terror" squandered that good will, producing more terrorists than it apprehended.⁸ Or consider the immigration debates, which present the other as "alien," intentionally hinting at extra-terrestrial origins. Or worse, an "illegal alien," as if people could be legal or illegal. Neighbor-regard recasts the debate in terms of near- and distant neighbors, asking about an extended civic responsibility to those with whom we share a common space, the border zone. It casts a new angle of vision on the debate. (Spohn and O'Neill)

Priesthood of all believers in a world of poverty

For Luther, the language of a "priesthood of all believers" had civic import, a resonance which is hard to hear today. For Luther, "priesthood" did not so much confirm the various vocations, as give everyone an additional job description in the public realm. It conferred on all people the duties and responsibilities of the office of priest. Chief among those duties was care for the poor.

In his provocative *New American Blues: A Journey through Poverty to Democracy*, Earl Shorris observes: "Martin Luther practically invented the idea of welfare." (205) He had to.

The sixteenth-century Reformation was simultaneously a reformation in social welfare. Institutions responsible for care of the poor were dismantled. What would take their place? Parish priests called to minister to the poor were displaced by married pastors with families of their own to feed. Who would then feed the hungry? Against the horizon of these social realities, the slogan "priesthood of all believers" had a different valence. Priests in the universal priesthood were commissioned by baptism to take on the duties and responsibilities of the clergy, one of which was to care for the poor. (Cf. Lindberg; Torvent; Stortz)

Reading the Reformation as a reformation in support services, one sees Luther's sensitivity to the plight of the poor. His inaugural treatise, the *95 Theses*, repeatedly names the poor. Luther's signal strategy, community chests for collecting alms, receives hefty theological argument. Luther even addresses the root causes of poverty, naming greed and avarice as chief culprits. In his catechetical writing on the Ten Commandments, Luther characteristically turns the negative "thou shalt not" commandments into positive "thou shalt" commandments, thereby increasing their range. "Thou shalt not kill" becomes a positive injunction: "Feed the hungry." Failing to do so "kills" God's creatures and violates God's command.⁹

I remember a conversation with a Syrian Orthodox Catholic businessman several years ago. He was describing the duties of the village priest. High on that list was priest's responsibility "to know the poor," he said emphatically. "This is who a priest is supposed to

be; *this* is what a priest is supposed to do.” Luther would have completely agreed—only he passed that identity and that knowledge onto the community. Poverty becomes a civic concern.

How do institutions of higher education live into this charism to be “priests” in the “priesthood of all believers?”¹⁰ As Lutheran institutions, this is a part of who we are. Catholic social teachings talk about a “preferential option for the poor,” and they urge believers to make choices that comport with a decision to be in solidarity. I’ve always admired that commitment: it’s a decision for action. This is what Catholics ought to do.

Yet, advocacy for and with the poor ought to cut more deeply for Lutherans: it’s not so much what we *do*; it’s who we *are*. It’s not so much a decision for action, as a fact of identity. If we are priests, this who we are. I think this is an element of our identity that is under-explored, not just in colleges and universities, but in congregations, synods, and churchwide offices.

How can we live out this part of our charism? How can an institution be priest?

Colleges and universities have various ways of doing this: service learning, cross-cultural experiences, immersions. These involve various combinations of being and doing: with service learning probably highest on the “doing” spectrum and immersion as highest on the simply “being with” spectrum.

I can’t look at all of these, but I want to look at immersion, partly because it’s concern for being with the neighbor, not simply doing something for the neighbor, and partly to honor the institution at which we find ourselves, Augsburg College. Augsburg’s Center for Global Education has long been at the forefront of immersions trips. Immersion programs differ from service learning projects in their focus on being rather than doing. Students go to live with, eat with, sleep with, people in the two-thirds world. Immersion programs place their primary focus not on building wells, teaching in schools, or running shelters. The mode is receptive rather than productive. Director Orv Gingerich spoke of the distinction: “We encourage people to go as receivers. We want to disabuse students of the feeling that they always have something to give. We want them to receive instead.”¹¹ And what do they receive?

They come to know the reality of the 1.8 billion people in the world who struggle daily to simply stay alive. They come to know the poor. When faculty, staff, and administrators participate in the experience of immersion, it becomes part of institutional culture. Again, a local example, this one from the University of San Francisco, where President Stephen Privett has been taking his leadership team to sites in the two-thirds world for seven years. They have visited El Salvador, Tijuana, and Nicaragua, visiting sites, hearing presentations by experts, members of the local communities, people affected by the issues they wanted

to explore. In Tijuana, they addressed immigration issues; in El Salvador, the role of Jesuit university that had been an institution of resistance during the Sandanista government; in Nicaragua, the presence of grinding poverty in a garbage dump outside the nation’s capital. Each evening after they reflected together over a glass of wine what they had seen and how it impacted concretely the university to which they would return.

In a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Privett observed: “I do not expect that such experiences will lead immediately to new programs and significant changes in the university requirements or policies....What I do hope is that university leaders will develop an increased sensitivity to the heart-breaking struggles of the 1.89 billion people whose daily struggle is simply to stay alive.” As far as this university is concerned, global poverty is the context of higher education, whether it be Jesuit, Lutheran, or private.

A culture of fear plays immersion trips and service learning experiences against the backdrop of a mentality of scarcity—particularly in a recession! It regards such experiences as wasteful and unnecessary, though the team at the University of San Francisco found they cost less than an administrative retreat at a fancy conference center. A culture of fear would argue: clean up your own backyard. Yet, when we do, we find that the fences have been moved out significantly from where we thought they were. We may have built them at the end of the campus property line, or border of the state of Minnesota. Or the border between the United States and Mexico or Canada. We discover our backyard extends now to Pakistan. Or Tegucigalpa or Cairo. Immersion trips emerge as a concrete practice of hope in a culture of fear. They become seminaries wherein an institution learns to be “priest.”

This is what it means to “know the poor”—and in so knowing discover a neighbor who bears the face of Christ.

Practicing hope in a culture of fear

I’ve tried to identify four charisms of Lutheran higher education, gifts we bring to the table simply by virtue of who we are:

In a setting where stability is prized, we present *flexible, responsive institutions*;
in an academy of competing ideologies, we embody a spirit of *critical inquiry*;
in a world of strangers—even enemies—we regard the other as *neighbor*;
finally, we enter a world of poverty as a *priesthood of all believers*.

These are not the only charisms, but these seem to be the charisms needed now. I don’t want to present them as gifts that

we used to have or gifts that we ought to have, but rather gifts that we have, more sharply put: the gift or charism of who we are. In ways that are both non-nostalgic and non-apologetic, we simply need to be who we are.

The world needs these qualities, primarily because the world needs hope. The kind of hope our institutions offer is unique. We all hope *for* certain outcomes: x number of students in the entering class or x amount of dollars in the endowment. Yet, particularly in times of fear, people don't know what to hope *for*. That's when a different kind of hope surfaces: hope *in* something. For Christians, Muslims, and Jews, this hope *in* something is uniquely a hope in Someone, whether Allah or Elohim or Christ, and we find that hope in spite of ourselves. Hope *in* Someone is powerfully and paradoxically that Someone's presence in us and for us. As the author of the epistle to the Colossians put it, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

This kind of hope does not look forward to possible outcomes, it reaches back to what is real. And what is real? Poverty is real; so is freedom, the neighbor, the solidity of the work we do together—at times imperfect, the daily graces that swarm every moment we haven't already scheduled or fretted away. This hope in what is real anchors us in rough seas. Like any good captain we find that when the storm intensifies, we simply cast a deeper anchor.

It's like the child I watched at the pool this summer. He was terrified of the water; he couldn't even stand to get wet. But he leapt in his father's arms, suddenly bold, suddenly a swimmer. He knew he could count on his father catching him. And that certainty grounded his hope.

That's what we bring to the table: hope, the fruit of our charisms.

End Notes

1. For a thorough, non-nostalgic study of what Jesuit education is all about, see Traub. I am deeply appreciative of what Robert Benne has done in his thoughtful survey of higher education, and James T. Burtchaell's work in his massive book, *The Dying of the Light*. And their accounts seem both anxious and nostalgic, longing for a time which may never have existed.

2. The author of the Gospel of John saw the danger of biblical literalism early on: "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40).

3. That incarnation continues through a community of believers who continue to participate in the mystery, incorporating themselves into the body of Christ through baptism and incorporating the body of Christ into themselves through the Lord's Supper. It is a mutual interpenetration.

4. Conversation with L. DeAne Lagerquist, July 28, 2009.

5. My academy of reference was the University of Chicago—Divinity School, a place which proudly proclaimed itself as a "school for the study of religion," but certainly made it tough on believers. Religion was a subject of study, not a love affair with the divine. We tended to reduce it to study of texts, ignoring the practices that breathed life into those texts. But then this is what academics do best, right: read texts. It was a study that was supposed to be objective, impartial, and at a distance. God and things divine were objects of investigation, not subjects of reverence. So we revered other things. I remember during my tenure, Karl Rahner was "the" theologian, and I remember one of my teachers commenting that the Divinity School must have sounded like a frog pond, with everyone running around burping up "Rahner, Rahner, Rahner!" Other gods joined him, Michel Foucault, Emmanuel Levinas. We could reverence these folks—but not God.

6. I develop this argument further in my "letter" in Tickle.

7. Cf. Brown, particularly his chapter on saints as "friends of God;" Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*.

8. The opposite of fear is not gung-ho, guts-out courage. Many times, courage only repackages fear, as T.S. Eliot wisely observed: "Neither fear nor courage saves us" (30). Courage is only fear with a bad make-up job, industrial strength mascara that runs like a faucet when you cry—or when you bleed.

In order for courage to function it needs enemies; it feeds on enemies. As we negotiate a culture of fear, don't be merely courageous, like Don Quixote thrusting our lances at windmills. Be leaders who bear a face of compassion. The opposite of fear is not courage but trust, which is translated into theological terms as faith. Faith regards the other, not as enemy but as near- or distant neighbor. For a Lutheran, all the world's a neighbor—and we get to turn that into powerful political and social capital.

9. Luther does this consistently in his explanation of the Ten Commandments in "The Small Catechism (1529)." (342-44)

10. John B. Bennett and Elizabeth A. Dreyer explore the ways institutions have a spirituality in their article, "Spiritualities of—Not at—the University." (Traub 113-32) They observe that most academics "have yet to attend to the spiritualities of our own academic callings and communities" (113). Lutheran institutions wouldn't call it "spirituality," but they have definitely explored their roles in terms of "calling" and "vocation."

11. Conversation with Orval Gingerich on July 7, 2009. While Augsburg's CGE focuses on immersion trips for students, Jesuit higher education has developed a program focusing on immersion trips for administrators. Directed by Ed Peck and run out of John Carroll University in Ohio, the Ignatian Colleagues Program has a five-fold approach, involving an orientation, an online learning component, a retreat on Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, an international immersion experience, and a final capstone. See their explanation: www.ignatiancolleagues.org. Peck and Gingerich collaborate on parts of the immersion component.

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Artist Statement for *Return of the Booger Man*

The image on the cover of this issue is titled *Return of the Booger Man* and is from a series of paintings titled the *et al series* that I did in 2004-2005 for a Rockefeller fellowship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I consider myself a "community informed" artist and open all my art making to the influence of others. The content of this work comes from drawings and doodles given to me from residents of Cherokee, North Carolina. Drawings were given to me by staff at their casino, from a "photo op Indian" standing on the street, from white and Cherokee visitors to an open mike night at a local coffee shop, and from Cherokee women volunteering at a community center. These images along with my own observations and research were folded together into a creative composition in my studio.

The title and central "booger man" figure comes from the Cherokee tradition of a disruptive clown that sometimes invades their orderly dancing, chasing the women and causing mayhem. This tradition is traced back to the invasion of the Spanish who would invade their villages with their guns blazing and war dogs barking looking for Gold and women. I titled this work "return of the booger man" because their community is experiencing a

second "invasion" from gambling tourists and foreign workers imported to fill the many service jobs in the community. (This time leaving their gold with the Cherokee!)

As a child did you fear the "booger man? I did. He lived under my bed. Do our common "booger man" stories come from this tradition? Possibly.

The wavy blue water in this image represents the Cherokee belief that the after world could be reached through the many mountain springs in their habitat. It was their practice of religiously bathing daily in their stream that taught the English settlers to bath regularly. Change is always a two way street. Change also creates fear and anxiety. The energy filled brush strokes, bright colors, and friendly faced Booger Man represent the energy, fear, and hope found in their community as they seek to honor their traditions while enjoying a good latte and surfing the 'net.

The Cherokee survived change and internalized it into their art. I seek to "ride the wave" of change by engaging with others—most often people I do not know. Each time I come away wiser, less fearful, and often wearing a smile.

JASON PETERS

Hope in the Face of Ecological Decline

– I –

Walking in to campus one day I was greeted by a pin oak decorated with various contraceptives, both mechanical and pharmaceutical. Affixed to the trunk of the tree was a sign: “Birth Control Doesn’t Grow on Trees!”

This slogan is true enough if access to birth control is what you’re interested in, but the ecologist knows better. Birth control *does* grow on trees, and unless a lot of women stop relieving themselves altogether, it’s going to continue to do so. As long as there are traces of hormonal birth control in our ground water, and as long as trees send their roots in search of that water, birth control will grow on trees. Hormonal birth control has reached such concentrations in our streams and lakes that it is feminizing male fish.¹ The eighteenth-century poet, Alexander Pope, in anticipation of such unintended consequences as this, said:

From Nature’s chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.
(*Essay on Man* 1.245-46)

But then Pope was a better ecologist than most of us, for although he lacked the science of ecology he had the benefit of an essentially pre-modern cosmology. For him the *analogia entis* and the intricate world of correspondences still obtained; he believed that we have a place on the chain of being and that we violate it if we attempt to behave as beasts or gods. What is more, he wasn’t one of those specialists who increase knowledge at the cost of fragmenting it. By contrast we moderns, assuming as we do that we are much more “advanced” than Pope (apparently for no other reason than that we live later than he), inhabit

a world where birth control grows on trees and male fish are being emasculated.

I mention Alexander Pope here at the start to suggest that if there is a balm in this toxic Gilead of ours it will be found not in the future but in the past; I mention the Birth Control Tree for a similar but slightly different reason: it joins in a single image things ancient and modern, natural and man-made. Trees, whether in life or imagination, are old; two of them stand at the beginning—indeed at the heart—of our religious tradition, and they call to mind many things, among them life itself, for example, and the knowledge of good and evil. Control, on the other hand, is a fairly new thing; it stands at the beginning—indeed at the heart—of the modern project we call the Enlightenment, and it too calls to mind many things, among them the Faustian bargain or vast weedless monocultures alongside the Interstate Highway and Defense System. And whereas the Tree is a natural artifact made by an artistry we can never fully know, Control as we understand it is entirely of human making and works not by artistry but by trickery or force or both. If eating of the tree came with a consequence, the principal aim of Control is to *outrun* consequence. The old Tree reminds us that we are limited, not boundless, creatures; the new Tree, newly decorated, promises to *deliver* us from limits. And whereas the two old Trees in the garden anticipate a third on a hill whereon death vanquished Death and hope vanquished despair, under the new Tree life vanquishes Life, and hope, far from vanquishing despair, gives way to it.

Now I should say before it’s too late that I do not propose to enter an argument about “reproductive rights.” In our age of increased but fragmented knowledge that’s an argument that

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can no more be had than won. If they could talk the fish would tell us that we are not *large-minded* enough to have it. Rather, I am speaking here, as William Blake did, of the despair that inevitably follows upon the lust for possession and control where possession and control are neither possible nor desirable. “The bounded is loathed by its possessor,” Blake said. “If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot” (“There Is No Natural Religion” [b], iv, vi). I wish to suggest that these two sentences capture exactly our posture toward Creation and our condition with respect to it. The more we presume to bind nature, to control her, the more we as her possessors will loath her, and because we desire—but will always be denied—complete control of her, despair is our inevitable end. On the gates of modernity hangs a sign: abandon hope all ye who enter here.

I should also mention that what I have to say here applies to the political Left and Right equally, which fight as only siblings can. If the “Right” believes that human nature is sacred and that the natural world is our gas station (“Drill, baby, drill”), the “Left” seems to believe that the natural world is sacred and the human body our amusement park (“Get your rosaries off my ovaries!”). The incoherence of these current political positions ought to be obvious to anyone who can tie a shoe. Both positions are ruthlessly individualistic; both have made possession their goal; both are leading us to despair—the specific characteristic of which, as Kierkegaard said, is that “it is unconscious of being despair” (178).

– II –

I’ll grant that the news on only a few environmental issues—population, climate, soil, and water—certainly *conduces* to despair:

Population

Population is tricky business; it’s bedeviled by one of our pet topics, birth control, about which we’re pretty muddled, and hardly ever qualified by one of our most pressing concerns, standard of living, which we are mulishly unwilling to confront—especially in higher education, where we tout “green” standards on Club-Med campuses.

But consider this: the global population doubled between 1960 and 2000 and currently exceeds 6.5 billion. The projection for 2050 is 9 billion, notwithstanding the decline in birth rates among the 25 wealthiest nations. A population of 9 billion, says Paul Conkin in *The State of the Earth*,

raises innumerable issues about available resources, about the level of pollution and waste, about massive extinctions, and about the quality of human life in crowded cities. Countries with nearly stable or even declining populations do not face

some of these problems, but these are the very countries with the highest levels of consumption, resource use, and emissions. [The US, comprising about 5 per cent of the global population, emits nearly 25 per cent of all greenhouse gasses (32).] They also have economies that are predicated on a continued growth in living standards. The pressures on the earth thus come from both directions, from the multiplying poor and the indulgent rich. (23)

But alongside this doubling of the population we’ve seen a doubling, since 1970, of food production—thanks to an official government push to drain farms of their farmers and replace the farmers with oil, machines, credit, and petroleum-based chemical inputs. But doubling food production has come at the expense of farmers, farms, farmland, rural communities, real fertility, and edible food. These are expenses that the selective bookkeeping we call the economy has managed to keep off the books; it has “externalized” them, as economists like to say, which means to lie about them, to charge them to someone else, usually the unborn. To top it all off, we still have more than 800 million people worldwide who are underfed, to say nothing of those in the so-called developed world whom cheap calories have magically rendered at once overweight and undernourished.

What too few people realize about all this is that, allowing for the effectiveness of vaccines and the *temporary* benefits of antibiotics, achieving a global population of 6.5 billion was possible only by massive infusions into our daily lives not of contemporary but of *ancient* sunlight in the form of oil, peak production of which we will soon reach if we haven’t reached it already. A population inflated by cheap oil *cannot* be sustained in its absence. Resource wars and massive starvation will not likely occur; they will certainly occur.

Climate

The causes and effects of climate change, to say nothing of the disputes surrounding it, have been widely published. Here are just a few remarks from the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) summary report for policymakers:

- Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level.
- Global GHG emissions due to human activities have grown since pre-industrial times, with an increase of 70% between 1970 and 2004.
- Altered frequencies and intensities of extreme weather, together with sea level rise, are expected to have mostly adverse effects on natural and human systems.

- Anthropogenic warming and sea level rise would continue for centuries due to the time scales associated with climate processes and feedbacks, even if GHG concentrations were to be stabilized.
- Anthropogenic warming could lead to some impacts that are abrupt or irreversible, depending upon the rate and magnitude of the climate change.
- Partial loss of ice sheets on polar land could imply meters of sea level rise, major changes in coastlines and inundation of low-lying areas, with greatest effects in river deltas and low-lying islands.
- As global average temperature increase exceeds about 3.5°C, model projections suggest significant extinctions (40 to 70% of species assessed) around the globe.²

Water

All that melted ice won't mean more usable water, however. According to Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute, in the leading grain-producing states (Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas), the "underground water table has dropped by more than 30 meters (100 feet). As a result, wells have gone dry on thousands of farms in the southern Great Plains, forcing farmers to return to lower-yielding dryland farming" (40).

The stories of aquifer depletion in China and India are grimmer. A World Bank report on water supplies around Beijing predicts serious shortages there, and Tushaar Shah of the "International Water Management Institute's groundwater station ... says of India's water situation, "When the balloon bursts, untold anarchy will be the lot in rural India." In parts of Mexico "the water table is falling by two meters or more a year"—at a time, by the way, when one of Mexico's chief sources of income, the Cantarell Oil field, is in steep decline. "Since overpumping of aquifers is occurring in many countries more or less simultaneously, the depletion of aquifers and the resulting harvest cutbacks could come at roughly the same time. And the accelerating depletion of aquifers means this day may come soon, creating potentially unmanageable food scarcity" (Brown 40-41).

Soil

And we haven't even come around to talking about rates of soil erosion. At one time our prairie loam was about fifty feet deep in some places (Conkin 47), but the U.S. is losing soil ten times faster than the rate of natural replenishment; China is losing it thirty to forty times faster. Over the last forty years (that is, during the height of the agricultural revolution that American Agribusiness is so proud of) 30% of the world's arable land disappeared (Lang).

Soil and water, however, are related—rather like links in the kind of chain that Alexander Pope was interested in. Better soil retains water better, and better retention in turn allows soil to do a better job of supporting biodiversity, which is the only kind of multiculturalism that really matters: if it dies, so will all the multiculturalists.

But intensive agriculture has so depleted water and oil resources that we have decided to intensify corn production so that we can put food in our gas tanks. This is such a good idea that we're currently losing about twenty-four pounds of soil per gallon of ethanol produced. Water pollution from increased use of nitrogen-based fertilizers and pesticides will worsen each time we put another acre in corn to support our addiction to the automobile, which means that cities and utilities will have to spend more money to remove those excessive amounts of nitrogen from tap water. That is, to purify our water we will have to poison it even more.³

On top of all this we face what Hamlet called "that monster, Custom." That is, we face over a century of habit, a century of monstrous inertia.

– III –

In other words, we have work to do. In my own attempt to think our problems through to the end I have been unable to wander very far from the three main points that follow. Each involves a kind of reorientation, the first practical, the second philosophical, and the third theological.

Practical Reorientation

One of the first things we must do, especially in higher education, is disabuse ourselves of the belief that energy and technology are interchangeable. When energy goes into decline, technology will not step in to take us up the mountain for a weekend of downhill skiing, nor will our current alternative energy sources pick up where oil left off. In terms of Energy Returned on Energy Invested (EROI), oil is special and almost certainly irreplaceable. The bulldozer that built our interstate highways isn't going to be retrofitted with a little wind turbine spinning merrily around on top of its cab. Neither solar energy nor wind nor coal nor hamsters running in their exercise wheels will do for us what oil has done. It doesn't do any good to invent new technologies if there's no energy to run them. There's no use saying that "someone will think of something." Thinking about *technology* does not call *energy* into being.

We must also disabuse ourselves of the belief that disciplinary knowledge and specialization, whether in school or out, are sufficient to the demands of responsible citizenship. Specialization perpetuates ignorance just as surely as a highly

reticulated division of labor and long distances between production and consumption. We educate for disciplinary expertise and thereby shrink awareness of the world's complexity—as when, for example, a graduate knows how to budget for food but doesn't know anything about the production of it.

This is why I have often wondered whether general-education curricula should include interdisciplinary courses on oil and agriculture—and whether passing such courses should be a graduation requirement. It is why I continue to be perplexed by the fact that students can major in economics or business, go on to earn MBAs, and never be told a single thing about thermodynamics or the basic principles of ecology.

The perils of this negligence are easy to illustrate. What, for example, do leading economists think are the dangers of climate change?

- William Nordhaus, Sterling Professor of Economics at Yale: “Agriculture, that part of the economy that is sensitive to climate change, accounts for just three percent of national output. That means there is no way to get a very large effect on the US economy.”
- Oxford economist Wilfred Beckerman, in his small 1995 book entitled *Small Is Stupid: Blowing the Whistle on the Greens*: global warming is not a problem because it affects only agriculture, which is only three percent of GNP. “Even if net output of agriculture fell by 50 percent by the end of next century, this is only a 1.5 percent cut in GNP.”
- Thomas Schelling, former president of the American Economic Association and in 2005 a Nobel laureate: “In the developed world, hardly any component of the national income is affected by climate. Agriculture is practically the only sector of the economy affected by climate, and it contributes only a small percentage—three percent in the United States—of national income. If agricultural productivity were drastically reduced by climate change, the cost of living would rise by one or two percent, and at a time when per capita income would likely have doubled.” (Daly 14)

Leaving aside the question of whether these redoubtable and well-educated economists intend to eat in the future, we must call them out on their errors. “[I]t is not true,” says the economist Herman Daly, “that agriculture is the only climate-sensitive sector of the economy; just ask the insurance companies or the folks in New Orleans.”⁴

Apparently you can be an expert in the dismal science but never know anything about the real wealth of the world that backs the paper. This is one of the great crimes of higher education; it is also one of its great cheats.

All of this is part of a larger question concerning the problem of ecological illiteracy, which, as the forgoing suggests, is an unselective pestilence as likely to blast a Nobel laureate as a frat boy.

A third thing we must do is assign proper value to basic human tasks and skills and to those who can perform them. For too long we have been dismissive of the knowledge and the skills—call them the domestic arts—by which we all live; for too long we have lived by surrendering skills and purchasing necessities; for too long we have assumed that the machines and the ungraduated will supply all our real needs. Deracinated and deracinating vandals that we are, chasers of whatever grant money inflates our egos, we have taught our children and students to be as we are: global citizens, citizens of *every* place, which is to say citizens of *no* place—that is, not citizens at all, but parasites.

But when globalization fails in the absence of cheap energy, dead for want of an oil transfusion, we are going to have to recover the basic skills and habits of local culture. I say let every house that can, but also let every college campus, have a large, highly visible vegetable garden tended by *everyone* who likes to eat; let us have compost heaps steaming everywhere to remind us to pay our debt to the soil. Let us have leaders committed to dismantling, not enlarging, our vast system of technological dependencies, and adults committed to living defensibly and responsibly and competently before the young. The time is now to stop talking about large-scale solutions only and to start enacting the small-scale manageable solutions available to each of us. No one can care for a globe, but everyone can care for a neighborhood. Such care, however, cannot be carried out by the ecologically illiterate or the specialists bent on enlarging knowledge by fragmenting it.

Philosophical Reorientation

But we also have real intellectual labor to get done, and I think it begins with nothing less than first understanding, then dismantling, the modern project in whose iron grip we have been squirming for several centuries now. The great difficulty here is again a matter of habit. We don't really know that we've been squirming. We think we're being caressed and fondled.

This project was inaugurated by such well-known villains as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Bacon, and then perpetuated by people who have never heard of them or read them—as well as by people who have. It is a project that even its most self-conscious critics still believe in and still *want* to believe in, the alternative being unimaginable to them.

But what any of us *want* may have a limited shelf-life; what we *need* is abundant and enduring and waiting for us if only we will turn around and look.

If Classical thought recommended that we *know* ourselves, that we *order* our desires, that we orient ourselves by our possible perfection, that we reconcile ourselves to Nature and her *limits*, Modernity has suggested the opposite: that we *be* ourselves, that we orient ourselves by our *desires*, and that we employ those desires in *mastering* Nature to satisfy our *infinite appetites*.

Machiavelli's recommendation—that we increase our power to extract what we want from nature, that we subjugate nature and conquer an unyielding and niggardly Fortune lest it turn our infinite desires into misery (See, for example, the chapter on Fortuna [XXV] in *The Prince*)—provided a theme upon which various impresarios of the Enlightenment played variations. They are well known, so I'll rehearse them quickly: We have Hobbes's famous "perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death" (1.xi, p. 55); we have Descartes' promise that science will make us "lords and possessors of nature" (Part 6, p. 46); and we have Bacon's goal of easing man's estate by vexing Nature's secrets out of her (XCVIII) in order to achieve what Hobbes called "commodious living" (1.xiii, p. 71).

This attitude toward Nature has led to "commodious living" all right. In easing our estate by becoming masters and possessors of nature we have turned the whole world into one great big commode, and *everything*, not just the morning toast but everything, ourselves included, is swirling ever nearer the vanishing point. We have been doing precisely as the architects of modernity suggested: torturing Nature to extract her secrets and confiscate her wealth. "Social progress," said Thomas Huxley a couple hundred years later, "means a checking of the cosmic process at every step" (81). Progress means establishing "an earthly paradise, a true garden of Eden, in which all things should work together towards the well-being of the gardeners: within which the cosmic process, the coarse struggle for existence of the state of nature, should be abolished" (19).

But such gardeners are not living by the limits of the garden; they are living—rather, they are *attempting* to live—by the limits of their own "intelligence," an intelligence that, as the diminished health of the garden indicates, has been disastrously fragmented.

I don't think it will do to take the usual cool post-modern stance and say with wry or ironic condescension that "of *course* we know the Enlightenment is over." No one really *behaves* as if this is so. How we can say this and yet act as if we're going to science our way out of the ecological crisis in large measure *created* by the methods and assumptions of science is just one more example of how good we are at reconciling ourselves to incoherence.

More torture isn't the solution to too much torture. More commodious living isn't the solution to too much commodious living. More easing of man's estate isn't the solution to too much

easing of man's estate. The more we try to keep the world we've built running the more we will empty ourselves of love, first for the world and then for one another, until, as Blake said, the bounded is loathed by its possessor. We have presumed to possess Nature—as many in this country once presumed to possess slaves—with the expectation that we can escape the loathing. This, as our history shows, is madness. It is also a good example of despair as Kierkegaard understood it.

The delusion that we'll science our way out of our problems persists for a number of reasons, one of which is that we want it to persist, and we want it to persist because we recognize, if only subconsciously, its intricate and inextricable relation to our standard of living and the artificial wealth that has temporarily bankrolled it. But artificial wealth depends on real wealth. Artificial wealth increases only at the expense of the real wealth of the world. You can't have your fifth cell phone in as many years apart from extraction and pollution, which are the *alpha* and *omega* of our economy, the ultimate condition of which will be exhaustion. Comfortable with this state of astonishing incoherence, we are utterly unimpressed with Nature's economic principle of return or the natural cycle of death and resurrection by which Nature renews herself. No: we want the extractive economy that enriches itself temporarily by destroying itself permanently. Our standard of living requires it.

But the delusion that we'll science our way out of our problems persists for another reason that may hit a little closer to home for those of us in higher education. It persists because we have consented to a version of the university that is in every way compatible with our role as Nature's torturer. According to the older view, the university is the *custodian* of knowledge and wisdom; according to the new one, the university is the *producer* of knowledge and the scoffer at wisdom. But it ought to be obvious by now that to produce knowledge at the cost of transmitting wisdom is to prepare a catastrophe. By a kind of institutionalized myopia we have supposed that such crises as we face in population, climate, water, and soil have nothing to do with our preferring one version of the university to the other, and there is little indication that someone is going to come along anytime soon to spit in the dust and apply the healing mud to our eyes.

The thing to do, really, is to get one thing straight: that we are the custodians, not the manufacturers, of knowledge, wisdom, ways, skills, restraints, and virtues (most of which we're going to have to relearn—or learn for the first time). Absent this knowledge and wisdom, absent these ways, skills, restraints, and virtues, we will move comfortably into the role of Nature's jailer, interrogator, and torturer, and the university we inhabit, not content with any talk of restraints or limits, will say to its subjects, "publish or perish." The best way not to perish in this

menacing climate is to imitate the extractive economy. The best way to “produce knowledge” is to run the academy on industrial standards—that is, to proceed from extraction to exhaustion with no concern for the effects on real places of whatever knowledge gets produced.⁵

Now I am not against research or writing or scholarship. Obviously scholarship has a place in the university. But it is a great danger to conduct it in contempt of the past, which is to say with no real knowledge of books written before last Tuesday, or of practices pre-dating the invention of the combustion engine. It is dangerous to act with no understanding that Nature imposes limits of her own, limits that modernity has been at great pains to ignore and abolish.

Lacking premodern definitions of ourselves and of nature—that, for example, we were made a little lower than the angels; nature is our Mother but also our judge—we live by other definitions, specifically the ones dreamed up in the nightmares of the knowledge producers who haven’t enough wit to deviate from the script handed them by their dissertation committees, who cannot tolerate the notion that the university is the custodian and conservator of knowledge, and who scoff at Religious fundamentalists but are themselves Progressive fundamentalists. Only in such a place as the modern university—conceived in desire and suckled on despair—could we come round to thinking of nature not as our mother or judge but as a kind of ATM stocked secretly each night by leprechauns. It may seem that I am overstating the case, but I don’t think I am. We are a deeply superstitious people: we believe that money, not topsoil, produces food; we believe that if we run out of topsoil, scientists will invent it; we scoff at people who believe in Big Foot but firmly believe in an Invisible Hand. We are incredible dupes.

What will expose the prevailing superstition once and for all will be the last secret Nature parts with under torture—and it will be the one secret we don’t want to know: that she doesn’t have any funds left. And we, who could have been living by Nature’s economic principle of return, which has always been available to us from the past, will realize—too late, I’m afraid—what anyone with a bank account ought to know: that you cannot draw endlessly on funds to which you contribute nothing. We are writing checks against a natural capital that is finite. It has a bottom to it.

C.S. Lewis, deeply suspicious of what he called “the image of infinite unilinear progression,” would have loved the Birth Control Tree.

There is a paradoxical, negative sense in which all possible future generations are the patients or subjects of a power wielded by those already alive. By contraception simply, they

are denied existence; by contraception used as a means of selective breeding, they are, without their concurring voice, made to be what one generation, for its own reasons, may choose to prefer. From this point of view, what we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument. . . . And all long-term exercises of power, especially in breeding, must mean the power of earlier generations over later ones. (55-56)

Lewis was taking a stand against a project (we call it modernity) that has at its core (1) the belief that man is a progressive animal and (2) the presumption that he has an unassailable right to conform nature to his desires by the means of applied science. His ultimate concern was that Control would bring about the abolition of man, and he took pains to be clear about it: to live in contempt of tradition is to secure for ourselves our own demise: “There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man’s side. Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger” (58). The story of American farming is a good example: it is the story of machinery evicting farmers from the land. We should have no difficulty in our moment of technological gee-whizzery illustrating what is meant by the abolition of man. We’re endangered and won’t even put ourselves on the list.

“Man’s conquest of Nature,” Lewis said, “turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature’s conquest of man.... All Nature’s apparent reversals have been but tactical withdrawals. We thought we were beating her back when she was luring us on” (68).

I mention Lewis here because half a century ago he articulated fairly well our own situation: it isn’t that in this great modern project of ours we haven’t quite yet figured out how to quit destroying the sources we live from and that pretty soon—somewhere along that line of infinite progression—we *will* figure it out. It isn’t that at all. It’s that we have made a Faustian bargain and sold our soils. Destruction has turned out to be the inevitable consequence—and, with it, the desecration of Nature and the obsolescence of ourselves. And yet we’re still patting ourselves on the back for how clever we are.

If the *light* within us is darkness, how great is the *darkness*?

Now I am not going to pursue this line any further than simply to mention it, but what this means, I believe, is that there are not, as we have been told, *two* orders, the natural and the moral. There is *one* order. In violating the natural order, we violate the moral order as well. Likewise, offenses against the moral order register in Nature. We live and move and have our being in these offenses. We must learn to see the despoiled creation as the consequence of these moral violations.

Theological Reorientation

If I am going to recommend that in education we cease treating the past with contempt and that we stop leap-frogging into the dark future without at least shedding some light on it from the past, I feel obliged to do the same with respect to matters of faith. So I come now to the third point—theological reorientation—to say that there is such a thing as orthodoxy and there are dangers that attend those who ignore it. And, again, we cannot behave as superstitious fundamentalists of progress. We cannot behave as if the Tradition has nothing to offer.

The word “vocation,” for example, gets batted around a lot these days, though by now overuse has rendered it a kind of deflated currency. But it seems to me that the Protestant notion of vocation is nevertheless one of the most important contributions of the Reformation. If you begin with a high doctrine of creation, as is the tendency in the Protestant West, or with a high doctrine of the incarnation, as is the tendency in Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, you are obliged in consequence to recognize the essential *goodness* of matter. God pronounced the creation very good and in time found it worth dying for. As one of the hymns of the Church puts it, God did not “abhor the Virgin’s womb.” And we in our vocations—not only as celibates in the cloister or at the altar but also as married woodcutters and farmers and professors—are engaged in the task of restoring the fallen order to its essential goodness. This is emphasized in some versions of Calvinism especially and it is, I think, an improvement upon the older version of Vocation according to which only those called to celibacy “have a vocation.” We must fulfill our several callings for the good of others, for the glory of God, and in the service of a lapsed creation that groans in the agony of its exilic fallenness.

But even this improvement upon or expansion of the notion of vocation must be understood in the context of the Church’s insistence on the inherent goodness of matter. It would have been quite impossible, I’m convinced, for the Church to have held off the various versions of Gnosticism—and to have condemned them as heretical—were it not for her strict doctrinal Trinitarianism and her rich practical sacramentalism. But you see both are part of the significance of the word *orthodox*, which means at once “right worship” and “right doctrine.”

Now the most efficient definition of Gnosticism I know of is this: that creation and fall were one and the same event—that we fell not when we ate of the tree but when, becoming incarnate, we made eating necessary. It follows that our salvation will come only by our being delivered of the flesh, its life in the world, and by the accumulation of knowledge necessary thereto. All this, we must remember, the Church rejected.

I want to make two quick applications of this rejection of Gnosticism, one bearing upon education and the other upon our view of Nature.

The first, bearing upon education: we suffer an inveterate Gnostic tendency in education. In holding that the life of the mind is a higher calling than the life of the body, in educating students for intellectual but not physical tasks, we set the life of the body in the material world at a discount and so perpetuate a suspicion of the creation. Education is an easy elevator ride up out of the drudgery of real work in real material conditions. That work will be done by those who have not purchased a diploma. Education’s attendant technology—the elevator is a good example—promises to deliver us from the constraints and limitations of the flesh. St. Augustine railed against his former pals, the Manichaeans, for being unwilling to pick their own food. We, it seems to me, are the new Manichaeans. We wish to live, but we wish to live by doing no more work than writing checks, and we invite our students to live only by the sweat of their check-writing. There is no use pretending that we don’t tell this story exactly to the high school students we recruit and whose abject dependents we have become. “The education we offer you will allow you to sit down for the rest of your life until you come to that strange modern invention known as retirement, when you will be endlessly provided for and endlessly entertained (and still ‘sexually active’). The treadmill will move electronically so that there will be only minimal bodily involvement in your exercise; the electric can opener will deliver your wrists from any exertion whatsoever, and when you brush your teeth the toothbrush itself will move so you don’t have to. You will have risen above the limits of your life in the flesh. You will have used your body for sex (without consequence) but nothing else (also without consequence). Thus you will have conformed the world to your desires.”

I’m suggesting here that our technological fascination is essentially an attempt to overcome the hateful limitation of the flesh and that our unthinking capitulation to it betrays a heretical tendency, the consequence of which is the destruction of the very creation that was worthy of a dying God.

The second application (of the Church’s rejection of Gnosticism), bearing on our view of Nature: the theology of the Church teaches us that grace comes by *means* of nature, not in contempt of it; that the finite world contains the infinite—just as the Virgin Mary, the created, contained God, the creator. The Church teaches that we achieve the infinite by penetrating the finite—not by skipping alongside it or running from it or crashing through it with the brute unintelligence of a bulldozer. It is by eating bread and wine, not by thinking about them, that we receive God. We are baptized *in* water, not in contempt of it or by closing our eyes tightly and thinking hard about it. Our first experience of God is bodily and, if our death be good, so is our last, just as a baby’s first experience of her mother is physical. That the Church should be

called our Mother at whose breast we are fed is altogether apt. In God, said St. Irenaeus, nothing is empty of sense.

Now if it is true that nature is the means—not the source, but the means—of grace (this would include the spoken and written word; it includes music and everything the senses experience), we may legitimately wonder what the doctrine of the control of nature, which has led to the destruction of nature, does to our experience of grace. I raise this as a question because I believe it's a real question. We have cut ourselves off from nature; to what extent, therefore, have we cut ourselves off from grace?

William Lynch once provided an apt analogy that might help us answer the question: you see what happens to a beached fish when it tries to get its oxygen directly from the air instead of by the mediation, as it were, of water: first it goes into contortions until at last it dies. We who would get grace “directly” rather than by the mediation, as it were, of nature are like this beached fish exactly: first we go into contortions—behold our desperate haste to succeed in such desperate enterprises—until at last we die. A fish needs oxygen but can't get it except by means of the water, just as we need grace but cannot get it except by means of nature. Fully immersed in water, which is its home, the fish can thrive; fully immersed in the creation, which is our home, we can thrive. Take the fish out of the water, or take man out of creation, and the result is the same. The fish can no more survive without water than we can without bread and wine—or indeed without water. We were no more made to despise or skip out on creation than the fish was made to despise or skip out on water. This, I take it, is an apt emblem of our sacramental relationship to the world, and according to it the Eucharist may imply not a special but a normal—or rather *restored*—state of affairs. Lest the point be lost, I am suggesting that the more we evict ourselves from creation by the technologies that render the body obsolete, and the more we alienate the creation by destroying it, the more like a fish out of water we become. What contortions afflict us we may well behold; what death awaits us we may well be hastening.

– IV –

I conclude now with a few words about hope. I frame them between (1) the doctrine of the incarnation, which reminds us that, although flesh apparently isn't good enough for those of us who get our community life from Facebook, it was nevertheless good enough for God, and (2) our eschatological hope grounded not just in the resurrection but in the resurrection of the *body*, which is yet another of the Church's affirmations of creation.

There are several apocalyptic delusions lining the bookshelves of the Family Christian Bookstore these days, and they offer the false hope that salvation comes not by pilgrimage through

the world, as the New Testament teaches, but by escape from it. This is the old Gnosticism rearing its ugly heretical head. In this version of human history, the whole show ends when a vengeful God opens up the ultimate can of whoop-ass and goes in search of Dandies, Darwinians, and Democrats. This version, complete with the Heavenly Hoover that sucks all the good people off the earth just in time, strikes me as contrary to the whole sweep and tendency of the Christian Bible, which, if I read it aright, moves incrementally *away* from positing a vengeful God and *toward* pointing out the consequences that people bring on themselves. We see this, for example, in the whole movement away from ritual sacrifice. “Go and find out what this means,” Jesus says, quoting Hosea—and against the backdrop of the Abraham-Isaac story: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Even the Gospels present the death of Jesus in essentially non-sacrificial terms. Jesus gets lynched under Roman law. There are guilty perpetrators whose guilt is obvious and identifiable. Such a movement *away* from placing violence and bloodthirstiness at the divine doorstep and *toward* placing them at ours opens onto a view of history in which everything, all the mischief so perplexingly presented in the apocalyptic literature, redounds on *us*. Such is the inclination of Rene Girard, for example, who is working out of the Christian tradition, but it is also the inclination of Elie Wiesel, who obviously isn't. One of the many fascinating things about Wiesel is that he cannot shake his own obsession with the long-standing kabalistic notion that the fate of God is intimately bound to the fate of man, that God is in exile waiting for man to deliver Him, that our eschatological hope rests with God, to be sure, but that it also rests with us, or rests perhaps in that difficult synergistic work according to which we learn to say with the Mother of God, “be it done unto me according to thy word.”

But if the mischief redounds on us, as I am inclined to say it does, so too does the hope. Now one feature of hope is that it increases as people behave in ways that make hope possible. For example, more and more people are concerned about where their food comes from. More and more of them see the value in local agriculture, in local living, in communities built to human rather than to mechanical scale. Farmers' markets, CSAs, and garden co-ops are springing up everywhere. Go to one and what you hear is the buzz not of engines but of humanity, of God's image and the delight God's image takes in God's creation. And what you feel in the air there is not a warm fuzziness; it is the hope that always increases as men and women behave hopefully. This is an operation of grace coming to us by means of the flesh. Neither the garden nor the market is the source of hope; neither place is the source of grace, but such places and the people in them, their work and their talk and their very presence, are its vehicles. Hope here is not so much in the ends as in the means.

But I don't see how we can justify bringing the Baconian approach to Nature and claim to be hopeful men and women. I don't think gizmos help us become fully human, notwithstanding the childish giddiness we exhibit with each new purchase—no doubt intended to evict some aspect of our bodily life from this refulgent creation. We're not alive and fully human if we live in contempt of Nature, removed far from it, way at the far end of a broken connection.

To prepare to make things right—trouble notwithstanding, trouble be damned—to prepare for *something*, is to be hopeful.

And let's remember that hope is a theological virtue that we are required to have. We are not required to be *optimistic*, but *we are* required to be hopeful. I rather doubt Jesus was optimistic riding into Jerusalem. But then optimism wasn't required of him.

When the rivers of your country are too polluted to drink from, it's time to get a new country—so said Edward Abbey. There are two ways to do that: to up and leave (we'll call that the automatic rapture option), or to remake the country. The second is obviously the more noble, the more hopeful, option. And let us not forget that in our founding myth we are exiled from Eden but not from creation. We're not at liberty to leave—regardless of what the Left-Behinders think.

We're told that God gave his only begotten son not because God so loved heaven but because God so loved the *world*. We're also told that for freedom did that only begotten son set us free, which is to say that we are not bounded creatures loathed by a possessor. We are free, rather, and loved. Why, therefore, would we desire to possess and to bind the world—or one another? The end of such desire is not hope but despair.

End Notes

1. See, for example, <<http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/newscience/2007/2007-0905philbyetal.html>>.

2. See <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf>.

3. See “The Unintended Environmental Impacts of the Current Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS): A Guide to Future RFS Policy.” Environmental Working Group. Available: <http://www.saveourevironment.org/factsheets/a_guide_to_future_rfs_policy-environmental-working_group.pdf>.

4. “But that's not the error that concerns me,” Daly continues. “The error that concerns me is to treat the importance of agriculture as if it were measured by its percentage of GNP. Surely these distinguished economists all know about the law of diminishing marginal utility, consumer surplus, the fact that exchange value reflects marginal use value and not total use value, and so on. Presumably they also know that the demand for food in the aggregate is famously inelastic. So in the

light of all of those things, it seems pretty obvious that the percentage of agriculture in GNP is not a constant of nature, and that in the event of a collapse of agriculture, it could increase enormously” (14). See Daly, et al.

5. Patrick Deneen has usefully called attention to the Clark Kerr's Godkin Lectures of 1963 (later published as *The Uses of the University*), which argued for a new “multiversity” that would be “central to the further industrialization of the nation, to spectacular increases in productivity with affluence following, to the substantial extension of human life, and to worldwide military and scientific supremacy” (199). These lectures touched off the Berkeley protests, which later transmogrified into anti-authoritarian demonstrations. “Worth noting is that both Kerr and the liberationist protesters—antecedents of the modern Right and the modern Left—agreed on the fundamental point that what was desirable was the dismantling of the classical liberal arts tradition. Both ultimately came to share the belief that the object of the university was human liberation from old restraints—whether material (to be solved through science and modern economics) or moral (to be overthrown by Left campus radicals). Today's university faculties are largely populated by denizens of the liberationist Left in the form of the faculty, while the administration remains dominated by technocratic professionals who largely evince allegiance to Kerr's declared ambition to pursue the aims of the multiversity. An unholy alliance exists in which both sides pursue their agendas separately but utterly compatibly, both in profound agreement that what is most fundamentally undesired is a return to liberal education. For both, a liberal education represents a restriction on the aims of the modern university. Both seek liberation, but on terms that would be unrecognizable to the original definition of ‘liberal’ in the term ‘liberal education.’ . . . The one thing needful in our time—an education in self-restraint, limits and tradition, the lessons our colleges and universities were designed to reinforce—is the one thing that our great universities are no longer well-designed to provide since our elders generally agree such an education is undesirable.” (Deneen, “When Campuses Became Dysfunctional”)

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REBECCA JUDGE

Hope in a Period of Economic Decline

We're certainly going through a period that puts the "dismal" in the dismal science otherwise known as economics. The unemployment rate has doubled over the last eighteen months as the economy has lost 6.5 million jobs, with more job losses expected in the near future. Most reasonable economic forecasts predict that the nation's unemployment rate, presently at 9.6 percent, will reach and even exceed 10 percent before the year's end. The long-term unemployment rate is now at 5.1 percent, meaning that over half of the people who have lost jobs during this economic downturn have been without a salary for more than fifteen weeks. The downturn has affected not only income, but wealth. Household wealth has decreased by about 50 percent between 2004 and 2009, hitting older households hardest. Families headed by individuals between the ages of 55 and 64 saw the median value of their assets decline from \$315,000 in 2004 to just \$160,000 in 2009, changing the retirement plans of a generation of baby boomers (Rosnick and Baker 1). While our leaders look for green shoots and lights at the end of tunnels, we are left to console ourselves by finding hope in the fact that the rate of our descent into the economic abyss of unemployment, foreclosure, and bankruptcy seems to be decreasing, even as the descent itself continues.

Some solace, if not genuine hope, is offered by the fact that we've been here before. The unemployment rate reached 10.8 percent in November 1982 at the depths of the last big recession. But twelve months later, the unemployment rate had decreased by two percentage points, and by 1987, it had returned to its pre-recession level of 5.9 percent. The central message of *Recession 101*, a national billboard campaign introduced this June, is that the single most interesting fact about recessions is that they indeed end.

But, to me at least, this recession seems different. Maybe it's my age. In 1982, I was in the second year of my Ph.D. program. I had very little income as a research assistant, but I also had neither debts nor responsibilities to anyone but myself. Twenty-seven years later, I am ten years from what I thought was to be my retirement age. I have income on which I've grown dependent and a job that I would hate to lose. I have a house that has lost twenty percent of its assessed value in the last year, a child starting college, another one starting high school, and a retirement account whose value decreases even as I continue to plough more into it each month. I studied the last recession; I experience this one.

No doubt these altered circumstances explain away much of the difference in the public's attitude towards this most recent recession. In the years since 1982, a generation of baby boomers like myself have matured, launched careers, and accumulated wealth and houses and children and parents who need extended and expensive care. But I don't think that a generational life-cycle model alone explains the panic that has gripped the nation since September of 2008 when within a single month Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac collapsed; Merrill Lynch was purchased at fire-sale prices; Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy; the president, warning that "our entire economy is in danger," asked Congress for \$700 billion to relieve private financial institutions of their bad debts; and the stock market suffered the largest one-day decline in history. Sure, recessions happen, but this one seems bigger, and scarier, than any that our generation has experienced.

This panic, the one that presidents and billboards alike are trying to address and assuage, this heightened social sensitivity to increases in unemployment and decreases in the value of

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stocks, is not, I believe, the result of hypersensitivity on the part of baby boomers to the regular peaks and troughs of a business cycle. The panic that accompanies this recession, which was largely absent from the last, results from the fact that many of us are genuinely and profoundly surprised at this recession's mere existence. We had been told, and we sincerely believed, that this recession was never going to happen. In July, 2004, Washington Post columnist George Will proclaimed that "the economic problem, as understood during two centuries of industrialization, has been solved. We can reliably produce economic growth and have moderated business cycles." Industry deregulation, globalized markets, tepid governmental regulation of commerce, the environment, and financial institutions, and the inscrutable monetary policy of Alan Greenspan had created a squeeze chute which effectively, we thought, corralled the economy, constraining its movements to a few harmless bucks and kicks. Our panic in the face of this recession is the panic the rodeo crowd experiences when the bull breaks out of its squeeze chute, goes its handlers, and charges the stands.

And it is in this adrenalized response to the charging bull that I find the possibility for hope in this period of economic decline. Having experienced the destructive capacity of this wild bull market, we might be inclined to favor one of the breed's more docile hybrids.

I do not mean, by choice of metaphor or example, to disparage market systems in which owners of private property are free to exchange their goods and services. But I do hope that my metaphor of a charging bull highlights the danger Paul Tillich found embedded in the bourgeois principle that "the free flow of human productive forces will lead inevitably to a rational formation of society." (49) Charging bulls are not rational. Furthermore, we neglect our obligation to our neighbors in the rodeo audience if we dismiss their injuries with a crude utilitarianism that compares the costs inflicted by the bull to the benefits he generates for his owners. Markets, as most economists are fond of saying, are *amoral*, without morals. We fail in our moral duties when we allow these amoral institutions to have the final say in determining our neighbor's welfare.

A Lutheran understanding of our role as economic agents needs to be grounded in the consideration of the impact of our actions on our neighbors. In contrast to Calvin, who largely supported the economic institutions of the day, Luther railed against a self-interested norm for market behavior. Writing on "Trade and Usury" in 1524, Luther observes that

The merchants have among themselves one common rule, which is their chief maxim and the basis of all their sharp practices. They say: I may sell my goods as dear as I can. This

they think their right. Lo, that is giving place to avarice and opening every door and window to hell. What does it mean? Only this: 'I care nothing about my neighbor; so long as I have my profit and satisfy my greed, what affair is it of mine if it does my neighbor ten injuries at once?'.... On this basis trade can be nothing else than robbing and stealing other people's property. ("Trade and Usury" 87)

Instead of selling dear, Luther recommends that concerns for the neighbor dominate market transactions, writing that,

your selling ought not to be a work that is entirely within your own power and will, without law or limit, as though you were a god and beholden to no one; but because this selling of yours is a work that you perform toward your neighbor, it must be so governed by law and conscience, that you do it without harm and injury to your neighbor, and that you be much more concerned to do him no injury than to make large profits. (88)

The raging bull of the market is to be constrained by considerations of its impact on others.

Now, in fairness to Luther and to history, I need to point out that the "law and limit" Luther would impose on merchants does not originate with the nation state. Government intervention into the marketplace was, according to Luther, "not to be hoped for," as "we Germans are too busy with drinking and dancing to give heed to such regulation." (89). Instead of answering to secular authorities, Luther's merchant answers to God. The sale of goods is itself a work that is subject to the vocational call that sanctifies all human effort. As such, its practice is bound by concerns for neighbor.

But who is my neighbor? Should I be concerned for my fellow Minnesotans? My fellow Americans? My fellow human beings? And how do I translate my concerns for my neighbor's welfare into my own market transactions in this global market place? In a consumer society, is consumption itself an act of vocation, and if so, does it matter if I buy free trade coffee or the house brand? And how do these questions relate to the more immediate question of finding hope in a period of economic decline, or the broader question of the vocation of the Lutheran college?

The Lutheran understanding of market transactions as works that we perform toward our neighbor expands the boundaries of economic analysis beyond the consideration of economic efficiency, forcing us to consider explicitly the personal, social, and distributional impacts of markets and market allocations. This means that we need to examine, with some suspicion, the analytical framework common to economics that justifies sweat shop labor, for example, by casting the tradeoff between prostitution and sweatshops as analogous to the choice between pizza and

subway sandwiches (Marglin 225). In both cases, the rational utility maximizer simply chooses the option that promises to generate the greatest happiness; economics recognizes no moral difference embodied in either choice. In the words of Larry Summers (2003), “as long as the workers are voluntarily employed, they have chosen to work [in the sweatshop] because they are working to their best alternative.” But a Lutheran understanding of market transactions as works subject to a vocational call demands that we consider our duty to those who labor for us. Through duty to each other, the worker in the shoe factory and the consumer who purchases the pair of athletic shoes are linked in a way that is not reflected in the economic model of individual utility maximizers. A Lutheran understanding of market transactions explicitly acknowledges that linkage, and the responsibilities it imposes.

The Lutheran understanding of vocation as extending into all aspects of our work in this world, including our market transactions, means that we need to be particularly mindful of the biases and distortions introduced into economic analysis by the discipline’s two traditional reference points: the highly stylized, rational, utility-maximizing individual and the nation-state. The individual who serves as the reference point for economic analysis, *Homo economicus*, is like one of those new Japanese robots in that, while bearing a striking resemblance to humankind, it seems to be missing some critical parts. *Homo economicus* goes about its days, rationally choosing between pizza and submarine sandwiches, eight hours of prostitution or eight hours in the sweatshop, calculating with amazing precision the total amount of “utils” generated by each activity, and, by applying the appropriate discount rate, is able to attain the maximum amount of happiness by the time its battery loses its charge. This life narrative for *Homo economicus* reduces our moral obligation to nothing other than assuring that it is given as much choice as possible. As only *Homo economicus* knows which choices will maximize its happiness, the rest of us would be wrong to force *economicus* to consume so many calories a day of protein, or so many units of education, or so many square feet of housing, if doing so reduces the amount of income *economicus* has to spend on other goods. Our duties to each other as individuals are simply reduced to the avoidance of activities that restrict others’ choices. Furthermore, since in a market economy, choice is limited by income, society fulfills its obligation to its members by maximizing the income generated within that society. This means that the nation-state dispenses its moral obligations by subjecting its decisions to cost-benefit analysis, which is itself limited to the consideration of only those costs and benefits accruing to the citizens of the nation state.

During the economic expansion that preceded the recent and precipitous market decline, critics of this sort of economic fundamentalism were mostly dismissed as either idealistic or

unschooled. As nothing succeeds like success, the economic model credited with providing the roadmap that guided our ever-expanding trajectory was increasingly relied upon. To paraphrase from Karl Polanyi, social values in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century were corroded by “a crude utilitarianism combined with an uncritical reliance on the alleged self-healing virtues of unconscious growth” (33). Benefit-cost analysis became the order of the day as federal regulations of all types were forced to prove their merits on the basis of the relative magnitude of their impacts on the economy. Economic values trumped other commitments in the areas of workplace safety, environmental protection, energy policy, and consumer product safety. The crude utilitarianism that forms the basis of benefit-cost analysis was used to justify everything from privatizing social security to refusing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to water-boarding. And all of this is the result of an allegedly moral commitment to expand the choices available to a humanoid known as *Homo economicus*.

“... encouraging another national conversation concerning our moral obligations to one another.”

Even as the Great Depression created the political environment that replaced *laissez-faire* with the New Deal, this recent downturn holds the possibility of encouraging another national conversation concerning our moral obligations to one another as fellow citizens, as fellow beings created in God’s image, and fellow souls reconciled to God through Jesus’ death and resurrection. It’s a conversation that I believe our Lutheran colleges are well suited for as intellectual heirs to both the rich understanding of vocation that is one of Lutheranism’s gifts to moral discourse, and the doctrine of the two kingdoms. Together, these two intellectual traditions provide a space for a discussion of our duties to each other which is necessarily constrained and informed by the explicit recognition of our plurality and diversity.

The depth and breadth of this recent economic downturn has exposed some of the folly of trusting in markets and market valuations alone to provide for our physical needs. Government is also necessary. As Luther instructs in his Large Catechism, “although we have received from God all good things in abundance, we cannot retain any of them or enjoy them in security and happiness unless he gives us a stable, peaceful government.” (430).

Our ability to retain and use God's abundant gifts to us depends on government, not markets. Governments may use markets as tools to accomplish their purposes, but they need to be careful to avoid surrendering their purposes to these tools. The hope to be found in this recent economic decline is that we recognize and reclaim our role as active moral agents called to serve our neighbor in all of our interactions, even—or perhaps particularly—those taking place in the market.

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DAVID L. TIEDE

An Apostolate of Hope

Theodore Hesburgh, the legendary president of Notre Dame, raised millions of dollars inviting others into a vision. “Let us make the finest Catholic University since the Middle Ages.” Hesburgh’s appeal to Roman Catholic loyalists was the envy of many development offices, but the case was more difficult within the university. When curricular reform was directed toward “the Catholic intellectual tradition,” more than one faculty cynic declared “Catholic intellectual” to be an oxymoron.

Still, I join the Catholics, non-Catholics, and advocates for diversity in higher education who argue that if you teach, lead, or learn in a Roman Catholic institution of higher education, you owe your work better than such an arrogant dismissal. Let’s also hope that the Quakers at Earlham College will be aware of their intellectual, moral, and spiritual tradition in the core of their work and will sustain their distinctive community of learning. And what does Brandeis bring to the table from its Jewish identity? In the past century, most higher education became secularized, overtly or tacitly, while places like Bob Jones University stand out as sectarian. Marsden notes the transformed soul of the historic American university. Harvard, Chicago, and the University of Minnesota were once publicly committed to *veritas* or public discourse or being land-grant institutions. And even if Burtchaell’s image of *The Dying of the Light* is sentimental, the declining cadre of strong colleges with a Christian identity prompted the Lilly Endowment to invest a half-billion dollars to engage in the “theological exploration of vocation.” Put simply, the world of higher education will be more consequential because Notre Dame is a Catholic University, *if indeed they know what they are doing in enacting that identity.*

No one who understands the economies and ecology of education thinks it is easy.

When we seek to measure the difficulty, our frame of reference could be the sustainability of these institutions themselves. Without revenues and students, “dollars and scholars,” our loftiest educational missions and deepest faith commitments are at risk. We can’t take the fundamental disciplines of institutional management for granted. Fiduciary governance must be exercised continually. It’s like ice skating. If you don’t do the compulsory figures, you won’t be given the opportunity to freestyle.

But when we are discerning “the Vocation of a Lutheran College,” we are looking beyond concerns for self-preservation, and are pursuing more than restoring the past. We are seeking to embody and enact a distinctive wisdom to prepare the leadership that communities, agencies, institutions, and nations need to navigate the uncharted future.

This gathering of ELCA institutions of higher education with our presiding bishop is itself a sign of the care for our shared vocation. It is also worth noting that the Lutherans who generated our array of strong colleges across the land also built a powerful network of social service agencies, disproportional to our national numbers.

I am serving a term as the “Theologian in Residence” for the Board of Lutheran Services in America. Lutherans have engaged the public world of social service at a strength and competence far beyond their numbers. In comparing notes between the governance of social service organizations and educational institutions, one of the pieces in the LSA reading stack was Darrell Jodock’s unpublished essay entitled: “The Third Path: Gustavus Adolphus College and the Lutheran Tradition.” Darrell contrasts “the sectarian model” of being a church-related college with the “non-sectarian” model. The one is thoroughly “rooted in a tradition and sees itself

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as a kind of 'religious enclave' in the midst of a secular society." The other "prizes inclusiveness. ...It avoids religious differences—by minimizing them," emulating the larger, secularized society.

The sectarians direct their enterprise for conversions. The non-sectarians often once had faith identities. But in Jodock's terms, their "religious commitments are now so general and superficial as to be innocuous." Neither model engages religious diversity. He proposes a third model that "takes religious diversity seriously enough to engage and struggle with it, while at the same time remaining deeply committed to the importance of its own Lutheran tradition. Rather than an enclave or a microcosm (of the society), the third option is a well dug deep to provide something helpful for the entire community."

With those in social service, the world of religious and cultural diversity is our context. Like them, we focus in Lutheran higher education on the "well dug deep to provide something helpful for the entire community."

And that's where we will go today. What will it mean to fulfill the promise of our vocation publicly? Who in the world needs what we do? My proposal is that **the vocation of Lutheran higher education is to be an apostolate of hope for the world.** Our challenge is compounded by our need to differentiate ourselves from sectarian educational strategies without allowing academic anxieties about all religious convictions from shutting down our intellectual and institutional vocations. What convictions and practices does the wisdom of the Lutheran tradition bring to our work of equipping our graduates to be leaders in the world of the 21st century?

To prompt our deliberations, listen to the challenge that Larry Rasmussen gave us verbally at Augsburg in the Batalden lectures on campus in February, 2009.

His topic was the grave risks of global warming, not so much for the physical future of the planet, but for the sustainability of the human and biological future of the earth. Even if we kill off human life cooking the earth, he noted, the planet will keep spinning. Well yes, we thought, but that is hardly consoling. Then Larry, who is the *emeritus* Reinhold Niebuhr professor of ethics at Union Seminary and a Lutheran expert in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted Teddy Roosevelt, of all people. Old "bully pulpit" Teddy once remarked that every generation is faced with a "presenting occasion," and those who lead are advantaged by knowing what the times demand and helping people face reality.

Instead of Teddy Roosevelt, his source could have been Martin Luther or Jesus. In Luke's gospel, Jesus is quoted as saying to the crowds,

When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. And when you see the

south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12:54-56)

Jesus was teaching that smart as people are at predicting the weather or reading the skies, their expertise was self-absorbed hypocrisy unless they were alert to what God is doing in the world. So we better understand the presenting occasion of our time theologically, that is, interpret our times in the light of God's purposes and call.

Luther was also "playing it forward," confident that the living God intends the mercy of Christ for the world. He knew the importance of dealing with real, present concerns. Listen to one of my favorite quotes:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point at which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not *confessing* Christ, however boldly I may be *professing* him. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if one flinches at that point. (Cited in Hall 108)

So what is the "presenting occasion" of our time? What are its metrics? And what does it mean for Lutheran higher education to be an apostolate of hope?

"... these are measures of defining realities of our time."

12,000, 350, and \$1.25 are three metrics, three powerful, public, symbolic numbers: 12,000 for the points needed in the Dow Jones Average to assuage our economic anxiety; 350 for the maximum parts-per-million of CO₂ particles to sustain human life on earth; and last year the World Bank identified the income of 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty as less than \$1.25 per day—12,000, 350, and \$1.25.

Other numbers can be cited, but these are measures of defining realities of our time. And if the vocation of a Lutheran College is to be an apostolate of hope, we better be smart about how our deepest convictions can inform and equip our institutions and our graduates for leadership in making the world a more trustworthy place.

Apostles are people, agents of an authority or empire or of God's rule. Apostolates are agencies or institutions or means

for the exercise of authorized powers. So, Jesus sent his followers as agents or apostles of his reign to preach, teach, and heal. The orders of the Roman church are still largely defined by their apostolates of preaching, teaching, or healing. And the sixteenth-century Lutheran Reformation centered the commission to preach in the congregation as God's "mouth house," to teach in the schools—including the universities, and to heal in the broad systems of health and social service that still exist.

They are all apostolates of faith, hope, and love, not least hope in fearful times.

If the vocation of a Lutheran college is to be an apostolate of hope, how can our deepest convictions inform and equip our institutions and our graduates for leadership in making the world a more trustworthy place?

Our Augsburg students roll their eyes about the "V" word, vocation, but most of them come to appropriate "vocation" as an interpretive lens for their purposeful lives. Many use Dr. Mark Tranvik's famous triangle diagram where "vocation" stands at the nexus of God, world, and self. Vocation is not just about me and God. God's love for the world, this earth on which Jesus lived and died, pulls us, sends us into the world's great need. And we engage that real, concrete world as agents, apostles of God's love and justice.

So, as they say on NPR, "Let's do the numbers!"

12,000 is the daily Dow Jones average from a time when we remember it as good news. To be sure, most of the earth's people have never heard of the Dow Jones average, but the economic flattening of the world means that in a global economic depression, everyone feels the pain, and as usual, the poor suffer most. And everyone is anxious, especially those who have the most. The productivity curve of wealth and abundance is stoked with debt, trade disparities, health inequalities, and immigration disputes. In the politics of Bill Clinton's campaign and Obama's presidency, "It's the economy stupid!" But will the anxiety of our age dissipate, if and when the Dow again surpasses 12,000?

Our faculties are filled with expertise to help us interpret the present economic time. When the news reporters are looking for a financial sound bite, they would do well to interview our economists, political scientists, community planners, and business faculty. The public, along with our own students, will discover our professors are economically smart about the real world. They won't hear either an uncritical idolatry of the market or an ideological rant against capitalism. Well, it could happen. Some might be tempted to cheer one side or the other. But then our hypocrisy would be transparent in our tuitions, compensation, mortgages, retirement accounts, and the college's endowments. We are embedded in systems that work quite well, at least for us, even as we seek higher pay.

California Lutheran recently brought over the Center for Economic Research and Forecasting along with faculty from

UC Santa Barbara. They are getting ink in the Wall Street Journal. What a coup! What game will they play on the Lutheran education field?

Can our schools communicate a deep understanding along with our technical smarts?

Think about the public strengths of your school. Look at your institutional website. Business and leadership programs are proliferating. Majors in mathematics and digital systems are marked for employability. Do we bring a distinctive intelligence to the work?

"Do we bring a distinctive intelligence to the work?"

Lutherans are known for focusing on justification by God's grace through faith. Luther identified "justification by faith" as the article of faith by which the church stands or falls. He was protesting the Roman church's control of the "treasury of merits" needed to enter heaven. That sixteenth-century economy of salvation also created a financial economy that burdened people with proving their worth before God. In studying the Apostle Paul's letters, Luther rediscovered Christian freedom. Human worth is not based on scrupulous performance nor obtained by purchase, but freely given by God, received purely by faith.

The faith of which he spoke was not merely a list that had to be believed, but a trust, a confidence in the God whose reign was enacted in Jesus. "Anything on which your heart relies and depends," said Luther, "is really your true God." He then warned against relying on the false god of wealth, "the most common idol on earth" and also "great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family and honor." Those "who trust in them have a god also, but not the one true God." (387)

Luther's talk of "the one true God" makes relativists nervous. This is where the prophetic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam part ways with spiritualities of human ascent or enlightenment, confessing that there is a God *extra nos*, outside of us. But pay attention to the character of this God and the belief that bears the quality of trust. This is the kind of faith that moves with strength from its center rather than guarding its boundaries. This is how the Lutheran tradition navigates the pluralism of a world of many cultures and religions, holding steady without insisting on its own way.

Our new Islamic neighbors in Cedar-Riverside have told us that in the refugee camps in Somalia, the word was that the Lutherans

are safe. So Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Immigration and Relief Services have helped open the door for Muslim students in our Lutheran colleges. In turn, Muslim parents have every right to expect their faith to be respected and their children will be received in good faith in our Lutheran colleges. This is not another environment of relativism, explaining away beliefs, but in authentic, critical pluralism, we deal “faith to faith.” Lutherans are mere “justified sinners” with no cause to manipulate others because their own worth is based on a trust relationship.

Now let me be clear. God’s justification is both personal and public. Lutherans have specialized in pastoral care, and American religion is highly individualistic. But the story is also prophetic. For the prophets, human history is an arena of struggle where God’s reign is enacted and God’s will is defied. The apostle Paul also saw God’s righteousness empowering our vocations in God’s public agency of justice and mercy for the world.

In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:19-20)

Jesus’ freedom in dealing with all conditions of people displayed his Messianic authority in his life and death. His resurrection vindicated his mission of God’s care for apparent outsiders. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is quoted as quoting the prophet Hosea, who was quoting God, “Go learn what this means, I desire mercy not sacrifice.” (Mat. 9:13; Hos. 6:6). When his followers announced “Jesus is Lord,” their faith irritated the empire’s official rhetoric that “Caesar is Lord.” Most were loyal to the Roman order, even in the military. Still their apostolate of hope was prophetic testimony. God’s rule in Christ is finally not a rule-based system of control, but a relationship of trust, even love.

So how does justification by faith inform our apostolate relative to a faltering DOW?

Let me take three quick runs at it to prompt further deliberation.

One: You don’t have to be a wizard to discern that the DOW at 7,500 is a wake-up call, if not a panic. Even 9000 calls for reorientation, for the change of mind the ancients named *metanoia* or “repentance.” Some breast-beating is surely in order for Wall Street’s abuse of the financial systems as well as by all of us for how our acquisitive economy has enslaved people with debt for doing their duty as consumers, just our getting stuff. But the wisdom of justification by faith moves beyond penance to trust. Jesus’ opening line in Mark 1:15 is “Repent and believe in the good news!” The good news worthy of trust is that your battered financial statement does not measure your true worth or even your impact.

Or your institution’s worth! The schools with the deepest endowments were the first to feel the impact on “business as usual.” When your financial model is locked down, the justification of the *status quo* is pretty secure. The signs are all around us that profound change is coming to higher education, in part because of the new digital world and in part because the financial projections were scary before the market fell. Merely improving good schools could protect vested interests for a time, even tenure. But denial of change could waste the opportunity of a crisis to reform our institutions for their future work.

Two: Think about the Countrywide fraud and Madoff schemes. What’s the big surprise? We were suckers for a faulty bill of goods on the basis of what Douglas John Hall calls, “doctrinaire optimism.”(158-69) It sounded too good to be true, even when we were tempted by easy money and financial institutions betrayed their public trust. Did we forget sin? Justification by faith is grounded in an analysis of our compromised human condition, and God who justifies the ungodly still is intent on our making the world trustworthy. Imagine what every academic discipline and teacher could contribute to this vocation!

Three: Our Christian story was formed in an anxious time and reformed in another. Listen to a still more ancient witnesses, way before the Dow Jones average.

The author of Isaiah 40-55, who is known as Second Isaiah, was the prophet who interpreted Israel’s return from Israel’s exile in Babylonia. The verse you are about to hear was also cited in Luke’s account of Jesus’ parting words to those who were about to be sent as his apostles to the ends of the earth. In times of profound change, God’s story is about more than the restoration of a glorious past.

Is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isa. 49:6)

So if the faltering DOW is a sign of the times that alerts us to change and reminds us of our compromised condition, it is also, by God’s grace, a call to renew our apostolate and play it forward in a new time. God has the earth and all the nations in mind.

Let me be more direct on 350 and the hope of stewardship of God’s earth. Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy* identifies 350 as “the most important number on earth!” An active Christian, he sits lightly on theological arguments as he writes for broad publics. 350 CO₂ parts per million is a more urgent number than the DOW at 12,000 because we are already beyond the limit. So let me provide some theological grain for that mill as we consider 350 and the exercise of our apostolate in higher education. Maybe we can at least sweep away some of the religious chaff.

Chaff is too kind a word for the popular heresy focused on hastening the end of the *Late, Great Planet Earth!* (Lindsey) This dismal disdain demonizes environmental science, Palestinian rights, and world peace, giving aid and comfort to theories of American exceptionalism and absolutizing our rights “to get ours while there’s still some left.”

I feel a rant coming! But our apostolate requires more than our self-righteousness.

My exploration of early Christianity as the apostolic form of the faith of Israel has been illumined by how a Jewish friend described the New Testament as “One of the major commentaries on Israel’s scriptures.” Indeed! Jesus’ God is Israel’s God.

The Marcionites tried to throw out Israel’s scriptures, and the Manicheans thought the earth itself was a dirty trap from which their spirits yearned to be free. But Jesus’ scriptures, and Paul’s, and even Luther’s first area of expertise, was our Old Testament.

In Genesis, God made the earth to be good, not perfect or even finished, but good, good, and very good (Gen. 1:4, 10,12, 18,21,24,31). “The earth is the Lord’s and its fullness” sings the psalmist (Ps. 24). The Revelation to John concludes not with torching of the earth, but with God’s reign coming to the earth, renewing the paradise of God’s creation with its plants and animals (Rev. 21-22). Jesus’ God loves the world (John 3:16).

Luther had blind spots, but when asked what he would do if he knew the world would end tomorrow, the old Saxon reportedly replied, “I would go out today and plant a tree so that the Lord would find me doing what I was sent to do, caring for the earth.”

The narrative of our apostolate is not a rigid creationism, locked into the science of previous millennia. But it is a story of human communities of peoples and stewardship of the earth itself. The beginning and end of the story are filled with hope in God. You don’t have to be a Christian to care for the earth. Many others are, in fact, far ahead of us.

I was intrigued to read the 350 website (<<http://www.350.org/>>) mobilizing October 24, 2009 as the “International Day of Climate Action.” The first line sounds almost like the church at Pentecost. “What’s the best way to introduce the 350 mission to the world?” they ask. And the second line identifies the context of 4000 languages being spoken on earth. “Our mission,” they declare, “is to inspire the world to rise to the challenge of the climate crisis—to create a new sense of urgency and of possibility for our planet.”

The 350 mission to the world is realistic, engaged hope, and so is our apostolate!

And our third number for interpreting the present time is \$1.25.

Now we are in the realm of human love and justice.

Neither love nor justice is easy. As an educator who taught only graduate students for thirty-five years, I am in awe of the

skill and care so many of you exercise in drawing your students into the adventure of learning. Teaching sophomores in a required religion class is humbling and inspiring. Love and justice start with caring for these young people.

The apostolate of the Lutheran college is grounded in love and justice for our students, welcoming them with a respect for their vocations they may not yet understand and serving their educations with the excellence their callings to leadership will require.

“The beginning and end of the story are filled with hope.”

Mark Tranvik recently told me that he welcomes the new Augsburg students into the world’s 4% club. These are the few in the world with access to higher education. 4% might be a more appropriate metric for our apostolate. It is dramatic enough. But the \$1.25 figure pushes us past the guilt of privilege to what the Liberation theologians call *conscientization*. When he heard about this conference on the vocation of the Lutheran College, Orval Gingerich, our vice-president for International Programs and Director of Augsburg’s Center for Global Education, raised a prophetic voice. He called all of our attention to how “the moral implications of the rich and poor of the world being linked in ways never known before raises serious questions about educational priorities for all students, not just those preparing for work to alleviate poverty.” (E-mail 6/23/09)

Orv also sent along two commentaries from *The Chronical of Higher Education*. The first is by Stephen Privett, the president of the Jesuit University of San Francisco. As Martha Stortz knows better than I, the Jesuits and the Lutherans have very compatible apostolates in higher education. Well, how obvious is this? Any tradition that honors Jesus and the prophets can’t escape the conviction that hiding from the poor in precincts of privilege is an educational failure, as well as a moral lapse. And we need the full range of our wisdoms to help each fulfill our callings. Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Service are partners in the Minnesota initiative to end poverty. LSS seeks to focus on the working poor, while Catholic Charities attends to the poorest of the poor. Their approaches are complementary, each grounded in rich understandings.

The Lutheran conviction of Christian freedom means that we don’t have to be perfect, but we are called to be practical. What will actually help the poor in our midst?

Many of our schools have strong community based learning. Look at the Wagner College Plan and its Center for Experiential Learning! When The Center for Democracy and Citizenship moved from the University of Minnesota to Augsburg, our president, Paul Pribbenow, told the press that this is a fit because: “We believe we are called to serve our neighbor.”

The second commentary was by Peter Singer at Princeton University. He and Jeffrey Sachs are truth tellers about the scale and shame of global poverty. Their question is, “When are we going to do something?”

It’s like listening to our radicalized Augsburg nursing faculty when they return from Namibia or Pine Ridge. They prophesy! The thousands we pour into exotic medical procedures for one person could immunize a whole nation of children. And the nurses are superbly professional, linked into the Mayo Clinic. But they are going for it. Listen to the title for their cross-cultural pharmacology class: “Amulets, Potions, and Remedies!”

That’s freedom! And hope!

The prophetic vision is a promise to the world. “I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isa. 49:6) And Jesus’ followers are also sent with his apostolic commission to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8) “Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;” testifies the apostle, “and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor. 13:13)

Trust is the heart of the matter. Love is hands at work. All Christian vocations are grounded in faith and empowered for actions of love for our neighbors and the world. Higher education has a distinct apostolate of hope, refusing to accept things as they are, realistically tracking the metrics, yet confident by God’s grace of what can be.

Our Lutheran Colleges are called and sent to prepare wise leaders who will:

- navigate the ambiguity of our dominant economy with an unfaltering trust;

- act in irrepressible hope to renew the future for the earth and all people; and
- live in love and justice with our neighbors.

End Note

1. Darrell Jodock is the Drell and Adeline Bernhardson Distinguished Professor of Religion at Gustavus Adolphus College. He developed this brief essay from a presentation he made to the Gustavus Board of Trustees in October, 2002. [We hope to publish this essay in the next issue of *Intersections*. RDH]

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CARYN D. RISWOLD

“Annoying the Student With Her Rights:” Human Life *Coram Hominibus* Reflections on Vocation, Hope, and Politics

The author of Col. 3:8 was writing to a divided community that needed to “get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language,” and was trying to give an account of hope to unify them. The various ways that our civic and political community is divided today are numerous. Is there hope, harmony, or any kind of unity in an age of ideological partisanship? Having survived the interminably long 2008 presidential election, pausing for a breath before the start of the 2010 midterm Congressional election, while already hearing speculation about the 2012 slate of presidential hopefuls, we are asked to think about the reasons for hope amidst the anxiety bred by a political climate that seems to be based on fear and mistrust. Our shared Lutheran tradition and our shared vocation as educators provide a context from which to speak and work, and they are reasons and resources for hope.

The 2008 election had a pretty significant presence on college campuses around the country, and data shows that 66% of 18-29 year olds voted for Barack Obama (CNN Election Center). That two major themes of his campaign were hope and change are obviously relevant to the theme of this conference. I want to share one curious encounter I had with a student last fall to provide entrée into some reflections on hope and politics in the context of our vocation and the Lutheran tradition.

Students in my political science colleague’s “Parties and Elections” class had been deputized to register people to vote on campus, so there was a community effort on campus to encourage students to participate in the election. The deputy registrars came

to classes with forms, sat in the student center during lunchtime, and set up tables outside of events on campus to catch the crowds and register new voters. For a couple of class periods before one such registrar was to come to my class, I was reminding my students that they needed to bring their drivers license and student identification the following week if they were going to register to vote. I talked about how exciting and memorable your first presidential election can be, shared stories about my first voting experiences, and emphasized why it is important to vote.

Finally, on about the second or third day of these promotional announcements, a young woman said with great exasperation, “I don’t WANT to register to vote.” I stopped in my tracks, a bit shocked amidst all the general election-fever, and said politely, “Who would like to tell Ashley [not the student’s real name] why its important to register to vote?” The other students in the class immediately piped up with all the proper responses: We are the ones fighting these wars. Our generation has to pay off these debts. We have to deal with the fallout from this economic crisis. We are the leaders of the future, and so forth. Ashley said, “Oh, I know about all of that. My boyfriend is about to deploy to Iraq.” I kindly said, “Well, then don’t you think you should have a say in how that goes?” She said, “I don’t understand it all and I don’t want to vote for the wrong thing and I just don’t want to be a part of it. If I register, then I have to vote, and then, I’m a part of the whole mess.” I gently reminded her that she already was.

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That was about the end of the discussion that day as we moved on to the lecture topic at hand. The interchange came up, though, one more time on my course evaluations at the end of the semester over two months later. Here was the anonymous comment: “Also, voting is your own personal right a right to participate and not participate so it was very unprofessional when you were annoying the student with her rights.” Annoying the student with her rights. That is a great description of my job, and our vocation.

By starting with the story of Ashley, I want to look first at some of the sources of anxiety and fear in the political arena, and some of the more disturbing consequences of those fears. Then, I will engage some of the resources of our Lutheran tradition in a way that might speak to these collective anxieties. Finally, I will reflect on how our vocation as undergraduate educators, and the vocation of a Lutheran college in general, provides a unique reason for hope in the midst of all of this anxiety and fear.

Our sources of anxiety: Fear of change, mistrust of difference

Back to Ashley: What was she worried about? Actually, it is kind of refreshing that she actually knew that she didn’t know enough to make a good decision, and in resisting the responsibility that comes with voting, she gets it in a fundamental way. There *is* a lot at stake in our political arena and with our voting decisions. You *should* know about all of the issues and candidates in depth before you step into the voting booth. Ashley was perhaps subconsciously aware of the change of her own responsibilities that came with being of legal age to vote, and she resisted because she was afraid. Rather than just view Ashley as an immature nineteen-year old shirking her democratic duties, I think we can also see her as properly humbled by the power of the democratic process and understandably afraid of change.

Of course, in our jobs as educators, we would like to see our students seizing the opportunity to participate in a democratic election. Everyone should read every candidate’s position statements, learn about and research issues that they care about, and understand the historical context for every decision that they make. This is much of what we do in our professional lives, and these are some of the skills we would like to impart to our students: the ability to think well, to read well, to write and communicate well. But we should not forget about how overwhelming all of that is, and how “annoying” it can be. Like me, a large number of my students are first-generation college students. For these young people especially, all that comes with a college education is simultaneously empowering and shattering. It is empowering insofar as it opens up the world in a way that their

parents may not have experienced. It is shattering because it makes it hard to go home again, because home has changed and so have they. We should not forget that this is a source of anxiety for the particular people with whom we spend our days and lives. The fear of change that comes with a college education and with grown-up responsibilities which we encounter in students like Ashley is natural, and to a degree it is understandable.

Fear of change is one thing that breeds anxiety in the political arena. This is especially true for anyone who has become comfortable with the status quo, or anyone who benefits from the way things currently are. This fear becomes sinister when coupled with another source of anxiety: mistrust of difference. The very thing that Barack Obama embraced to catapult him into the history books as the first African American president, change, is a source of hope for many while it remains a foundational source of anxiety for many of his opponents and detractors. One feared change, though, is very specific. In many ways he is similar to many other presidents: an Ivy league educated lawyer with humble family roots, a strong work ethic, a sharp mind, and a charismatic personality. We have seen all of these things in other presidents. What we have not seen before, literally, is the color of his skin on a president. This is a specific source of anxiety for many of his critics and it gets cloaked in other issues and language: the prejudicial mistrust of black men by the white establishment is the dirty secret of American racism that still pervades our culture and our history. Add to this a generalized Islamophobia and Obama’s Indonesian-schooled youth with a Muslim stepfather, and we end up with legal complaints that he is not a U.S. citizen (despite the release of his birth-certificate in 2008, something never demanded of any another president or candidate), blog and talk-radio rhetoric that refers to him as an “Islamofascist nazi” or “Islamofascist monkey,” campaign rallies last year where enraged audience members shouted “terrorist” and “kill him,” and the widespread use of socialist as a dirty word. All of this is meant to engender fear and hatred among an already anxious population. Fear of change naturally accompanies a young person into college, and often throughout the maturation process, but here in politics when fear of change is coupled with mistrust of difference, it takes on a sinister and destructive form.

Anticipated results of this fear of change and mistrust of difference led to the Department of Homeland Security’s April 7, 2009, report warning about a likely uptick in right-wing extremist violence: “...rightwing extremists may be gaining new recruits by playing on their fears about several emergent issues. The economic downturn and the election of the first African American president present unique drivers for rightwing radicalization and recruitment.” The report indicates that rightwing extremist organizations are stockpiling weapons and using the financial crisis as a specific

tool for anti-Semitic extremist recruitment. It reminds the public of “white supremacists’ longstanding exploitation of social issues such as abortion, inter-racial crimes, and same-sex marriage.” (Office of Intelligence and Analysis). One example cited in the report itself is the April 4, 2009, murders of three Pittsburgh police officers by Richard Poplawski, a white supremacist who talked about the influence of “the Zionists” and spread rumors about a coming gun ban under President Obama. (Anti-Defamation League). The release of the DHS report was roundly slammed, mocked, and chastised by conservative media personalities as ideologically motivated and inaccurate.¹ Within two months, the murders of Dr. George Tiller and Holocaust Museum guard Stephen Johns at the hands of right-wing extremists provided further sobering confirmation of the accuracy of that assessment.

The key motivator identified by the DHS is fear. I want to be very specific and talk about how race- and gender-based fear and hatred play a unique role in these two cases. Racism and sexism are at one level a mistrust of difference along with an insecurity about one’s own identity in relationship to that difference. Racism clearly motivated James Von Brunn to enter the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, with the stated intent to kill as many Jews as possible. He is an outspoken white supremacist and anti-Semite who is also on record as part of the “birther movement” insisting that Barack Obama is not a U.S. citizen (Stein). Racial hatred and fear was also echoed by Poplawski in Pittsburgh who wrote about promoting a new “racial awareness” among the young white population (Anti-Defamation League).

Sexism motivated Scott Roeder insofar as he bought into and repeated the rhetoric that Tiller’s Women’s Health Care Services clinic in Kansas City was a “death camp” rather than a medical services provider for women in extremely dire circumstances with no good options left to them (Fitzpatrick). At one level, the anti-choice movement capitalizes on a fundamental mistrust of women’s moral discernment and agency. The belief carried to a violent extreme by Roeder and others is that women, along with their families, doctors, and spiritual advisors, cannot be trusted to make difficult decisions, and that they need to be protected from doctors like Tiller. To that end, it is easy to find several websites that show detailed pictures of Tiller’s now-closed clinic from every angle to show its location and entrances, with its address and phone number, photographs of employees’ vehicles and their home addresses, and most importantly, chilling photographs of “churches that defend and comfort Tiller,” one of which is Reformation Lutheran Church in Kansas City where he was finally gunned down while ushering on a Sunday morning.

These cases of extremist violence occur when a fear of change coupled with a mistrust of difference take root in unstable and mentally ill people. While they are relatively rare, they are the red

flags that signal something gone very wrong in our culture, with our political discourse, demanding our attention. Poplawski, Von Brunn, and Roeder are terrifying examples of some of the consequences of fear-based divisions that infect our political arena. The confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor made plain the ways that racism and sexism infect political discourse in a less extreme but equally infuriating way. The line of questioning for those senators who opposed her nomination focused primarily not on her seventeen years of cases, written opinions, and summary judgments. The questions focused on identity politics, especially race and gender, highlighting the implications of the first Latina Supreme Court nominee. Eugene Robinson wrote in *The Washington Post* that “Republicans’ outrage, both real and feigned, at Sotomayor’s musings about how her identity as a ‘wise Latina’ might affect her judicial decisions is based on a flawed assumption: that whiteness and maleness are not themselves facets of a distinct identity.” One senator in particular repeatedly used terms like “classic American” and “objective view” of the law to describe what Sotomayor did not have. In context, these terms are coded references to the presumed white male neutrality that Robinson names.

What the players in all of these examples (my student Ashley, rightwing extremist violence, and the Sotomayor hearings) share is a fear of change and a real sense that there is a lot at stake in our public and political discourse. I would like to suggest that we have before us a tradition and a vocation that helps us respond to young people like Ashley, and delegitimize divisive racist and sexist rhetoric that serves in part to justify violence and hatred that fuels extremists like Poplawski, Von Brunn, and Roeder.

Our Lutheran tradition

Engaging the Lutheran tradition is one way to begin crawling out of the morass of anxiety and fear that affects us all in this age of ideological partisanship. It was not an accident that Barack Obama’s “hope” theme resonated widely across the country last fall, as we watched the markets collapse, saw the foreclosure signs in our neighborhoods, and heard family members’ stories of losing their jobs. Anxiety and fear were pervasive, and hope was an essential antidote. “Anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language” existed for the Colossians, and they exist for Americans engaging in politics. Martin Luther understood that anxiety and fear were characteristic of the human condition, and he experienced those things himself very keenly. The hope which brings people out of this morass had one clear source for both of these authors: God.

A major source of Luther’s anxiety was uncertainty about salvation, a fear that was calmed with his renewed look at justification by grace through faith, something also claimed in the Colossians text. Luther knew deeply and personally that he was

not good enough and could not do enough to earn God's favor. He was therefore liberated in his reading of Romans in particular and Paul's discussion in chapter three of

the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. (Rom. 3:22-25).

All have sinned. All fall short. Grace is a gift. I can almost hear Luther breathing a sigh of relief at really and finally understanding this.

With justification by grace through faith in Christ as a core concept, Luther discussed throughout his life's work the various ways in which the human person is therefore in relationship. Gerhard Ebeling, a Lutheran theologian writing in the 1950s, described four key ways that the human being is in relationship, using Luther's Latin term *coram*. I like the use of this term because it suggests an intimate relationality that extends in many directions. It is a Latin adverb (typically translated into German as "vor," and English as "before") that can be translated in several ways: in the presence of, before the eyes of, in the face of, openly, face to face, present, in person, personally. Those things which are before my face are things with which I am in relation.

“... it suggest an intimate relationality that extends in many directions.”

For Luther, Ebeling pointed out, human beings live first and always in relationship to God, *coram Deo*. This was the foundational source of hope for all of Luther's theology. While this relationship is most important and pervasive, Luther also took seriously the fact that human beings live *coram mundo* (in relationship to the world.) Many scholars and theologians have discussed at length his development of a “two kingdoms” theology, wherein human beings have dual citizenship in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. The kingdom of this world as created and ordained by God is a key location for carrying out God's work. Human beings come to know what this work is because they live *coram meipso* (in relationship to myself). This is a more subtle discussion of personal existence, what Ebeling calls “existence in my own sight ... before myself” (199). Finally, Luther explores human life *coram hominibus* (in relationship to other people) as a

particular locus of relation and responsibility. I have explored two aspects of this relationality elsewhere, so here I want to mine his ideas about human life *coram hominibus* as a particular source of hope for our age of anxiety and fear (see Riswold, *Coram Deo* and “*Coram Mundo*”).

We first gain a little more insight into Luther's understanding of anxiety and fear when hearing his consideration of human life before the fall. In his commentary on Gen. 1:26, he says:

Therefore the image of God, according to which Adam was created, was something far more distinguished and excellent ... Both his inner and outer sensations were all of the purest kind. His intellect was the clearest, his memory was the best, and his will was the most straightforward—all in the most beautiful tranquillity of mind, without any fear of death and without any anxiety. (62)

Beautiful tranquility, without fear and anxiety. Whether or not this is the most adequate reading of the Genesis text, this is what Luther understands as human life *coram Deo* without the stain of sin and consequences of the fall: it is “freedom from fear.” He clearly notes that we have no real experience of this now, and in fact “we continually experience the opposite” (63). For Luther, the fall brought us the fear of danger and death with which we all live. Perhaps this is the ultimate fear of change.

When Luther talked about human beings *coram hominibus*, in relationship to other people, some of the more significant statements came in his 1520 treatise on “The Freedom of a Christian.” It is here where he expands on how a Christian is freed from working to earn salvation, therefore freed to serve the neighbor as a manifestation of Christ in the world. Thus, mutual service and care ideally characterize the relationships of Christian people in community. Ebeling describes “the freedom which a Christian has through faith is freedom to render the service of love. And it is only the service of love if it is carried out in freedom.” (212) Additionally, he quotes Luther's reflections on Matt. 5:38, that the Christian is “bound in his life to another person, whom he has below or above him, or even beside him, as lord, lady, wife, child, neighbour, etc., such that one has the obligation to defend, protect and guard the other when one can.” (206) This is what an obligation to mutual service looks like in this world, where each person has a role to play and a duty to carry out in relationship to other people.

A Lutheran ethic has therefore often been described as “faith active in love,” despite Luther's well-known criticisms of the Epistle of James and its claim in the second chapter that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” (Jas. 2:17). Understanding that human life is both *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus* is the key to maintaining justification by faith (not works) as well as a

robust ethic of servant love. Brian Gerrish uses the twofold relationality to situate the proper place of human work in the world: “before God moral attainment, being always tainted with the disease of self-will, counts for nothing. Here a man is justified only by the righteousness of Christ, appropriated through faith, and the works of the law have no place.” (119). He restates the foundational nature of justification by faith: *coram Deo*, works have no merit or meaning. And he goes on:

In the Earthly Kingdom, on the other hand, as we face our neighbour, we do stand under the imperative of the law. For our faith does not benefit our neighbour; he needs our works of love. Indeed Luther is quite willing to assert that, before our fellow men, we should seek to be justified by our *works* ... (119).

He thus claims the place of service and work: *coram hominibus*, we are obliged to incarnate the love of God and live out of the righteousness made possible through Christ.

Alister McGrath similarly uses these two relationships to help his exposition of Luther’s ideas on righteousness and the value of faith: “viewed *coram hominibus*, it [faith] cannot [have value], as the inherent value of faith is so little; viewed *coram Deo*, however, it has a much greater contracted value.” (118) In relationship to God, what matters is faith because of the covenantal and sacramental relationship between God and human beings. In relationship to other people, what matters is what we do with and for them. Both are important. One gift of Luther’s idea about human life *coram hominibus* is the way in which it insists that we speak of an obligation to serve the other, and a humility in which we grasp that are all equally wretched *coram Deo*.

This manifold relationality, with its mutual accountability and communal humility are resources from the Lutheran tradition which we can use to respond to and understand fear of change and a mistrust of difference. Rather than be captive to fear and mistrust, we are all freed by the relationships that characterize our lives. Grounded in human life *coram Deo* which properly humbles all persons in relationship to a transcendent source of truth, justice, and compassion, we are called to live human life *coram hominibus* in which we are called to serve each other in proclaiming that truth, seeking out justice, and living with compassion.

Our vocation: Annoying students with their rights

Our final task is to consider more concretely how our vocation as educators in this tradition is a source of hope in an ideologically divided and dangerous time. This is how Luther’s discussion of the role of our work in the world is most relevant. We have already seen how he understands our work in this world as morally significant and important *coram hominibus*. Gustaf Wingren spends a good

amount of time in his discussion of Luther’s thoughts on vocation describing “co-operation” and how “Luther conceives of man as a ‘fellow-worker’ with God.” Specifically, Wingren says that “co-operation takes place in vocation, which belongs on earth, not in heaven; it is pointed toward one’s neighbor, not toward God. Man’s deeds and work have a real function to fill in civil and social relationships.” (124) Again, having sorted out the difference of human life *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*, we see how the work and service that we do pointed toward our neighbor matters. A more modern construction of this idea is Lutheran pastor and theologian Philip Hefner’s idea of human beings as created co-creators. Hefner preserves a robust understanding of our fundamental created nature, while detailing how we work throughout our lives to bring about a world which God envisions (27-39). Human life *coram hominibus* is where we live our lives, do our work, and enact that which God purposes.

“We want people to be awake.”

Our work in this world is undergraduate education, so it is perhaps clear how this calling provides hope for the reality that my student Ashley voiced. When the overwhelming responsibility of civic participation and adulthood seizes young people, we respond by guiding, teaching, and empowering them to think carefully and decide well. Wingren even states in a footnote that “when the work of vocation is carried out, the neighbor is profited.” (125n) If we do our work well, our neighbors will benefit. In this vocation, our neighbor is our student. Mary Rose O’Reilley makes a key connection in her reflections on the power of education: “finding voice—let’s be clear—is a political act. It defines a moment of presence, of being awake; and it involves not only self-understanding, but the ability to transmit that self-understanding to others.” (58) Isn’t this what we want for our students? Isn’t this at the heart of institutional mission statements’ language about mind and character, leadership and service? We want people to be awake. We want them to have a self-understanding and we want them to be able to communicate and act on that self-understanding. We want to annoy students with their right to a voice.

But we also do that within a tradition that properly limits and guides our work. Because James Von Brunn was awake, and he had a voice that we all have now heard. O’Reilley also describes this “finding voice” process as necessarily “a socially-responsible political act.” (62) Luther reminds us that our lives *coram hominibus* are simultaneously *coram Deo*, and that perhaps what it means

to be socially responsible is to be accountable both to the neighbor and to God. Because of this, I as a professor have to remember that shattering assumptions and challenging claims made by students can be threatening. I have to do it with compassion and attention. Because of the context of the Lutheran tradition, we can understand that our work in the world should benefit our neighbor, not destroy her. The relationship with God serves as a foundational context for our actions and our institutions. This is one thing that holds our actions in check, and holds us accountable not only to one another but to a transcendent source of truth, justice, and compassion.

If violent extremism is the red-flag that something is wrong with our culture and our politically charged public arena, then our vocation to educate the mind and form the heart and character is one part of the antidote of hope that we need. By serving our students as responsible and effective educators, we serve the world into which they are called to live their own vocations. In 2007, Bishop Mark Hanson described two purposes of the colleges and universities of the ELCA: to “model moral deliberation” and “prepare students for engagement in the world.” If we do this well, we will in fact help Ashley figure out how to responsibly participate in the democratic process that governs her life, and we will contribute to delegitimizing radical extremism and violence by educating activists, leaders, and educators of the future.

The reason for our hope in the face of such despair and tragedy is the understanding that human life is lived both *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*. We have a source for our vocation, and a neighbor to whom we are accountable. The vocation that we share takes place at the intersections of many relationships, and the tradition that informs us frames our responses to the world.

I conclude with the words of bell hooks, who describes the complexity of our work today:

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (207)

Endnote

1. It was also pointed out that the **Department** released a report on left-wing extremists on January 26, 2009. This report spoke of animal rights and environmental activists expanding cyber-attacks and computer system hacking to disrupt the operations and economic

viability of specific industries. The unfurling of a banner by Greenpeace Activists on Mount Rushmore in July 2009 is an example of this kind of activity. See: “Leftwing Extremists Likely to Increase Use of Cyber Attacks over the Coming Decade.” Online: <<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/5601713/Leftwing-Extremist-Threat>>

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The Neglected Miracle of Pentecost

“O God, in whom we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray thee so to guide and govern us by thy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget thee, but may remember that we are ever walking in thy sight.”

My interpretation of the story of Pentecost is inspired by the work of Liz Spelman, Professor of Philosophy at Smith College and Maria Lugones, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at SUNY Binghamton. They are both known for their work in critical race theory and feminist philosophy. In 1983, they published an essay together entitled: “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for ‘the Woman’s Voice.’”² At that time many feminists were trying to find their voices and make themselves heard. The trouble was that in a man’s world only the man’s voice was audible. Furthermore, the man’s voice was not identified as male. It called itself “the voice of reason, objectivity and sense.” And, because the man’s voice was the voice of reason, objectivity, and sense, all other voices uttered only unreason, subjectivity, and nonsense. Many feminists thought that the woman’s voice must finally be heard. She should be thought equally capable of uttering reasonable, objective and sensible claims for equality, human rights and freedom. She must be allowed to speak for herself.

While Lugones and Spelman agreed that the man’s voice (especially the voice of the white man of privilege) was the only one being heard, they worried that it was mainly white women of privilege who were allowed to shape the woman’s voice. White/Anglo women were speaking for others about whom they knew little or nothing. They were doing to women of color, immigrant women, uneducated women and others what had been done to them by white men of privilege, leaving them out of the discussion. Well-educated white/Anglo women acted as if they knew what all women wanted.

Spelman and Lugones point out that in fact, women of privilege know less about women of color than women of color know about them. They write:

...it is presumed to be the case that those who do the theory know more about those who are theorized than vice versa: hence

it ought to be the case that if it is white/Anglo women who write for and about all other women, then white/Anglo women must know more about all other women than other women know about them. But in fact just in order to survive, brown and Black women have to know a lot more about white/Anglo women—not through the sustained contemplation theory requires, but through the sharp observation stark exigency demands.

Women of color have to know how to get along in the white/Anglo woman’s world, but white/Anglo women do not need to know how to get along in the worlds of women of color. Notice further, that immigrant women, like Lugones, must learn the dominant language in order to survive. Women of privilege in the United States do not need to speak Spanish, Swahili, Arabic or Portuguese. While some well-meaning white women of privilege may feel an obligation to speak on behalf of women of color, poor women, immigrant women, Lugones and Spelman insist that they stop speaking for others. Instead, they should find ways to listen to what other women have to say for themselves.

Let us turn now to the polyglot miracle of Pentecost. Acts 2:1-8 read as follows:

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place.

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” (RSV)

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The first important thing to notice is that for these immigrant Jews who speak other languages, the bewilderment comes, not from the sound from heaven which is “like the rush of a violent wind,” nor from the “divided tongues, as of fire” resting on the disciples, but from Galileans speaking in their native languages. I don’t know about you, but the rush of a violent wind from heaven and tongues as of fire on peoples’ heads would surely astonish me! But, instead, it is the polyglot miracle that astonishes Jews from other nations. They are “amazed and perplexed” to hear Galileans speaking to them in their own languages. They wonder what this means.

The second thing to notice is that the response of the men of Judea and of the native inhabitants of Jerusalem is very different from the response of the Jews from other nations. The men of Judea and the native inhabitants of Jerusalem think that the apostles are “filled with new wine.” (Acts 2:13) They do not even recognize that other languages are being spoken. They think the apostles must be babbling drunken gibberish. In fact, Peter feels compelled to defend himself and his fellow apostles by claiming that it is too early in the day for their strange utterances to be debauched nonsense. Peter insists that what is happening is the fulfillment of the prophesy of Joel that “young men shall see visions, and old men shall dream dreams.” (Acts 2:17)

The third thing to notice, and what inspires me, is that even Peter does not understand what is happening. He knows it is a miracle, but he does not know that he and his friends are saying things that make perfect sense in other languages. The immigrant Jews are the ones who know what God said. They know what the miracle of Pentecost is and are astonished.

Now, I want to ask another question: Why did the writer of Acts fail to tell us what God said? How am I supposed to know what God said at Pentecost, if the author of *Acts* doesn’t bother to mention it? We are told only that the Jews heard the apostles speaking about God’s deeds of power. Why not be more specific? Isn’t the message from God more important than the messenger or the means of delivery?

I want to suggest that the fact that the apostles and the readers of this text *do not know* what God said at Pentecost, and the fact that other people, the devout Jews from other nations, *do know* what God said, forces us to reinterpret what it means to listen to God. In fact, it forces us to re-think discipleship. We had thought that the disciples were sent out to tell others the good news. We had thought that tongues as of fire over the disciples’ heads marked them as vestibules of God’s wisdom which they were to pass on to all nations. But if we take Pentecost seriously, we learn that we are like Peter. We mean well, but we need to listen to what others know about God instead of thinking ourselves fit to speak on their behalf. Pentecost makes us re-examine why the disciples must go out to all nations—they must go there to learn from the

Jews of other nations what God said to them. Pentecost makes us re-examine how we must love one another. Rather than speak on behalf of others, we must let them speak for themselves. We must learn another’s language so that we can understand her when she tells us what God said to her in her language. And Pentecost makes us re-examine our conviction that we have privileged access to the message of the Holy Spirit. Disciples of old and disciples of today must set aside their self-righteousness in order that they might listen to God and to the message God gave to others.

This miracle of Pentecost reminds us that people of privilege know less than the foreigner, the immigrant, the oppressed, the woman, the child. If we want to know the good news, we must learn to listen in new languages to new voices. We must lift up the neglected miracle of Pentecost. We must attempt to understand one another, indeed, to love one another, in this way. A way that defeats cultural imperialism. A way that subverts our dominance and calls into question our righteousness. The only proper motivation for learning about the experiences of others is friendship, which requires trust and care. It requires wishing to know another’s heart and allowing her to speak for herself.

When I travel I must try to learn the languages and customs of the people I visit. I ought also to learn the languages of the immigrants, foreigners, and oppressed in my community. When I read a novel, a work of philosophy, a scientific treatise, scripture, or a letter from a friend, I must listen openly, allow them to guide me; to surprise, delight, challenge, and intrigue me. Further, I must be in dialogue with others in order to discover what is divine in my own experience, traditions, and customs. I must explore, question, examine myself. This is also what it means to listen. Only when I do this can I listen to God.

I cannot learn directly God’s language. Nor can I acquaint myself directly with God’s customs, for I am a human being. I am not Divine. The message of Pentecost, especially if I am a Galilean, is that I must learn the languages of all nations, so that when God speaks through my mouth to the Jews of other nations, I too might understand what God says. I must allow myself to be questioned in the intimacy of friendship. I must expect that others know better what God has said. The message of Pentecost is to listen to God by truly listening to and loving one another.

End Notes

1. “Daily Morning Prayer.” *The 1979 U.S. Book of Common Prayer*. 30 August 2008. The Society of Archbishop Justus. 6 October 2008 <<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/mpi.pdf>>.

2. Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman. “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for ‘the Woman’s Voice’.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 6.2 (1983): 573-81.

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