

2013

From the Editor

Jason A. Mahn

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Mahn, Jason A. (2013) "From the Editor," *Intersections*: Vol. 2013: No. 37, Article 3.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2013/iss37/3>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Intersections by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

From the Editor

In the last essay of this issue of *Intersections*, Ernest Simmons traces the way in which Luther's refusal to separate the life of faith from life in the world leads to a particular stance on education. Luther's both/and approach may appear increasingly *peculiar* as well as particular—especially on this side of the Enlightenment's quest to clearly distinguish indubitable, sure-footed knowledge from all the relativities of history, culture, and faith. Our dominant North American culture and our educational institutions thus can pull in opposing directions: One divides fact from value, objective truth from subjective opinion, science from religion. The other believes, first, that no knowledge should be wholly divorced from matters of ultimate concern and, second, that concern for the Ultimate frees rather than constrains one for free and open inquiry into “the world.”

Certainly, Lutheran colleges and universities are particularly (and peculiarly) posed to resist and maybe even mend our culture's fact-value split. I was stuck by this soon after arriving at my current position. Kai Swanson, Augustana's Executive Assistant to the President, was leading some of us newcomers on a tour of the campus when we passed the skeletons of an Apatosaurus and Tyrannosaurus Rex in our Fryxell Geology Museum. Kai mentioned that the museum was named after Dr. Fritiof Fryxell, who graduated from Augustana in 1922 with majors in biology and English before returning to teach here in 1924. “What's so significant about this period of time?” Kai asked us. The answer, of course, is that this was the time of the so-called Scopes Monkey Trial (1925) that so painfully pitted modern science against biblical religion. Just as that culture war ignited, a graduate in biology and English was quietly starting his second year investigating and teaching about that natural world on its own terms—not despite but because he found himself at a church-related college.

As their parallel titles suggest, the first five essays in this issue think through overlapping matters of value, vocation,

faith, meaning, and commitment from the perspective of different disciplines. I hope there is something here for everyone and that together they help move us past the fact-value split. Those who assume that the “hard” and social sciences have no time for “softer” issues of meaning and value might begin with Stephanie Fuhr's reflections on her “Becoming Biologists” course or with Lynn Hunnicutt's account of why economists should—but often don't—talk about vocation. Those who assume that disciplines such as literature or religion may be nice or personally meaningful but don't much matter in “the real world” might begin with Allison Wee's account of the value of poetry or with John Barbour's willingness to model the deep connections between intellectual and religious convictions. Those who assume that religious witness and testimony only take place after hours in the dorms might be surprised—as I was—to read Adam Luebke's account of the choir as a community of faith.

In light of these essays and our ongoing conversations about the identity of Lutheran colleges, I am convinced that “education for vocation” should characterize not only those who, like Simmons, write elegantly about the namesake of our institutions, or those who find themselves in centers for vocational reflection or institutes for faith and public life. Education for vocation characterizes our daily work with students, spreadsheets, beakers, food preparation, and lesson plans.

Let me end by sharing my excitement about this summer's Vocation of a Lutheran College conference (see the announcement on the opposing page). In an economic climate where job earnings and what students will “do” with their degree increasingly overshadow questions about *who* they are and what they (and we) are called to *be*, what better time to discuss the broader value of Lutheran education, even if it is harder to assess? I look forward to continuing our conversation.

JASON A. MAHN | Associate Professor of Religion,
Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois