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L. DEANE LAGERQUIST

# Welfare of the City and Why Lutherans Care about Education

Most readers of *Intersections* have two characteristics in common: We are associated with Lutheran higher education and we do our work now, in this decade, in this culture. However, our degree of affinity with the Lutheran tradition of Christianity varies more than it would have done fifty years ago.

Even those who have worked at Lutheran schools for a rather long time may still have questions about this tradition. They may wonder why Lutherans cannot just give a simple, straightforward explanation of themselves or why they insist on asking the same questions over and over. Others are committed to the mission of their college or university, they admire its heritage, and are able to give a subtle account of the tradition, but they do not share it completely. A third group is composed of those who are relatively new to these places and are still a bit perplexed about what they have gotten themselves into. They may be uncertain which campus customs are merely local and which are part of a larger tradition—which can be traced to the school's Lutheran identity, which to Christianity more generally, which to the liberal arts? What is the relationship between those? Finally, there are some formed by this tradition of Lutheran, liberal arts education who have thought about it quite a lot with pride, occasional anxiety, and lively imagination.

These are not vague, made up, ideal-types. I have specific people in mind and I can recall actual conversations with them. Whichever type comes closest to describing you, I have no doubt all these types are present on your campus as well

as on mine. As you think of your colleagues of these various types, you may also recall some whose presence on your campus is now fond memory. A tradition is like that—at least this tradition is. It keeps us living with the dead whose legacy to us includes buildings, dated college hymns, and conversations about our work that we must keep having over and over.

When I began my association with Lutheran higher education as a student at California

Lutheran it was still “CLC”—college not university—and neither the current library nor the statue at its entrance existed. Today students approaching the library are greeted by a statue of Martin Luther, a gift from the first graduating class installed in the 1980s. This two and a half ton Luther is abstract, more like Gumby than the man himself. Looming over the



Brian Slethem / CLU

plaza, as the man's reputation seems to do among his spiritual and ecclesiastical heirs, “Enormous Luther” prompts us to ask: What legacy do we receive from Luther—the university professor, theologian, parish pastor, and church reformer? Lurking inside the theme of this journal and the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conferences is another, related question

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about each individual's personal participation in the institution's mission. Our interest is not only in the schools, but also in the people. More to the point, having acknowledged our jobs, we are interested in the possibility that the jobs are part of our own vocations.

## Commercializing College

Which brings us to the second characteristic uniting us, namely, we all work at Lutheran colleges and universities *here and now*—in the early twenty-first century in the United States. In our shared context there is notable public confusion, not to say conflict, about the purposes and worth of higher education and about its worth. In one way of looking at them our schools come close to the romantic ideal of college. Indeed most were founded on a venerable American model that served the pre-revolutionary schools beginning with Harvard and that dominated well into the nineteenth century: smallish, residential, associated with Christianity (usually Protestantism), concerned with forming personal character and preparing students for responsible engagement in religious and civic community life. But from another angle our schools may seem outdated and elitist. They lack the economies of scale available to larger institutions, private or public. Even their programs that lead toward employment usually require courses that seem to wander from that practical goal. Most have neither nationally ranked sports teams nor huge endowments. While we are not the most expensive, many assume that we are unaffordable. Less than five percent (maybe only two percent) of American college students attend schools like ours.

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add value to higher education today?”

The organizers of the 2013 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference have presented a theme that turns our situation on its head. They invite us to consider “Vocation as a *Challenge* to the Commodification of Education.” I suspect this is because we share the experience of having our vocations—both institutional and individual—challenged by the commodification of education. The challenge might be stated this way: Does a Lutheran notion of vocation add value to higher education today? Or a bit more fully: What does the Lutheran contention that God's primary mode of relationship to human beings is as the giver of grace that generates neighbor directed action (i.e. vocation) offer to the work of higher education when education

is increasingly regarded by Americans as something to be bought and sold, something to be judged on the basis of its immediate, individual, practical value as measured in financial return? Hold this question in mind as we visit sixteenth century Germany, the formative decades of Lutheran higher education in the United States, and then return to our own time. In addition, given our shared identity we must ask: Does this matter not only to the self-identified Lutherans, but also to the fellow travelers, the skeptics, and the newcomers?

We are all aware of the commodification of higher education, what we might also call its commercialization or, worse, monetization. We encounter it on radio talk shows, in the newspapers, and among our friends and family members who ask us why college costs so much and who ask their kids, “So, what can you *do* with that degree?” We who get our paychecks from colleges know that money changes hands in the “delivery” of learning, and not only to pay us. Each July, Target stores begin to replace lawn furniture and garden hoses with school supplies and dorm décor. Soon campus food services will be to full, and the food, the fuel to cook it, and the water to wash the dishes all cost money—as do library books and academic support services, and other services and supplies. We are not here to deny that buying and selling are involved in formal education. We are to think about the value of education and about how that intertwines with its economy.

## Luther and the Commodification of Salvation

Given these realities, how useful is Luther? Of course life in early sixteenth century Saxony was different from ours. The list of material and cultural differences could be multiplied. In his discussion of early Protestants and education, historian of American religion Mark Noll details the chronological chasm: infant Martin was born nine years before Columbus sailed. When Dr. Luther declared himself captive to the word of God and unmovable, Puritan migration to New England was more than a century off. But, then Noll explores the ways that Luther's focus on grace, the priesthood of all believers, and the authority of the Bible informed his educational agenda (Noll 97). Introducing a collection of essays on Luther and learning, Reformation historian Marilyn Harran highlights continuities that compress the passage of time between then and now (Harran 19-20). Noll and Harran and many others thereby point toward intriguing resonances between pressing questions of our own time and the debate Martin Luther was part of nearly five centuries ago. Let me begin by concentrating on the particular: Luther's experience, his theological insight, and the programmatic consequences for education.

Luther and we ask big questions such as these: What makes a person valuable? Where do I belong? What can I accomplish? What makes life worth living? How does one come by those goods? Given our theme, we might ask about what can (and cannot) be bought and sold, about which human goods are properly regarded as commodities and which are not. Bound up in these questions are fundamental assumptions about the human condition, God, the character of community, and the nature of religion. Luther despaired that he would ever be worthy of God's love. His experience was shaped by the nearness of death from disease or natural disaster, by the politics of the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, and by the theology and ritual practices of late medieval European Christianity. Our questions—and our students' questions—about our own worth and our place in the world are shaped by the environmental,

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political, and religious circumstances of the early twenty-first century. Carl Dennis's poem, “The God Who Loves You,” exposes one contemporary anxiety—the fear of making the wrong choices and missing out on a perfect life. It suggests vocational questions such as these: What sort of freedom do I have to determine my life? How much depends upon me reading the signs correctly and how much is beyond my control? Is picking the right college the way to insure my happiness and success?

Luther's question was deeply personal, but his spiritual struggle was not unique. If his despair about his inability to meet God's demand for righteousness has become legendary, it was in keeping with the religious ethos of his time and place. Luther was acutely aware of his inability to earn forgiveness and God's favor. He joined an Augustinian monastic community where he made fervent efforts at righteousness, including scrupulous confession of his smallest failings. Although these efforts did not gain him peace, they prompted his superior to assign him to teach Bible at the recently founded university in Wittenberg. There Luther's personal, spiritual experience was closely intertwined with the ordinary, daily work of scholarship and had consequences far larger than his own religious life.

We are approaching the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Reformation with Luther's 1517 posting of the 95 Theses. There, Luther challenged the commodification of

salvation. He questioned the theological premise behind the sale of indulgences, and concluded (1) that if the Pope had the authority to release sinners from their obligation to perform acts of penance in punishment for their sins, then he should grant it freely, not sell it; and (2) that no human being had the authority to remit that sort of religious debt because God offers forgiveness freely on the basis of Christ's actions. These conclusions denied the existence of a “treasury of merit” that the church could exploit for its financial advantage. Salvation, God's loving forgiveness, is not something believers can buy with money or earn by their efforts; rather it is a gracious gift. Beyond rejecting an understanding of salvation based in market economy, Luther's theology was more like what scholars call a gift economy. This is not merely a matter of removing money from the system of exchange, but of positing an entirely different logic in which giving, receiving, and giving to others replace the market exchange.

### Calling on Gifts

In his book, *The Gift: Imagination and Erotic Life of Property*, Lewis Hyde introduces gift economy by drawing upon anthropology, mythology, and modern poetry. He observes, “unlike the sale of a commodity, the giving of a gift tends to establish a relationship between the parties involved. Furthermore, when gifts circulate within a group, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake, and a kind of decentralized cohesiveness emerges” (Hyde xiv). Gifts circulate according to a set of three obligations: to give, to receive (or to accept), and to pass on (or to reciprocate). The value of a gift is in its use. Holding it, rather than passing it on, will kill the gift or render it toxic. A gift's generative power (or what Hyde calls its “erotic” power) is released, even increased when it is given away. This dynamic is expressed by a colleague in a recent Facebook post: “People who help a person pack to move across country do so for love, because this work is too hard to do for any other reason except more money than he can pay. Thank you. You know who you are.” Money and the market have nothing to do with gift economy. And yet, Hyde probes artists' overlapping involvement in a gift economy as they create and in the market when they sell their work. Artists, like college professors, need to eat. Like artists, educators inhabit both economies.

Discussing the “The Ethics of Gift,” theologian Oswald Bayer notes that the biblical “conception of a willing, open-handed, generous and incessantly giving God,” which Luther revived, contrasts with the late medieval image of Christ as

judge (Bayer, “Ethics” 452). Immediately this shift reverberated in the spiritual arena where, having received grace, the human being stood before God, clothed in Jesus’ righteousness and then offered the reciprocating “counter gift” of thanks and praise. The full implication of the gift exchange extends further. It leads, Bayer suggests, to a reorientation of all of life, not only in the spiritual realm, but in the temporal as well. He writes, “Not only the vertical *retribution* of praise to God in prayer and in faith belongs to the thankfulness of the human being, but also equally fundamentally the horizontal *distribution* to our neighbor in love” (Bayer, “Ethics” 459).

Now we return to the notion of vocation I offered early on. A Lutheran conception of vocation declares that God’s primary mode of relationship to human beings is as the giver of grace and that divine grace generates neighbor-directed action. In the logic of gift economy, this is the generative passing along of the gift that faith has received. In standard Lutheran-speak: faith active in love. Contemporary baptismal liturgies highlight the dynamic relationship between entering into the body of Christ and sharing the work of God’s love for the world. All of these echo Luther’s firm conviction that divine grace levels spiritual status. The office of priest is not abolished, but its significance is rendered functional as a mode of service to others. Before God there is no distinction to be made between priests and pipers, cobblers and cardinals, nuns and nephews.

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All Christians are equally members of the spiritual estate who carry out their work in various places of responsibility. This is the priesthood of all believers, which along with justification by faith and the authority of the Bible Mark Noll identifies as the central commitments of the early Reformers. This notion of vocation begins with being (or identity) and moves into doing. Its attitude stirs action in every aspect of life, in all one’s roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

### Taking Luther to School

Among the consequences these teachings had in early modern life, we are concerned with their effect on education: its purposes, its funding, and its practice. Already in his 1520 treatise, “To the Christian Nobility of Germany,” Luther called

for educational reforms. He advocated changes that would make educational practice responsive to his new understanding of Christian life, both how it is received and what it entails. In a later sermon he announced his intention to address what is at stake regarding spiritual, eternal matters and temporal, worldly ones (“Sermon” 219). One purpose of education is cultivation of personal faith; a second prepares learners for service to the neighbor (i.e. vocation). In keeping with the way that biblical study informed his own faith, Luther insisted that Christians “get” the gospel both by right knowledge of God and by true experience of grace. Over the centuries, this concern for the partnership of objective and subjective knowledge—for religion of the head and religion of heart and hands—weaves through Lutheran educational endeavors with one or the other taking the lead, but with the other still part of the dance. Similarly, concern for the personal spiritual good of education intertwines with commitment to the practical, temporal benefits that result and that flow into the community.

Even children should be given the opportunity to encounter God’s word in their own language. Luther’s translation of the Bible was a partial response. However, in order to read the Bible, children need to be taught and that requires schools. He urged princes and city councils to support schools for both boys and girls and parents to send their children so that they might know and understand God’s grace. After the Saxon visitation revealed the stunning ignorance of many ordinary Christians, and even parish pastors, Luther prepared the Small Catechism setting out the rudiments of the gospel for their instruction. This is one reason Lutherans care about education, particularly about basic literacy but also about ongoing, life-long learning that supports mature faith.

If the first, personal purpose concerned the vertical dimension of faith, the second coincided with the horizontal dimension, faith active in love. Here vocation and the first part of my title come to the foreground. Most famously in “To the Councilmen of All Cities of Germany that They Establish and Maintain Schools” (1524) and in “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School” (1530), Luther addressed temporal authorities, both political rulers and parents, all of whom he assumed were Christians. He admonished them to do their duty and to prepare children for their own duties toward their neighbors. Certainly preachers and pastors would be needed, but the good of all requires teachers and lawyers and physicians as well. In Luther’s own, often quoted, words:

Now the welfare of a city does not consist solely in accumulating vast treasure, building mighty walls and magnificent building, and producing a goodly supply of

guns and armor. Indeed, where such things are plentiful, and reckless fools get control of them, it is so much the worse and the city suffers even greater loss. A city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consists rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens. They can then readily gather, protect, and properly use treasure and all manner of property. ("To the Councilmen" 712-13)

Education's vocational purpose concerns individuals, but its value is public as well as personal. Lutherans care about education for this reason too, that it contributes to the well-being of their neighbors and of their communities in this world, indeed to the well-being of the whole world. Educating religious leaders is important, but doing so is a special subset of this larger vocational purpose.

The theology behind this evangelical view of education's purposes grows out of a gift economy that resists commodification and the logic of the market. Again and again Luther reminded his readers of what God has given them, both salvation and worldly goods, and urges them to receive it gladly by giving what they have. Most particularly, he urged parents to educate their children to be instruments of God's care for the world. He acknowledged that wealth and honor may follow and couched his appeal in terms of investment; however, he always warned that avarice and excessive concern about one's belly turns humans into beasts. We too participate in the overlapping economies of the market and gift exchange. We must not lose sight of the fact that the day-to-day work of education—whether for personal spiritual purposes or for temporal public ends—requires material resources.

### Sponsoring Education

In the sixteenth century funding for education came increasingly from the pockets of territorial rulers, though both the church and the nearly coincident civil community benefited. An earlier shift toward princely, instead of church, sponsorship for universities accelerated. Children's education followed a similar trend. New church ordinances, drafted by Johannes Bugenhagen for several German and Scandinavian cities, included education among the social welfare concerns worthy of community support. Such support might be construed as service to neighbor, a counter-gift in the exchange initiated by divine grace, but those who provide financial support for schools and aid to students are also likely to expect tangible returns on their investment.

Benefactors' motives were mixed. They gained prestige, financial advantages, and a supply of well-trained civil servants, other professionals, and pastors. For example, when

he founded the University of Wittenberg in 1502, Elector Frederick the Wise hoped that it would "produce graduates who, more than anything, were useful to society," but he was not unmindful of his reputation (Appold 73). Similarly, when he assented to humanistic reforms at his university, Frederick may well have taken account of the ways those would make the school more attractive to students and increase enrollment. At least initially the temporal rulers' interests and the Reformers' goals overlapped enough to allow a productive collaboration. By the seventeenth century the relationship was more strained.

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Despite the change in the source of university support, much of university life was relatively unaltered in the first decades of the Reformation. Administrative structures and academic organization remained stable. If a territorial ruler was now the patron, his scope of influence seldom extended to ordinary, internal matters, although his approval was required for changes in the universities' statutes. Frederick the Wise approved adding the Greek professorship which brought Philipp Melancthon to the University of Wittenberg in 1518 and his successor agreed to the reforms Melancthon drafted in the 1530s and 1546. Most professors still were, or had been, clerics. They were still organized into four faculties with arts or philosophy providing the foundation for advanced study in law, medicine, or theology. Students followed a similar route through the stages of their study which could take several years. While these aspects of the university changed little, more dramatic reforms were made in the content of the curriculum employed to achieve the university educational goals which—at least in the theology faculty—centered on cultivation of personal piety supported by right belief.

Reformation scholars debate about the scale of curricular changes and proper credit for them; however, for our purposes, attention to the general contours will do. In his writings Luther suggested modifications, but Philipp Melancthon was the architect of the reforms in town schools and universities. As far as the Reformers' agenda coincided with Humanism, they capitalized upon a movement that predated them rather than devising a novel program. The Reformers sympathized with Humanists' expectation that education would produce practical results. Their evangelical

commitment to the authority of the Bible was well served by Humanists' return to the sources. Biblical exegesis, the centerpiece of the theological curriculum, was supported by increased study of ancient languages, particularly but not only Greek and Hebrew. More attention was given to early Christian writers and to historical study. Philosophy in general and Aristotle in particular, if not rejected completely, were initially given reduced importance.

### From Piety to Orthodoxy and Back Again

My equivocating in that last sentence points to the scholarly dispute about the degree to which Luther and Melanchthon agreed about the value of philosophical study and the role of human reason in theology. Luther's rejection of reason is infamous, and yet we should not forget that his own faith was nurtured by the mundane work of scholarship. He expected the Holy Spirit to be active even in such ordinary activities as learning Hebrew vocabulary and Greek grammar. This expectation echoes the way Christ is present in the ordinary water used in baptism and the everyday bread and wine consumed at the Lord's Supper. Moreover, Luther recognized the usefulness of human reason in its proper place which

“Luther's rejection of reason is infamous, and yet we should not forget that his own faith was nurtured by the mundane work of scholarship.”

had more to do with daily bread (a placeholder for all that nourishes earthly life) than with the means of grace. Even if Melanchthon was in essential agreement with Luther about the purposes of theology, he was more open to using reason in pursuit of pure doctrine. To that end he introduced a modified use of Aristotle in his loci method. In addition to its limited utility in theology, Melanchthon also recognized the philosophical value relative to the civil law that governs society. Once again we are reminded of the horizontal, vocational dimension of education (Bayer, “Philipp Melanchthon” 149-52).

As the Reformation movement consolidated in the late sixteenth century and developed in the following decades, its universities also changed. Noteworthy educational developments include the effects confessional territorialism on university governance and shifting emphases in educational purpose and theological method. The territorial principle (introduced by the Peace of Augsburg and reinforced by the

Peace of Westphalia) further tied German universities to the “particularistic interests of emerging territorial-confessional states” (Howard 68). By 1701 the number of German universities grew to an overabundant thirty. Every territorial ruler wanted a university and, insisting on confessional conformity, they became more intrusive. Professors resisted assaults on university autonomy; nevertheless, theologians were committed to orthodox teaching that preserved the gospel. They relied on Melanchthon's loci system to guide their work preparing pastors. Many leaned noticeably toward the objective pole of faith, though Johann Gerhard maintained a robust view as evident in his comment on the outcome of theology: “By this theology a person is prepared by his knowledge of the divine mysteries through the illumination of his mind to apply those things that he understands to the disposition of his heart and to the carrying out of good works” (Howard 77 n.116) Overall the pedagogical focus shifted from away from students' own piety to the pure doctrine they would teach their parishioners.

By the late seventeenth century the balance was shifting again. At the University of Halle, founded in 1694, Elector Friedrich III's political interest in a more tolerant religious stance was reinforced by Herman A. Francke's commitment a “supraconfessional practically oriented spirit of pietism” and by his rationalist colleagues, though on different grounds. (Howard 93-94). In addition to his university post, Francke launched a full range of charitable institutions: an orphanage, Latin school, pharmacy, and publishing house. His religious program had enormous influence through the work of men such as Bartholew Ziegenhagen who traveled to India in 1709 and Henry Melchior Muhlenberg who came to colonial Pennsylvania in the 1740s. If you visit the Franckesche Stiftungen today, you will see evidence of this global engagement; its museum houses one of the few intact cabinets of curiosities, filled with artifacts and specimens sent back to Halle by its former students.

Although not every Lutheran college founded in North America had direct links to Halle, the enterprise as a whole owes a great deal to Francke's educational ideals and to his institutional model. The Halle legacy included its conception of Christian faith. Without repudiating intellectual knowledge or purity of doctrine and while engaging in serious study, it emphasized personal piety and assumed that true faith bears fruit in good works on behalf of others. Support for the largely autonomous Francke Stiftungen and its missions came from a variety of sources, including the King of Denmark, voluntary organizations, and private donations. This pattern anticipated funding for Lutheran colleges in the United States.

Before we leave Europe behind, I offer a list of four lessons from this history about vocation and the commodification of education. Please take them as propositions for discussion, rather than firm conclusions.

1. If vocation directs us to consider education as the means to enter more fully into faith, then it is part of a spiritual gift economy and certainly resists the reduction of education to something that can be bought and sold.
2. If vocation directs us to consider education as the means to prepare ourselves for service to others, then it challenges the notion that education is something one can own, particularly if ownership is merely for one's own benefit or pleasure.
3. If vocation reminds us of the necessity for practical knowledge and its usefulness in the service of others, then it allows us to acknowledge our participation in market economies and the ways in which buying and selling are required as we engage in education.
4. The history of temporal sponsorship of Lutheran education hints at how easily something can be perverted; the good work of sponsoring education is easily diverted away from pious ends or even public good.

### Coming to America

Now we travel across the ocean to the United States where we consider, much more briefly, how the Reformation era educational purposes were pursued in the early decades of Lutheran higher education and what questions those purposes raise today. Lutherans arrived in the colonial era, but began to found colleges only in the nineteenth century. The first, Gettysburg College, opened in 1832 and the last ELCA intuition, California Lutheran, graduated its first class in 1964. Other schools are independent or associated with church bodies. Each one has a lively and distinctive history. I encourage you to learn as much as you can about the stories of your own school. My account of how Lutheran theology and prior educational experience were adapted to the new setting is more schematic than thick.

Education for piety and education for vocation remain foundational for American Lutherans, though their resources and strategies for addressing them change. A brief comparison of primary level education in nineteenth century Scandinavia and the United States is instructive. According to the territorial principle, because their rulers were Lutheran, so were the citizens of these northern nations. The church was a part of the state; pastors were civil servants. Primary education included religious instruction based on Luther's catechism and

prepared pupils to be both good Christians and good citizens. By mid-century, immigrants to the United States could send their children to state-funded, primary schools that addressed literacy and citizenship. Unlike the schools they left, however these were not explicitly religious in a sectarian way. In so far as they were Christian, it was of a type informed by Calvinism

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and the Second Great Awakening rather than by the Lutheran Confessions. Thus Lutheran parents had two options: (1) send their children to the common schools for secular education and supplement it with spiritual education or (2) organize schools that did both. Most Scandinavians went with the first option despite the possibility that public schools would undermine students' religious commitments and ethnic identity. The theologically conservative Germans associated with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod went with the second option of parochial schools.

Like the primary schools and supplementary classes Lutherans sponsored, the colleges of all ethnicities and synods were intended for their own children. College founders ranged from entrepreneurial individuals, to groups of congregations, to church bodies. While this resulted in a variety of legal and financial relationships between colleges and their churches (in its denominational form), generally there was a strong affinity between a college's supporters and its related religious (frequently ethnic) community. Some degree of confessional agreement and similarity of piety was assumed. The college, often referred to simply as “our college,” served as a powerful symbol of community identity and generated a great deal of what we now call social capital. This was so even though only a small percentage of the churches' members were enrolled and without excluding either students or supporters from outside the church. Such supporters were sometimes drawn from the local business community, as was the case at Gettysburg College.

In the 1830s Gettysburg was an example of one sort of Lutheran college or university: institutions founded to prepare potential pastors for their theological training. In contrast, a second set of schools had a broader view of their vocational purposes. If the first group's mission, which focused narrowly upon the office of public ministry, bared

women, it did not prohibit male students with other occupational aspirations. The second, usually co-educational, group's mission was wider, but did not preclude courses with quite specific occupational goals: programs such as teaching, nursing, and business. At both sorts of schools, as at many American colleges in the nineteenth century and in keeping with Luther's earlier scheme, the humanities were the foundation of the curriculum. Along with what I have called the public, temporal, vocational goals, the spiritual goal to foster personal piety was generally assumed. At some schools it was stated explicitly. An early St. Olaf document, for example, promised to "preserve the pupils in the true Christian faith as taught by the Evangelical Lutheran Church and nothing taught in contravention to" the Confessions, specifically the three ecumenical creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and Luther's small Catechism (Shaw 17). Perhaps it goes without saying that these were generally small operations, often on the verge of financial collapse. Indeed there may be more closed schools than active ones. Among the survivors, none developed into a full-blown university on the old medieval model with faculties of theology, law, and medicine or on the modern, research model, though some now offer a comprehensive program and are called universities.

### Our Colleges and Universities Today

Since the mid-twentieth century much has changed at these schools, in the arena of higher education, in their associated churches, and in the larger society. Without any attempt at narrative, here is a list of some changes: institutional mergers reduced the number of Lutheran churches bodies and movement into the mainstream of American culture weakened members' ethnic affiliation. Both developments lessened the college's value as symbols of group identity. Some schools grew larger. Motivated by necessity, or by social trends such cultural inclusiveness, or by pursuit of academic excellence, or by religious commitments—likely by some mixture—Lutheran colleges and universities welcomed more non-Lutheran students, staff, and faculty. More professors had undergraduate degrees from large, and often public, universities where the ethos and mission are dissimilar from those at Lutheran schools. The types of post-secondary education have multiplied, though the general public is seldom well informed about the significant differences between them. Information and communication technology is ubiquitous. These schools receive less financial support from the ELCA and are subject to more regulation by the federal government and accrediting agencies. Lastly, in the midst of American economic recession, there are fierce

public demands to justify the cost of this sort of education on the basis of immediate, financially measured return on individual investment.

We wrestle with this year's conference theme in this context. What challenge does vocation bring to the commodification of education today? Or, as I put it at the outset: What value does a Lutheran notion of vocation add to education? Try to imagine a conversation between that Enormous Luther at California Lutheran University and the man in Dennis' poem who imagines God "Knowing as he does exactly what would have happened / Had you gone to your second choice for college" (lines 7-8). How would Luther respond to that man's anxiety that he chose the wrong college and ended up with a less perfect life? First, I think, Luther would assert the greater importance of the eternal, spiritual gift God offers.

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Next, he would remind the man that everything he has—wife, job, friend—all that he has received, spiritual and temporal blessings, are gifts from God. Then he would admonish the man to gratitude and urge him to pass the gift on to his friends and neighbors. Finally, he would caution against any expectation of perfection in this life since human efforts are always flawed and subject to perversion.

This personal response is based in a historic religion, in Lutheran understanding of divine grace and Christian vocation. Vocation in this tradition, as we have observed, grows from a gift economy in which the spiritual benefits of God's reconciling love generate human gratitude and love of neighbor, gratitude and love that are expressed through ordinary, material, and temporal means. That said, as we respond to the commodification of education at our Lutheran colleges, we must notice that not everyone shares this tradition. If vocation is to inform our collective, public response, then I suspect that we need to be open to Lutheran theology and to other ways of nurturing a gift economy. (Here I am drawing upon the distinction between historic, personal, and public religion that Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen make in their very instructive book, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*. I commend it highly.)

Educational practice grounded in gift and informed by the history we have so quickly considered may take various forms that share important characteristics. The logic of gift allows us, on the one hand, to recognize that education requires material resources and generates temporal benefits and, on the other, to insist that education cannot be reduced to the exchange of money for information and skills or even to individual satisfaction. By analogy to the spiritual purpose for education, it attends to the enduring and big questions of life. A liberal arts approach is well suited to this work of encouraging students' understanding of themselves and their place in the world. By analogy to the temporal, public, vocational goal for education, this practice also equips students to be responsible and responsive neighbors. This may include teaching practical skills, but it insists that the value of the training is not primarily to be evaluated by immediate, individual reward. I suspect that each of you could identify ways

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these characteristics are present on your campus. Certainly they are at St. Olaf, though not without some tensions about programmatic implications. They are central to the essays included in our forthcoming collection of essays on vocation, *Claiming Our Callings: Toward a New Understanding of Vocation and the Liberal Arts*.

Lastly, there is one other set of changes to notice. In the sixteenth century universities became secular institutions that retained their ecclesial missions and served the civic good. In the nineteenth century Lutheran colleges were largely religious institutions with religiously defined missions that had civic dimensions. Now these are religious institutions with religiously grounded and secularly expressed missions. This arrangement does not fit neatly into mid-twentieth century notions of the secular and the sacred, but it is consistent with my understanding

how Lutherans view God's way of being active in the world. These schools certainly serve Lutheran churches and Lutheran students, but their educational work is not contained by the church any more than God's love for the world ends at the church's exit. Their institutional vocation (or mission) is to accept all the gifts that come to them and to pass those along to all their students and neighbors and the well-being of the world. Among the gifts that come to our schools are all the faculty, administrators, and staff without whom the mission would be impossible.

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