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intersections

Spring 2011



in this issue

Lutherans and Religious Diversity

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

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's vocation in higher education remains vibrant. The articles in this issue of *Intersections* from the 2010 Vocation of a Lutheran College conference demonstrate that strength.

Nonetheless, the landscape of leadership in ELCA higher education has shifted significantly since the vocation conference of summer 2010. A redesign of the churchwide organization, which was announced in October 2010, radically revised churchwide ministries with colleges and universities. The Vocation and Education unit ceased to exist as of February 1, 2011. Churchwide work in higher education is now carried by the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit in the redesigned churchwide organization. And, as most readers know, familiar churchwide staff from the Vocation and Education unit either have left the churchwide organization (Marilyn Olson and Kathryn Baker) or have been reassigned to another unit (Arne Quanbeck). I continue to work with colleges and universities, although higher education is only one of four assigned portfolios.

Given this reduction in human resources, staff and faculty from ELCA colleges and universities have stepped up their leadership of our community. For example, our annual administrator conferences have been more directly managed by college and university leaders. I deeply appreciate those who have helped to sustain our network during these days of transition.

Many of you have led much of the work of maintaining our network for years. To name a few examples: Bob Haak at Augustana (IL) has served faithfully as the editor of this publication; George Connell at Concordia has overseen the Lutheran Academy of Scholars until recently and has now passed the baton to Jacquie Bussie (one of the authors of the articles in this issue); and Tom Morgan at Augsburg has provided leadership for gatherings of the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference. In many respects, the health and vibrancy of our network has resulted from the willingness of many of you to take on leadership of the network for many years.

So I welcome the increased participation by all of you in the leadership of our network. And, even though I regret the loss of capacity in the churchwide organization brought about by the changing economy of the ELCA, this apparent change is really nothing new. As I noted above, the ELCA has long been a church in which its higher education network has taken the lead in directing its own common mission. To the extent that we do need new ways of maintaining our network, the Council of Presidents at ELCA colleges and universities has begun exploring the changes that might be required. Thanks to all who continue to contribute toward sustaining the gift of ELCA higher education.

MARK WILHELM | Program Director for Schools, Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit, ELCA

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From the Editor

The articles in this issue were presented at the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference in the summer of 2010. (This year's conference will be held on July 30th–August 1st. The theme will be “A Calling to Embrace Creation: Lutheran Higher Education, Sustainability, and Stewardship.” Save the dates!) The theme of the conference that summer dealt with how our campuses respond to religious diversity.

There was a time, not so long ago, when religious diversity on our campuses revolved around which branch of the Lutheran tree one identified with—usually connected in some deep way with a cultural tradition of the founders of the college. The Swedish Lutherans of Augustana, the Danish Lutherans of Dana, the Norwegians of Well, you understand. I remember coming to Augustana (RI) to teach in the religion department at a time when I was considered to be “the token German.” This was a sort of diversity, but hardly the same phenomena that the colleges face today.

In recent times we have been faced with student bodies—and faculties—that often do not identify themselves as Lutheran. The range of faith identifications today covers the wide range of religious diversity that occurs within American culture. At some institutions, “none” is the most predominant religious affiliation. For some time, Lutheran colleges and universities have addressed their relation to Judaism and Jewish students and faculty. At some places, such as Muhlenberg College, this conversation has produced dramatic results. An ever increasing number of our students identify themselves with Islam. How do we as Lutheran colleges and universities understand this changing landscape?

Today it would be unusual, to say the least, if anyone on a college campus spoke out against diversity of any kind. The experience on many campuses, however, is that while diversity is espoused, little is done to encourage and support diversity. Too often this is seen as the work of an individual or small group of people who take this on as their cause. Any time the issue comes up, the response is “well, that’s the responsibility of X.” The result is that often not much progress is made on these issues.

I would argue that diversity is important on our campuses. But I would also argue that assent to that proposition is not

sufficient. Diversity is not an end in itself. It is important because of the work that it can do toward the end of educating our students well. How do we understand the role of diversity in this project for which we all exist? Is there a difference in our understanding of the need for diversity based on the Lutheran tradition from which we grow?

Darrell Jodock, in his article in this issue, argues that our theological tradition leads us to a “third path” in relation to religious diversity. He finds this “third path” on the Lutheran value of giftedness. I would suggest that this theological base could be expanded to include Lutheran understandings of the work of the Holy Spirit and the Incarnation. Lutherans believe that the Spirit of Christ speaks not only in the past but continues to speak even today. And we believe that the Spirit of Christ is not under our control but speaks as the Spirit wills. Our job as Lutheran Christians is to be attentive to that voice wherever it may be heard. And we know that the place of the Spirit is not limited to where we look. Often the Spirit speaks important words through the ones that we perceive as “the other.” It is because of this that diversity (religious and of all types) is crucially important on our campuses. Those voices of “the other” may be the Spirit of Christ speaking to us in this day. If we do not listen, or are not able to because we have somehow dismissed “the other,” we may well miss the most important words we are called to hear.

So our job as institutions of Lutheran higher education is to create places where the voice of “the other” is heard and valued. Again, this is not for diversity’s sake itself, but because of our theological understanding of how God interacts with this world.

Tonight in Wallenberg Hall at Augustana College in Rock Island, on September 9, 2011, Dr. Omid Safi spoke of fear and love in our world. Those who were able heard in his words the voice of God. It is true that not all in the audience could hear those words. But in this place, at a Lutheran college gathering, the voice of “the other” was heard, and the best of religious diversity was experienced. This is what we are about as Lutheran colleges and universities.

ROBERT D. HAAK | The Augustana Center for Vocational Reflection, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois

DARRELL JODOCK

Vocation of the Lutheran College and Religious Diversity

My job in this article is twofold—to remind us of the basics of Lutheran theology and to begin to build on those basics in responding to religious diversity in our colleges. So, if what I am saying sounds familiar, I will not be disappointed and I hope you will not be either. Simply regard it to be a reminder or a restatement of what you already know and an endeavor to establish a common base for the other articles in this issue. If what I am saying is new and unfamiliar to you, then I hope it will serve to invite you into the conversation and equip you for it.

The Third Path

I begin with an image of the third path. When it comes to private colleges in this country, there are two well-known default positions. Each has value, so I describe in order to distinguish, not to criticize. The first I call “sectarian.” The sectarian institution is deeply rooted in one denominational and/or one religious tradition, but it is not inclusive. It expects a good deal of homogeneity. If it’s Baptist (let’s say), it will give preference to hiring faculty and staff and admitting students that are Baptist. Sometimes the expectations are more informal, at other times they are formulated into written statements that faculty and staff are expected to sign when they are appointed. The sectarian college is an enclave. It primarily serves the church and is good at nurturing students in its own religious tradition. But a pretty clear line separates it from the rest of society, and this line tends to isolate it and make full participation in the surrounding world difficult. With regard to religious diversity, it has no problem, simply because religious diversity does not exist or is not acknowledged. It is excluded from the on-campus conversation. Seventy-five or one hundred years

ago, many of our ELCA colleges were more homogenous than they are now, but the homogeneity was often driven more by ethnicity or language than by religious principle. Even so, many alumni and friends of our colleges often expect them to be more sectarian than they are.

The second default model is “non-sectarian.” A non-sectarian institution is religiously inclusive; it is a microcosm of the surrounding society. Unlike the sectarian institution, the line of demarcation between the college and the larger society is easily crossed. It has as much religious diversity as the society around it. But it is not rooted. Every religious group has equal status, and the college endeavors to have policies that are neutral. As a result, its communal religious identity is superficial—that is, its principles are borrowed from the surrounding culture rather than from a religious tradition. With regard to religious diversity, it too has no problem, but for quite different reasons. Its implicit message is that religion is not important enough to be part of the communal life of the college. Religion becomes a private matter, so there is no reason to wrestle with religious differences.

Somewhat ironically, though the intention is clearly positive, this non-sectarian approach can have quite a different result. Built as it is on the notion of tolerance, it can result in new forms of intolerance. This can happen when each religious group, lacking interaction with the others and reacting against the communal devaluing of religion, can begin to see itself as the bastion of truth. Then a new balkanization can occur as each group within the college becomes an embattled enclave. Instead of fostering cohesion, the result can be even more rigid divisions.

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Often, having in mind the more positive aspects of a non-sectarian college, some voices within our colleges and some voices from without expect us to become non-sectarian, in part because the model is familiar and in part because some assume it is the only alternative to being sectarian.

“How is a college that is rooted in the Lutheran tradition to deal with religious diversity? How can it be both rooted and inclusive?”

In our society, a Lutheran college that takes its own tradition seriously does not fit either of those default models. It follows a third path. It is rooted because it takes the Lutheran tradition seriously and draws nourishment from it, and it is inclusive in at least two senses: (a) welcoming into its student body, faculty, and staff persons of diverse religious backgrounds and (b) seeking to serve the larger community. Instead of an enclave or a microcosm, it is a well that is dug deep to nourish the whole community. One difficulty of the third path is that it is hard to explain. It does not fit either default model. Another of the difficulties is that it leaves us with an unresolved question and an unfinished task: how is a college that is rooted in the Lutheran tradition to deal with religious diversity? How can it be both rooted and inclusive?

Two Orienting Observations

I begin by observing that we are talking here about the identity and vocation of the college, about a communal identity and not a sum of individual identities. For a college to be Lutheran, not everyone in the community needs to be Lutheran or Christian. I like to think of it this way—if everyone in the college shares a vision of what the college is trying to do, this vision informs the teaching and decision-making at the school even if only some members of the community have their personal roots sunk deeply in Lutheran soil while others do not. Or, to appeal to an analogy, if a student who is not sure if he or she believes in God goes to India and comes back so moved by the plight of people there as to make helping them a priority, and another student who is a committed believer goes to India and comes back with the same priority, and both benefit from good mentoring, the two may well wind up doing the same kind of project. In either case, in some modest way the poor in India are likely to be helped. The difference is that the second student will believe that the call has come from God through the deep human need of our neighbors

in India while the first student will believe that the call has come directly from the deep human need. The second is likely to be more deeply rooted than the first; hence the two may well differ in their vocational resiliency and may also differ in other ways. But on the level of ethical action, their initial results may be the same: namely, the poor get help. Or, at the risk of overkill, allow me one more analogy. The piers that support a bridge hold up a roadway that is usually wider than the piers themselves. So, too, Lutheran roots nourish a college community that is much more inclusive than building on a denominational identity would seem to suggest.

Having made this observation, allow me to make a second. A community that values the deep wells of its own religious tradition is more likely to value other kinds of depth. A religiously rooted college that follows the third path is more likely to value the rootedness of a Muslim or a Buddhist or a Jew than is a non-sectarian college that dismisses the importance of religion. I do not mean that the religious differences will disappear. No, precisely the opposite, the differences will remain. But what I do want to say is that a person deeply rooted in one tradition is more likely to respect the importance of religion in the life of the deeply rooted member of another religion. If they talk at some length about their religious views, their differences will not be ignored or denied, but a different kind of kinship will emerge. If all goes well, each will be enriched by the conversation, and each will appreciate new elements in his/her own faith. This is possible because

“A person deeply rooted in one tradition is more likely to respect the importance of religion in the life of the deeply rooted member of another religion.”

each religious tradition (and specifically the Lutheran tradition) brings with it an awareness of the deep mystery of the divine. This mystery cannot be captured fully in any one set of words or any one set of symbols. A believer need not endorse the words of another tradition in order to understand that one's own words are insufficient and one still has more to learn.

Interreligious Dialogue and Civil Discourse

With this longish introduction, I'd like to try to identify some features of the Lutheran tradition that influence how a Lutheran college begins to think about interreligious relations and civil discourse—the two topics that are front and center in all the articles of this issue. Before doing that, however, the

introduction will be extended one more time. I need to clarify what I mean by interreligious dialogue and by civil discourse, so let me provide some descriptors:

A person engaged in good *inter-religious dialogue* (a) compares the “best” of one religion to the “best” of another, not the best to the worst, (b) interprets the other religion “in such a way that an informed adherent of that religion would agree with the description,” (c) enters the dialogue “ready to learn something new” and “see the world differently,” and (d) stays clear of merely fitting an idea from the other religion into the framework of one’s own, as if the other religion were but a pale reflection of one’s own, when in fact the pieces there are put together quite differently (Jodock 131-32).

A person engaged in *civil discourse* seeks “common ground”—that is, areas where values overlap—and does so regarding any issue of importance, including the more contentious ones such as immigration, global warming, war, abortion, same-sex relations, etc. Indeed, the conversation needs also to tackle disagreements about the relative importance of these and other issues. Some guidelines for such civil discourse include the following: (a) “those who claim the right to dissent should assume the responsibility to debate.” (b) “Those who claim the right to criticize should assume the responsibility to comprehend.” (c) “Those who claim the right to influence should accept the responsibility not to inflame.” (d) “Those who claim the right to participate should accept the responsibility to persuade” (Hunter 239).

The Lutheran Tradition

Now, what features of the Lutheran tradition influence how a college thinks about interreligious dialogue and civil discourse? I’d like to consider six; as we will see, they are interlocking.

Feature #1: Giftedness

According to the Lutheran tradition, being right with God and having dignity as a human are free gifts, for which there are no prerequisites. It is as if we were orphans and totally out of the blue came adoptive parents who say, “From this point on, as far as we are concerned, you are our child, no matter what.” We would have no idea why we were selected or why the adopted parents are taking this step. All of the initiative and all of the energy for the relationship would be coming from the parents. And we would see that this was happening not only to us but to others as well. Being adopted means being adopted into a family with siblings. The tradition says that being right with God and having dignity are both founded on God’s evaluation, not ours.

What results from being gifted is a trustworthy relationship, which militates against fear and anxiety. I am convinced that fear and a pervasive anxiety are contributing to the polarization and

the harsh rhetoric in our society. This anxiety has more than one cause, but among them is the deep, inarticulate worry that our way of life is not economically, environmentally, or politically sustainable. Anxiety gets in the way of civil discourse. According to Peter Steinke, the consequences of anxiety include the following: (a) it “decreases our capacity to learn,” (b) it “stiffens our position over against another’s,” (c) it “prompts a desire for a quick fix,” (d) it “leads to an array of defensive behaviors,” and (e) it “creates imaginative gridlock (not being able to think of alternatives, options,

“What results from being gifted is a trustworthy relationship, which militates against fear and anxiety.”

or new perspectives)” (8-9). He calls for non-anxious leaders who keep the mission of the group front and center. This is as clear a priority for college faculty and staff as for neighborhoods and the nation as a whole. Over 200 times we find in the Bible reassurance: “Fear not” or “Do not be afraid.” An outlook rooted in gratitude and a trustworthy relationship with the divine goes a long ways toward permitting civil discourse, because it enhances our capacity to listen and to imagine less polarized possibilities. And an outlook rooted in gratitude and a trustworthy relationship goes a long way toward freeing us up for interreligious dialogue. Why? (a) Because we cannot know the limits of God’s free gift. If there are no prerequisites, I cannot establish any boundaries. (b) Because the identity of a gifted person is not threatened by persons whose outlooks differ. And (c) because, as Luther made clear, we cannot know how anyone else is related to God. He was thinking about people who were nominally Christians, but the same would apply to people in other religions. To hear that a person is Jewish tells me little about that person’s relationship with God any more than learning a person is Christian tells me much about that person’s level of commitment or relationship with God. We all know or know of Christians whose spiritual stature is so significant that it would be acknowledged by anyone. At the same time we all know or know of Christians whose narrowness and legalism make us observe, with Sam Shoemaker, that they appear to have been starched and ironed before being washed.¹ If so, we should not be surprised to find a similar diversity within other communities of faith. Some draw sustenance from their religion for enriching lives while others use their religion to intimidate, demean, or attack others. Recognizing multiple uses of religion leads to dialogue rather than predetermined generalized judgments.

If one's standing before God is a free gift, what is the role of faith? According to the Lutheran tradition, faith is an acknowledgment of what God has done and will do in one's life. To return to the analogy used earlier, faith is acknowledging one's adoption. Faith does not come first; it tags along after God has been at work. Acknowledging that one is part of the family into which one has been adopted does not *effect* the adoption. That's already occurred. And it does not *affect* the parents' love. That's an ongoing gift. What faith does do is to influence the self-understanding of the child or the self-understanding of the person adopted by God.

Notice that this understanding of faith puts the Lutheran tradition at odds with much of mainline Protestantism in the United States where the understanding is "if you have faith, then you'll be right with God." This common understanding changes the nature of faith, makes it a pre-requisite, and establishes boundaries that a free gift does not. That is, if faith is a prerequisite, then I can tell who is not right with God. In fact, this view is a contemporary form of exactly what caused Luther problems.² It leaves God passive and expects the initiative to come from the human being. For Luther this view was completely backwards and completely unworkable.

"The legacy of being freely gifted provides the kind of security and freedom that encourages civil discourse and interreligious dialogue."

The point here is that the legacy of being freely gifted provides the kind of security and freedom that encourages civil discourse and interreligious dialogue. If I have no control over my adoption into a family or a community, am confident that the person adopting me will love me no matter what, and base my dignity as a human on this giftedness, then I have nothing to defend and nothing to fear. I can listen to those who disagree and search for common ground. I can keep my eye on the goal rather than overreacting to others. In addition to providing this kind of security and freedom, the legacy of being freely gifted also provides the basis for treating others with generosity—for becoming a channel of generosity toward others.

Feature #2: The Whole World Gifted by an Engaged God
What we have already said about free gifting can only be understood when it is seen to be part of the larger reality of God's

generosity toward the whole world. Unlike other traditions that see God as "up there," orchestrating and micromanaging the world in accordance with an already worked-out plan, the Lutheran tradition finds God "down here," amid the ordinary, amid the suffering and the chaos as well as the order and beauty, deeply involved in delivering good gifts to anyone and everyone

"The Lutheran tradition's vision of a down-to-earth God views deliberation as an essential feature of God's work among us."

through the agency of other humans and other creatures. Many Americans, I sense, feel as if civil discourse and interreligious dialogue are concessions. Things really should be black and white. Either a religious concept is right or it is not—so why talk about it? In contrast, the Lutheran tradition's vision of a down-to-earth God views deliberation as an essential feature of God's work among us. God works through deliberation and its complexity and messiness to invite us forward into deeper insights and a new perspective. On this view, God empowers but does not control. God has a goal (the kind of wholeness and peace reflected in the word "*shalom*") but not a detailed plan of how to get there. For humans, the result is a remarkable freedom and a remarkable capacity for creativity, which they can use for good or for ill. The tradition affirms that all humans are invited to use that freedom and creativity to serve the goal of *shalom*.

One of the things this means is that everyone has a vocation—everyone has a calling to serve the neighbor and the community, in and through one's parenting, occupation, and contributions as a citizen. And part of the mission of a Lutheran college is to invite and challenge everyone to develop a robust sense of vocation. One evening a group sat around a dining room table. They were all parents with children at the "best" schools in the country—Williams, Swarthmore, Carleton, Macalester. All were disappointed. This prompted a search for an explanation, the result of which was an agreement that what was missing in their children's experience at these schools was a campus-wide conversation about vocation. I like to describe vocation this way—it is (a) a sense of the self as not an isolated unit but nested in a larger community, and (b) a deep sense that one's highest ethical priority is to serve that larger community (a community with ever-widening circles—from neighborhood to nation, to all of humanity, to all the creatures in our biosphere). What is

distinctive about the Lutheran view is that vocation comes from outside, from the needs of the neighbor and the community rather than from an emphasis on one's own gifts and interior priorities (though these are by no means irrelevant). Earlier this summer, during a workshop on vocation for faculty at Gustavus, one of our sessions was led by three colleagues—a Jew, a Muslim, and a Buddhist—each of whom explained how his or her own religious outlook supported a robust sense of vocation. Because of the breadth of the Lutheran concept of God's activity in the world—or, we could say, God's ongoing creation—their ability to do this is not surprising. All are gifted and all are called.

Notice what has happened here. Our focus has been on the kind and quality of relationships. Doctrines and beliefs have their place and their importance, but they are not central. From the very beginning, the Lutheran tradition has relied on paradoxes—placing side by side two seemingly contradictory statements as a way of pointing beyond the statements to some deeper reality. (The believer is free lord of all subject to none and the believer is the dutiful servant of all, subject to all. The believer is simultaneously right with God and a sinner. God is both hidden and revealed. In 1912 some American Lutherans decided that both predestination and free will were right. The list could go on.) If doctrines were central, the rootedness of the college would have quite different consequences and the dynamics of interreligious relations would be far different.

Feature #3: Wisdom

The Lutheran tradition prizes wisdom. Let us return to the concept of freedom. What acknowledging one's giftedness does is to set a person free—*free from* the endless treadmill of trying to prove oneself through success at this or that and *free for* service to others. Here as elsewhere we run into terminological difficulties, because Americans commonly mean by “freedom” what I would call “freedom of choice”—that is, the absence of coercion when deciding whether to have a hamburger or a chicken sandwich. The Lutheran tradition affirms freedom of choice,³ but what it typically means by freedom is something far deeper. For example, when society is caught up in a mass hysteria and a group is being feared and/or blamed for what is wrong, risking all to stand with a member of that group is an expression of this deeper “freedom for.” Such an action takes courage and a strong ethical commitment to the neighbor, and it also takes a deeply rooted freedom from anxiety and fear.

Now back to wisdom. If humans are free, how are they to know how to act? Luther provides no blueprint—either for the individual or for society as a whole. There are no detailed do's and don'ts. There is no prescribed plan for how to organize a society. Decisions are to be guided, not by rules, but by wisdom. We can

define wisdom as understanding humans and what makes for a rich and full life and understanding communities and what makes for justice and peace. Wisdom is not the exclusive province of one religion, but it can be enhanced by the life-affirming instruction found in the Bible. Similarly, there are enough educated fools around for us to know that wisdom is not automatically the result of education, but it can be enhanced by good learning. When Luther wrote to the city councils in Germany, recommending that they establish schools for both young men and young women, his chief argument was that the study of human history and what has gone well and what has gone wrong throughout the ages would enhance the *wisdom* of Germany's citizens so that they could lead the community and lead their households (368-69).

“The cultivation of wisdom is the central contribution that education can make to society.”

The ultimate goal of Lutheran higher education is not learning and is not even critical thinking, as important as these are. It is the enhancement of wisdom. Learning and critical thinking both contribute to this goal but they are not ends in themselves. The cultivation of wisdom is the central contribution that education can make to society.

This means that education is inherently communal. I can learn new data on my own, but wisdom requires the give and take of multiple perspectives. Wisdom comes from insight gathered in community. In order to discover wisdom, civil discourse is needed. Moreover, in order to discover wisdom, interreligious dialogue is valuable. It helps us examine the most basic of human questions about meaning and purpose, drawing upon the multiple insights of major religious traditions and thereby deepening our understanding of what it means to be human.

I should add that wisdom is never objective or neutral. It is always self-engaging. So, the pursuit of wisdom does not require us to abandon beliefs that hold up under scrutiny; the pursuit of wisdom is rather a form of deep listening that helps us refine those beliefs and figure out what our neighbors and our community need so that we can determine where to put our energies. And what is the standard? The measuring stick is very pragmatic: whatever actions benefit the neighbor and the community are good. Whatever actions do not are bad. What matters is not one's own virtue, not one's good intentions, not some ideology about small or big governments; what matters are the consequences. Does someone get fed or housed or educated or experience the dignity of work or

have access to health care? Do relationships get mended? Is justice achieved? Is *shalom* fostered? What matters are the consequences.

Feature #4: Caution regarding Claims to Know

Luther was upset about the scholastic theologians of his day who would use isolated statements from the Bible or the theological tradition as premises upon which to build arguments that would supposedly answer questions not addressed in revelation. In other words, they would use syllogisms to “fill in the spaces” between fundamental truths. Luther saw more than one problem with this approach, but the one that concerns us for the moment is that it overstepped the capacities of human knowledge. The problem was not the endeavor to learn more. The problem was the claims made about the results of those arguments. John Haught, a fine Roman Catholic theologian, has used the term “inexhaustibility” to describe human knowing (11-13). In science, for example, there is always something more to know. Scientists once claimed that atoms were the smallest particles, until they learned there were still smaller ones. They expected to find that the genes were in control of human development, but soon it became clear that other chemicals and processes turn genes on and off. No matter how much we learn about the world, there is still more to learn, and that something more does not just add to our knowledge, it often changes the whole paradigm. Similarly our knowledge of another person is inexhaustible. And so is our knowledge of God. Acknowledging this inexhaustibility is a reason for caution. From Luther’s perspective who would have expected God’s clearest self-revelation to be a carpenter from a remote corner of the world who identified with suffering and was executed as a criminal? Who would have expected that discipleship involves a call to “suffer with” rather than to escape suffering, a call to acknowledge the reality of suffering rather than to deny it? There are too many surprises for our claims to have much weight. For Luther, revelation shows us God, God’s attitude toward us, and God’s overall purposes, but it does not answer many other questions. Why is there suffering in the first place? What exactly is God doing at this moment? There are questions for which we have no definitive answers. The lack of full answers leaves room for freedom and the use of wisdom.

And this reminder of limits and endorsement of caution about our claims to know has a corollary: we also need to be cautious about what we do with those claims. When a person adopts bad ideas, someone gets hurt. It was, for example, a bad idea that prompted Stalin to starve out three million Ukrainians when they resisted collectivization. It was a bad idea that regarded Aryans to be superior and Jews to be a threat, and this bad idea caused untold hardship during the Holocaust. It was a bad idea to cut down ancient forests and to dump toxic gases

into the air without thought to the consequences. If we cannot fully understand God, cannot fully understand humans, and cannot fully understand nature, then acting as if we did know is likely to harm someone or something else.

“The lack of full answers leaves room for freedom and the use of wisdom.”

If a person listens carefully to the political rhetoric of today, one is shocked by the audacity of the claims to know what society needs or does not need. A little caution or intellectual humility would go a long way toward opening the door to civil discourse and the search for common ground.

And if a person listens to some of the religious rhetoric of today, one is similarly shocked. How can one claim to know the timetable of the future? The only way is to use the method of the scholastics to take ideas from scattered parts of the Bible and fill in the blanks. How can one claim to know that God punished Prime Minister Sharon for his withdrawal of settlers from Gaza? The only way is to assume, not only that God is a micromanager, but also that we can know what God is thinking.

A more cautious set of religious claims—not cautious in one’s confidence of being gifted, but cautious in one’s claims to know—allows for significant religious dialogue, where mutual learning takes place.

Feature #5: A High Value on Community

I have already talked about the centrality of relationships and the quality of relationships. In this tradition, humans are understood to be shaped and formed by their relationships. When my wife and I were engaged, people who knew me well commented that I seemed different. Who I was and how I responded to things was influenced by this new relationship. Relationships either enhance our humanity or cause it to shrivel. God graces us through others. So a healthy person is always simultaneously a giver and a recipient. To see oneself as part of a community is to acknowledge this mutuality—to acknowledge that I receive from others and that others can receive from me.

Once again here we run into something that is both counter-cultural and at odds with much religious practice in America. Our society generally regards humans to be isolated units, fully capable of discerning for themselves what it means to live the good life. On this view, hooking up with others is merely a matter of convenience. In contrast, the Lutheran tradition sees relationships as constitutive of selfhood. Luther was influenced

by the biblical view that existing without relationships is best described as “death”—the person is breathing in and breathing out but is, for all practical purposes, dead. The Lutheran tradition is at odds with American *individualism*.

Some time ago I attended a talent show put on as part of the 125th anniversary of my home town. In that setting I listened to half a dozen gospel tunes. Some of the musicians were excellent, and on one level I even enjoyed the songs, but the lyrics were troubling—me, me, me in one song after another—a little about God and a lot about me. As I say, the Lutheran tradition is in this regard out of step, not only with American culture, but also with American religiosity, in that it sees the individual not as isolated but nested in a community. If being “spiritual but not religious” means trying to be a Christian by oneself, then the Lutheran tradition is at odds with this contemporary trend as well. If the goal of religious life is to practice *shalom*, then participating in a community of faith is essential.

“The Lutheran tradition is at odds with American *individualism*.”

When I ask students to define the word “community,” very often they describe it as a group of people with shared interests. I do not know whether that is a valid use of “community,” but it is not what I am talking about here. “Community” is rather the mutual interaction of people who differ—people with different occupations, priorities, and temperaments—all working together for the common good.

The community of faith may have shared commitments, but, as Paul discovered in Corinth, it also has a good deal of diversity, held together by a common mission to mend the world. And the larger community has even greater diversity. To understand the larger community as a community is not to seek to reduce diversity but to utilize that diversity in service to the common good—that is, to help mend the world and move it toward *shalom*.

We’ve already mentioned some consequences of this emphasis on community:

- everyone has a calling to serve the community
- participation in community is a crucial part of any education that aims at wisdom
- when it can be harnessed by civil discourse aimed at common ground, diversity is an asset to the educational mission of a college

- when religious diversity results in inter-religious dialogue, religious diversity can also be an asset to a college that is both rooted and inclusive.

Clearly, this emphasis on community includes both the priority of the community of faith and the priority of serving the larger community.

Feature #6: An Emphasis on Service and Community Leadership

As I hope I have already made clear, the overarching goal in Lutheran education is to equip people for service to the community. However much Luther himself emphasized the God-human relationship, he also worked to establish community chests to end begging, provide for those in need, especially children and the elderly, and provide low-interest loans to shop owners. He advocated schools for all young people. He opposed hoarding that would profit at the expense of others. He encouraged the princes and peasants to negotiate rather than go to war. He advocated changes in the rules governing marriage. He opposed a crusade against the Muslims. And, if we turn to Lutherans in America, they constitute about 3% of the population and yet are responsible for the largest social service network in the country, operate one of the two largest refugee resettlement services, and support an international relief and development service with such a high reputation that after the tsunami in Japan major secular journals suggested it was one of the best places to send donations.

An education that equips people for service to the community also equips for leadership. Vocation is my own sense of call. Leadership is helping others discern and put into action their calling. Leadership is not just being in charge or occupying a position of authority but rather the capacity to see what a community needs, to convince others that it’s important, to decide on a course of action, and to get people working together toward that goal. So long as one has some vision of the whole, anyone can lead and can lead from any position in the group. Leadership comes in diverse forms—whether discerning the need or coming up with a plan or getting people on board, whether working behind the scenes or serving as a public spokesperson. What a community leader needs is a sense of vocation and a sense of agency (that is, a sense that he/she can make a difference). At a time when many feel helpless, Lutheran higher education needs to nurture a more robust sense of agency. Because the goal is service to the community, Lutheran higher education focuses on both vocation and leadership.

If leadership is to be community leadership or transformative leadership, then our college graduates need to be able to engage in civil discourse and be able to work with persons of other religions.

A Commitment to Christianity and Inter-religious Dialogue Go Together

Some may ask: what is Darrell up to? Has he relativized Christian claims? Not at all, because my endeavor is to reclaim the Lutheran tradition of God's ongoing creation alongside the more familiar strains of redemption. Not at all, because the only way we can move the world toward *shalom* is to emphasize both systemic change and personal transformation. I believe that the personal transformation that Christians have emphasized is crucial. But American society has privatized and individualized that part of Christianity to the point of distortion, and in so doing it has neglected the priority of justice and wholeness in society. This ongoing creation and this quest for *shalom* are the larger framework within which personal transformation takes on meaning. Only because God is at work mending the whole world, do I have hope. And personal transformation is part of this hope. It enhances the "freedom for" we need in order to participate in this mending.

The message of our adoption by God is foundational for those of us who are members of that faith community; whether it makes a difference to the *world* depends on what kind of Christians we are.

Even though God's free gifting and God's goal of *shalom* make all the difference to me, I can still invite those who do not share my enthusiasm for these ideas to join me in mending the world. I can remind them that they did not choose to be born, that they did not construct the natural landscape they value, that they did not build the roads or discover the medical procedures that enhance their lives and make possible their accomplishments. In other words, I can remind them that a sober assessing of their own lives rules out a sense of entitlement and supports a life of gratitude. I can remind them of their connectedness with all that is and what this means for their exercise of freedom. I can remind them how limited is the control we seem to seek and how much in this world arouses a sense of wonder, and I can remind them how important wonder is for creativity in science and music and art and every other discipline. I do not have to prove that their religious convictions are wrong and I certainly do not need to abandon my Christian faith to do this inviting. I can invite them into a sense of gratitude, vocation, wonder, and connectedness, and encourage a vision of *shalom*. These have the capacity to enable religions and other groups of humans to work together and to be a unifying force instead of a dividing one.

Religious Diversity and the Lutheran Identity of a College

And next some may ask, if all of this is true, why should a non-Christian care about the college's rootedness? Because it is

precisely this rootedness that has secured a place for the non-Christian's full participation in the community. That is, the Lutheran tradition has invited not only the person but also the person with his/her religious convictions to participate fully in the community. And I trust that religiously based invitations are more likely to endure in the midst of countervailing forces than are culturally based invitations. As the Hillel director at Muhlenberg College once told me, "I tell Jewish parents that this is a good place to send their children, not despite the fact that it is Lutheran, but because it is Lutheran." I admit that at times the Lutheran vocabulary and outlook in a Lutheran college may make a non-Christian feel like a visitor, but the choices are these: a sectarian college where the feeling is still more intense and full participation is limited, a non-sectarian college where, in the final analysis, no one's religious commitments are welcome, or a college that follows the third path, where the living tradition of the college supports one's presence and participation. I think the third path is the one worth taking and the one that supports both civil discourse and interreligious understanding.

Endnotes

1. From a speech given at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, somewhere between 1962 and 1966.
2. He had learned the theology of Gabriel Biel, which said that God had established a path to salvation, but the individual needed to take the initiative and take the first steps on that pathway. Then God would supply what was needed to complete the journey.
3. With regard to everything except initiating the God-human relationship. There God takes the first step.

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TERENCE S. MORROW

The State of Civil Discourse on Campus and in Society

Introduction

One can find in any given day troubling examples of communication that may be seen by some, or many, as a sign that our civil dialogue has deteriorated. The tragic shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords precipitated a robust examination of the state of public discourse in the United States. Congressman Joseph Wilson's "You lie" during President Barack Obama's September 2009 health care address to Congress was just another of the many examples that can be cited. Within academia, stories of students being punished for their classroom statements abound (see, e.g., "Georgia College Student"; Holland).

Before turning to a closer examination of civil discourse, though, it is important to acknowledge that it can and does occur. A striking example happened at the 2009 Minnesota State Fair when a Tea Party activist engaged Senator Al Franken in a discussion of health care reform ("Franken Talks"). The respectful way in which both listened to the other and articulated their own views and concerns might give hope to those who despair that civil discourse has largely disappeared.

Despite this example, public angst regarding the state of public discourse in the United States is widespread. Dr. Merrill Ridd, an emeritus professor from the University of Utah, captures the concerns of many:

The problems we face today are perhaps as basic to our way of life as any American has faced since its founding. Few things are so fundamental as health care, the economy and war. Emotions are high and intense. Surely we need to be honest, informed and avoid misrepresentation. Has partisan

divisiveness escalated to a level where vicious personal attack... has displaced thoughtful dialogue? Whatever happened to respectful, insightful civil dialogue? (Ridd)

Others join Dr. Ridd in expressing deep reservations about the capacity and the willingness of Americans to engage in meaningful public debate. One University of St. Thomas (MN) dean recalls a conversation with her peers: "We were just talking about the state of discourse whenever there was a controversial issue and the seeming unwillingness, in general, of society to engage in a meaningful way with people whose views differ from your own and to really engage with them in a way that could be productive" (Selix).

To measure fully the present state of 'civil discourse' in the United States, one must consider the nature of civil discourse itself. One commentator offered the following description. Civil discourse occurs when people "are willing to think seriously about the position of those different from their own and to consider arguments in its favor and the data, evidence, and conclusions" (Selix).

Understanding the purpose of civil discourse can aid us in assessing its current state. Appraisal of a dialogue's effectiveness cannot be premised upon the "success" in converting one's audience to one's own point of view. Such a perspective carries with it a win-lose framework that can impede open investigation and discussion of assumptions, evidence, and claims. Rather, the changing of people's minds should not factor into determining whether a particular enactment of civil discourse was effective. The participants' positions might not be altered, but the willingness to test the claims and evidence in a meaningful way might signal civil discourse.

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The quandary regarding civil discourse is pronounced at our colleges and universities. Much of the concern arises from the tension between competing goals that can appear antithetical. One objective is to create an environment in which ideas may be examined and challenged. For this purpose, protection of “academic freedom” is said to support expression of ideas that others might find troubling. To encourage students to examine critically their own views and those of others, some contend that colleges should not engage in punishing speakers for their views. As one commentator noted, “College campuses should be the last place where we want to start telling people what speech is bad and what speech is good” (Rosen).

“The quandary regarding civil discourse is pronounced at our colleges and universities.”

Another objective for colleges and universities is to maintain a campus upon which students do not feel oppressed or intimidated. At a university, one scholar noted, “students should feel safe from discrimination” (Rosen). To protect against a hostile learning environment, institutions often establish speech rules to proscribe certain communication, such as hate speech. The tension resulting from the two objectives might be captured in the following *Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education* strategic objective: “To encourage campus environments which promote civil discourse, respect and appreciation of difference, freedom of expression, inclusivity and opportunities for individual and community development” (“National Association” 16).

Three Deep Traditions

To dissect the civil discourse tension at our colleges, this article turns to three traditions that offer understandings of civil discourse that cohere well with the nation’s democratic foundation and our colleges’ missions.

The Liberal Arts Tradition

The consanguinity between the liberal arts and civil discourse is well-known. St. Olaf’s past president Christopher Thomforde captured this sentiment: “Some folks at liberal arts colleges point out that civil discourse is the goal of a liberal arts education” (Selix). He explained that colleges and universities must create “safe space” for moral deliberation and discourse.

In part, the liberal arts tradition is central to the vitality of civil discourse in that both herald the value of understanding

the limits of one’s own perspective. Building upon this premise, one professor explained, “At St. Olaf, we are trying to teach a certain type of humility and empathy” (Selix). A core principle in the Western liberal arts tradition is exemplified in Socrates’ response to the Oracle at Delphi, in which he realizes that he is wise because he recognizes the limits of his own knowledge. This Socratic precept encourages a commitment to humility, one might hope, that carries over to public dialogue.

Another Platonic contribution to the liberal arts that can aid civil discourse lies in *dissoi logoi*, a rhetorical exercise in which a student is encouraged to develop the positions of opposing sides in an argument. Professor Douglas Casson at St. Olaf invokes *dissoi logoi* analysis when he requires his students “to take positions that they disagree with and defend them orally” (Selix). By undertaking to understand and argue an opposing position, students learn to appreciate the other’s perspective and to solidify, if warranted, their own views. Dr. Casson elaborates:

What (*dissoi logoi* analysis) forces them to do is try to empathize with a political, social, [or] religious position that’s completely foreign to them. And my hope is that that also helps us move toward a type of civility... because I think that empathy or imagining yourself in your opponent’s shoes is the first step toward open political dialogue. (Selix)

Development of the capacity to engage in *dissoi logoi* analysis can engender the empathy for another’s views that is a hallmark of the liberal arts tradition. It also can assist as we strive to engage in the meaningful dialogue that is said to mark healthy civil discourse.

It is essential to develop our capacity for understanding another perspective if civil discourse is to thrive. As Pearce and Littlejohn remind us,

If we can see the rationality behind our opponent’s position, we will no longer be able to characterize the opponent as insane, stupid, or misguided. When we realize the limits of our...assumptions, we will have more respect for the power of our opponent’s views. In the end, we will find the ability to disagree without silencing the other side through repression, injury and pain, or death. (167)

That our colleges and universities can inculcate the value and the practices of civil discourse by encouraging an expectation of rational reason-giving is a belief shared across academia. University of California-San Diego Chancellor Marye Anne Fox stated:

Through civil discourse and debate, we can challenge long-held views and expand our perspectives through thoughtful, constructive discussion. Every great university is set upon the rock-solid principles of freedom of thought and freedom of speech. Those freedoms are strengthened when our public discourse is reasoned and collegial.

The Lutheran Tradition

My relatively recent immersion in the Lutheran tradition leaves me with the growing realization that civil discourse and moral deliberation are fundamental components. I defer to Dr. Darrell Jodock and other authors in this issue who can better explicate the connections between Lutheranism and civil discourse. Dr. Jodock observed during a Gustavus Adolphus College campus forum:

A gifted person respects mystery in God and other humans, values differing opinions, understands what the Bible can teach without granting it the final word on everything and does not feel the need to be right. These are the most effective ways that Lutheranism can encourage civil disagreement. (Shandretsky)

I note that these ties between Lutheranism and a commitment to civil discourse have been well-noted. ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson, for one, called for the establishment of ‘communities of moral deliberation’ (Hanson). Bishop Hanson’s concern was that “we do not know how to engage in public conversation that is centered in moral discourse.”

The Legal Tradition

The Anglo-American legal tradition has long espoused the centrality of the freedom of speech and its inextricable connection to democracy and representative governance:

Democracy can only thrive when citizens can and do exercise their freedom of speech, but the marketplace of ideas works best when citizens and their representatives engage with others in debate and deliberation over their different, and often opposing points of view. It is through such constructive engagement that new ideas and innovative policy solutions emerge. Civil discourse, the respectful exchange of information, values, interests, and positions, is a necessary predicate for creative problem solving and democratic governance. (“National Institute”)

Beyond the scope of this article is consideration of the ways in which the adversarial nature of legal argumentation offers a model for civil discourse in political debate. Similarly, work in

legal scholarship on bargaining, negotiation, and dispute mediation, offers instruction in discursive practices that can foster constructive political dialogue.

The Confusing State of Discourse on Campus

The three traditions—liberal arts, Lutheranism, and legal—offer a theoretical framework that would support the practice of civil discourse on campus and beyond. This vision, however, is often undermined through campus policies and procedures that can have the unintended effect of stifling discourse, particularly on controversial issues. When combined with the inherent tension in a college’s mission considered above, policies and procedures can sap the capacity of the three traditions to encourage and educate students in civil discourse.

College handbooks present an especially troubling set of policies that seemingly send conflicting messages to students. The conflict emanates from colleges’ laudable efforts to balance the freedom of inquiry and expression with students’ need to be in a learning environment that is free from harassment and discrimination.

A well-documented example of this conflict is found in colleges’ handbook rules regarding hate speech. For the purpose of this discussion, this article will not delve into the legal distinctions regarding the free speech rights of public and private students respectively. College handbooks regularly set forth narrowly-drawn rules regarding hate speech, sometimes using ‘harassment’ as the operative term. Generally, the handbooks reflect the colleges’ objective of ensuring that “every student has the right to study in an environment free from harassment,” as one college handbook states.¹ Examples of harassment stated in handbooks typically include language that communicates “hostility or aversion to persons of a protected classification.”

These rules can be sometimes found in a school’s ‘Code of Conduct.’ One college’s “Student Code of Conduct” reads in part:

[The College] is a community of scholars whose members include its students, faculty, and staff. As a community, we share a dedication to creating an environment that supports trust, respect, honesty, civility, diversity, free inquiry, creativity, and an open exchange of ideas.

This code exemplifies the tension between the goals of ensuring free expression and creating a safe learning environment discussed earlier. Consider the student who attempts to determine whether a speech she or he is about to give violates this code, especially if the speaker recognizes that the view about to be expressed could reasonably be seen as disrespectful by others.

This is not to say, by any means, that harassment is appropriate or that these rules are inconsequential. The personal and

educational harms that can be inflicted upon students warrant protection from these dangers. Rather, the point here is that college policies can set up expectations that can be confusing, especially to an undergraduate student. For example, colleges that ban hate speech and harassment also often protect classroom expression. One college states that it protects “discussion and expression of all views relevant to the subject matter” in the classroom. Another states that “students are free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about debatable issues.”

“Colleges can best serve their students by acknowledging the tensions that pervade civil discourse.”

The right to protest at a college can also be confusing. At one institution, “support of any cause by orderly means that do not disrupt the operation of the Institution or violate civil law is permitted.” Another recognized the “right of peaceful protest,” provided that individual safety, protection of property, and “continuity of the educational process” are not threatened. A third college bans any “demonstration, riot, or activity that disrupts the normal operations of the College and/or infringes on the rights of other members of the College community.” Protest through posting handbills on campus can be similarly confusing. One college allows posting provided that “the rights of viewers, civility, tolerance and respect” are protected.

This brief review of some of the campus rules regarding public and classroom discourse suggests the ways in which an undergraduate student might be uncertain of his or her rights and responsibilities. Such uncertainty can create apprehension that works against the school’s effort to sharpen students’ abilities and willingness to engage in civil discourse. Rather than deny these conflicts—which exist in the workplace and the public arena as well—colleges can best serve their students by acknowledging the tensions that pervade civil discourse and helping students learn to navigate these shoals. This article next explores some ways in which colleges are striving to meet this responsibility.

Promising Programs for Civil Discourse

Despite the sometimes confusing signals that institutions of higher education can give regarding discourse, colleges and universities are responding to the challenges revolving around civil discourse and its practice on campus and in the United

States. Some have adopted first-year programs, such as that of the University of St. Thomas (MN), that encourage students to practice their ability to listen to and interact respectfully with people with whom they initially disagree. The university’s Connect Four program also requires students to attend campus activities that can help them develop the skills associated with civil discourse (University of St. Thomas). In announcing expansion of its programs, Dean Marissa Kelly explained, “You cannot educate students to be morally responsible leaders if they are not committed to civil discourse.” Focusing upon the range of traditions relevant to the practice of civil discourse, Harvard University embarked upon the Civic Initiative within its “Pluralism Project.” The Civic Initiative focuses in part upon the ways in which various religious traditions and communities participate in the nation’s civil life (Pluralism Project).

Some colleges have fostered active campus dialogue in the hope that these opportunities would encourage students to hone their abilities and their willingness to engage in civil discourse. Tufts University, for example, developed the Tufts Roundtable model. Students can share their views and debate issues on a website of blogs and videos (“Tufts Undergraduates”). And yet, while the approach may encourage civil discourse, the anonymity and other factors related to internet-based dialogue can revive the tensions related to a college and its mission as they relate to public discourse:

Internet blogs provide forums for discussions within virtual communities, allowing readers to post comments on what they read. However, such comments may contain abuse, such as personal attacks, offensive remarks about race or religion, or commercial spam, all of which reduce the value of community discussion. Ideally, filters would promote civil discourse by removing abusive comments while protecting free speech by not removing any comments unnecessarily. (Sculley)

To help students learn to “agree to disagree” on hot button issues, Tufts set up “teaching tables” at which students and faculty from a range of disciplines would be encouraged to gather and talk. In addition, the Roundtable publishes a magazine devoted to topics ranging from the war in Afghanistan to health care reform (“Tufts Roundtable”). Similarly, Loyola University (New Orleans) developed its Society for Civic Engagement, which fosters an environment in which “ideas, thoughts and concerns can be discussed and brought to the table for the Loyola and New Orleans community” (Loyola University). The Loyola program promotes “the dialectical method” as it helps students develop their capacity for

civil discourse. Moreover, the college developed the *Loyola Journal of Civil Discourse* as a forum “for civil discourse from all perspectives on controversial issues.”

Conclusion

Despite the understandable concerns regarding the current state of political discourse in the United States, I remain hopeful and convinced that our Lutheran colleges can be powerful institutions. We can offer our students purposeful guidance in civic engagement and discourse that encourages reflective and responsible participation in the public arena. Our colleges can provide opportunities for public engagement on our campuses and we can move beyond our ivory towers to engage in the issues of the day. Our liberal arts and Lutheran traditions are grounded in principles and practices that mesh neatly with the democratic reliance upon healthy and productive civic discourse. While challenges and instances of “failed” public discourse will continue—as they have existed throughout the history of democracy—I am confident that our Lutheran institutions will continue to serve our students and our society by inculcating and engaging in civil discourse.³

End Notes

1. During the 2010 Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference, where I first presented this material, I stated that I would not specify the colleges from which these examples were drawn. Each is a Lutheran institution. My goal was to encourage dialogue about the concepts; identifying specific institutions, I feared, would potentially undermine this goal. I have retained the anonymity of the colleges here.

2. This article is designed to reflect the ways in which we touched upon a set of themes and questions discussed during the 2010 Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference. With more time, we certainly could have delved more deeply into any one of these themes and examined specific discursive practices more fully. I am deeply grateful to all of the conference participants, who offered wonderfully insightful comments, questions, elaborations, and insights.

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KARLA R. SUOMALA

The New (con)Texts of Jewish-Christian Engagement

What are the new contexts of and issues that characterize Jewish-Christian engagement on campuses? Why do these matter to us? You might say, as I do, “I don’t think we have any Jewish students on campus,” or “Maybe there are just one or two Jewish students.” Does Jewish-Christian engagement matter to Lutherans, to Christians? I think it does. Christians and Jews have been each other’s “Other” for nearly two millennia, and our track record in that relationship, to say the least, is not very good. The United States in the late 20th and early 21st century suggests a new, radically different phase in this relationship, a “golden age” according to one Jewish scholar. That is not to say there aren’t issues, but relatively speaking, Jews and Christians have learned to live together and to thrive.¹ This “success story,” if you will, can serve as a model and a deep well of resources in how we engage the other “Others” that are forming significant portions of our society.

I want to look at four different contexts or arenas that highlight the contemporary relationship between Jews and Christians in our culture. We’ll look at campus populations, curricula, identity, and religious pluralism as areas in which Jewish and Christian students (and others) are living and learning together in ways profoundly different than their parents or grandparents did.

Not Your Parents’ Jewish-Christian Encounter

In some ways, college campuses themselves are a “new” context of Jewish-Christian engagement, historically speaking. The post-World War I climate was characterized by anti-Jewish policies and practices on campuses throughout the United States. Henry Ford’s publication of the anti-Semitic “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,”

a tract depicting Jews as engaged in an international conspiracy for world domination, contributed to an environment in which Jews were looked upon with suspicion (Tenenbaum 17). By 1924 Congress passed legislation curtailing the immigration of “racially inferior” people, including East European Jews, writes Shelly Tenenbaum in the introduction to her article, “The Vicissitudes of Tolerance: Jewish Faculty and Students at Clark University,” in which she traces the status of Jews—students, staff and faculty—on United States campuses throughout the 20th century.

“Does Jewish-Christian engagement matter to Lutherans, to Christians?”

Tenenbaum goes on to describe how many East Coast college presidents implemented exclusionary measures out of fear that increasing numbers of Jewish students would overwhelm their schools and threaten their institutions’ reputations. President A. Lawrence Lowell of Harvard, for example, advocated a quota system when the proportion of Jewish students at his school tripled from 7% in 1900 to 21.5% in 1922 (17). Similarly, Yale’s President James Rowland Angell supported a measure to limit the number of Jewish students when they grew from 2% in 1901-1902 to more than 13 percent of the class in 1925 (18). Once one school introduced quotas, a chain reaction emerged since “no one wanted to become a dumping ground for unwanted Jews” (18, quoting Oren 40). Some schools used character tests while others developed other exclusionary tactics such as requiring

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students to send a photo along with information about religion and race to identify and reject Jewish applicants. According to Tenenbaum, the schools that implemented the quotas were successful in reducing the numbers of Jewish students significantly in a relatively short period of time.

This discriminatory trend started to change after World War II due to a number of different factors, including, according to one historian, a new spirit of inclusion connected to the post war ethos (Tenenbaum citing Synnott 201). Perhaps more practically, student enrollment on United States campuses doubled between 1938-1948, creating the need for more faculty in nearly every area of study. Universities could no longer afford to discriminate against Jews—they desperately needed trained faculty, including Jews (Tenenbaum 21). With all of this, the system of quotas for students also began to fall. In addition, “the dismantling of the Jim Crow laws of legal segregation in the 50s and 60s further supported these trends so that by the time of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ... anti-Semitic quotas had all but disappeared in the [academic world]” (Rathner and Goldstein).

Today there are about 250,000 Jewish undergraduates on American college campuses, according to the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey (Fishkoff). While the Jewish population represents about 2% of the national population, Jewish students make up about 5% of the population on United States campuses. While there are a number of schools, both public and private, that boast high numbers of Jewish students, such as Brandeis, NYU, and Columbia, Jewish students attend a wide variety of schools throughout the country. According to Jeff Rubin, a spokesman for Hillel International, the past decade has seen a rise in the number of Jewish students applying to private schools “that haven’t historically been magnets” (Passman). In a recent article that explores the college choices of Jewish students in the *Jewish Exponent*, Rubin pointed to Muhlenberg College as one of the schools with a growing Jewish population.

Patti Mittleman, the Hillel director and Muhlenberg’s Jewish chaplain, came to the college in 1988, when her husband was appointed the first professor in the school’s new Jewish studies program. At that time, she said, “There were no Jews—or very few Jews” (Passman). Today, there are about 750 Jewish students at Muhlenberg, or about 35% of their students. In 2009, Muhlenberg was fifth in the *Reform Judaism Magazine* rankings of schools with the highest percentages of Jewish students, up from tenth place in 2007. What attracts Jewish students to a place like Muhlenberg? Initially unsure about the school because it was historically a Lutheran institution, Muhlenberg senior Susan Medalie said that she “was hooked” when she visited the campus and found out how many Jewish students there were (Passman). The Jewish community is not limited to the campus;

the Lehigh Valley boasts a vibrant, active Jewish community as well. Mittleman also suggests that Muhlenberg is particularly attractive to families who have spent lots of time and money sending their kids to Jewish day schools or private schools and are looking for a smaller school with low student-teacher ratios.

Muhlenberg’s Jewish population has grown so much over the past decade that Hillel recently began an expansion project, increasing the size of the current house, which opened in 2001, from 7,000 to 20,000 square feet. Friday night Shabbat dinners regularly draw as many as 300 students, with about 50 students attending liberal and traditional services. In addition to Hillel, Muhlenberg also has a Jewish studies minor, and hosts the Institute of Jewish-Christian Understanding. This coming fall, upon completion of renovations to the campus dining facility, students will have the option of glatt-kosher dining in the student cafeteria. Mittleman estimates that about one-third of the Jewish students keep kosher.

Muhlenberg is not the only ELCA college with a Hillel center. Students at Gettysburg College, Wagner College, Augustana College (Rock Island), and Susquehanna College also have Hillel programs or houses on their campuses. Wagner Hillel which began in 2003 now has over 100 Jewish students who regularly participate in activities. A number of other colleges with smaller Jewish populations offer support and programming through their campus ministry offices. Wittenberg University, and St. Olaf, for example, have Jewish student clubs or groups. These schools are more the exception than the rule, however. Most of the ELCA colleges and universities have very few, if any, Jewish students. Luther, for example, hasn’t had more than a handful of self-identified Jewish students on campus at any given time during the nine years that I have been on faculty.

Judaism on the Books

While there are Jewish students on an increasingly diverse number of campuses throughout the country, the overall Jewish population is still small. What is of interest in this regard is the explosion of Jewish studies programs as well as course offerings in Jewish thought, life, culture, social science, history, and religion at American colleges and universities. The growth of Jewish studies in the United States dates back to the 1970s, a time in which groups including women, ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians demanded programming and curricular changes to reflect their presence on campuses and in society, as well as their contributions to history (Hsu). While it is hard to come by current data on the numbers of Jewish Studies programs in the United States, the Association for Jewish Studies reports that when it was established in 1969 as a society for “individuals whose full-time vocation is teaching, research, or related endeavor

ors in academic Jewish Studies,” it had 35 members (“Association for Jewish Studies”). Today the AJS has more than 1,500 members from a variety of fields across the United States and Canada.

Interestingly, much of the growth in this area has been driven by the interest of non-Jewish students. Professors who teach Jewish studies courses report that many, and sometimes most, of the students in their classes are not Jewish. “What was once considered a course of study almost exclusively for Jews

“What is of interest in this regard is the explosion of Jewish studies programs as well as course offerings in Jewish thought, life, culture, social science, history, and religion at American colleges and universities.”

has, in the last 40 years,” reports Sean Roach in a piece on the expansion of Jewish studies, “evolved into a diverse and multifaceted educational discipline” (Roach). There are at least two consequences of the tremendous growth that Jewish studies has witnessed: (1) More and more Jewish students are learning about their religious and cultural heritage in an academic setting rather than through more traditional venues such as the home, synagogue, or Jewish religious education programming; and (2) More and more Christians (and others) are being exposed to Jewish life, thought, culture, and religion than ever before since much of the growth in these courses has been driven by non-Jewish student enrollment. “My classes,” notes Umansky of Fairfield University, “are really a mixture of students...but most of them are Christian. We close our classes at 30 and I [had] four Jewish students this year. That is the most I’ve ever had. Sometimes I have none, or just one” (Roach).

This growth in Jewish studies course offerings has impacted Lutheran higher education as well. In a survey of the most recent course catalogs at the 26 ELCA colleges and universities, 17 offer at least one stand alone course in Judaism—a course focusing on some aspect of contemporary Jewish life, thought, culture, or practice. Muhlenberg offers a Jewish studies minor, and Gettysburg College and Wittenberg University each offer at least four stand alone courses in Judaism. Another three ELCA colleges integrate Judaism into a Western traditions or monotheism course, and six have no offerings in which Judaism figures significantly. These statistics do not include courses in Bible or Christian Theology or History, even though these subjects

may touch on aspects of Jewish thought or religion. Many of these courses have found their way into course catalogs at these institutions in the last 20-30 years, roughly coinciding with the beginning of the Jewish studies movement in the 1970s.

Much like the national picture of Jewish studies, most of the students who take courses in Judaism at ELCA colleges and universities are not Jewish. At Luther College, I offer an “Introduction to Judaism” course every year, and it always has at least 25 students, in part because students can fulfill their second religion course requirement by enrolling in it. Even so, it has been and continues to be a very popular religion course. Over the 9 years that I’ve taught the course, I have had about 3 Jewish students, and another 3-4 Christian students who were considering conversion to Judaism. The motivations of my students for taking the course are diverse. Many say they want to study Judaism as a way to learn more about the roots of their Christian faith traditions. Some have had Jewish friends or family members, while others register for the course because they don’t know anything about Judaism and are curious.

Some of the challenges that I face include introducing students to Judaism in the nearly complete absence of Jews, either at Luther or in the local community. A caveat to this is that there is a significant Chasidic Jewish community down the road in Postville, IA, but this is not a Jewish population that is necessarily open or accessible to us due to the traditional nature of their observance. In addition, many of my students have never met a Jewish person or have had any exposure to Judaism. In doing adult forums on Jewish-Christian engagement at local churches over the past decade, I have found that many of those who are over 65 years of age remember having at least one Jewish family in their small town, and talk about attending school with or befriending a Jewish person of their own age. This is almost never the case for students who arrive at Luther from these same small towns today, and reflects the movement of Jews out of rural areas into more urban settings with larger Jewish populations.

Another issue that I wonder about for my institution as well as other Lutheran or Christian-affiliated schools that offer one or two courses that focus on Judaism is the function of these courses in the larger religion and liberal arts curriculum. My concern is that these courses can, for Christians, serve a utilitarian function in ways that study of other religious traditions cannot. What I mean to say is that part of the reason for the appearance of Jewish studies courses at Lutheran colleges (among others) is that as interest in historical Jesus studies grew, and it became acceptable, even popular, to consider the Jewishness of Jesus, it became acceptable, and even popular to include a course in Judaism in departments of religion. Courses in Judaism came to serve, perhaps not intentionally, as courses

in which Christian students could learn more about the Jewish roots of their faith. This may not be a bad thing, but Judaism-as-background rather than Judaism for its own sake and for the sake of its adherents can send the wrong message to our students. Students can easily miss the idea that Judaism is not Christianity, and that Judaism is a living, breathing tradition on its own.

Jewish Students Today are Being Jewish Differently

Substantial numbers of young Jewish adults are being Jewish in ways that are quite different from their predecessors. In the many studies and analyses of Jewish young people that are flowing out of the American Jewish community in their efforts to understand and reach out to 21st century Jews, the Jewish Millennial on campus, especially the non-Orthodox Millennial, might have the following profile. She is a student who is not particularly interested in Jewish institutions or denominational labels, although she might identify more with Reform Judaism, if pressed. In fact, this student probably sees Judaism as a cultural rather than religious identity (Birkner, “Generation Y”). According to Cindy Greenberg, director of NYU’s Edgar M. Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life, “Many of these students feel passionate about being Jewish but aren’t necessarily religious,” rather they see their Jewishness as grounds for service, and “[Jewish-led social action] allows them to express themselves Jewishly...” (“Generation Y”). Students “want to be participate in social action projects that don’t speak only to the Jewish community but to the community at large, and projects that the whole campus population, not just Jewish students, can take part in it,” said Danny Greene, a recent graduate of Stanford where he was a Jewish student leader (“Generation Y”).

“Students can easily miss the idea that Judaism is not Christianity, and that Judaism is a living, breathing tradition on its own.”

With these sensibilities, today’s Jewish student is likely to be more comfortable with non-Jews and much less likely to have mostly Jewish friends than are Jews over 40 years old. College-age Millennials also tend to have non-Jewish boyfriends and girlfriends, marking a dramatic change from past generations. She is more comfortable sharing Jewish events such as holidays

and life cycle rituals and space with non-Jews than her parents or grandparents. In addition she is far less likely than her parents to define her Jewish identity in reaction to anti-Semitism or by the Holocaust. Interestingly, she is also far more likely to acknowledge her Jewishness (Birkner, “Trends 101”). “It’s much more common to see college students wearing yarmulkes, and outwardly displaying other Jewish symbols,” says Jewish-American historian Jonathan Sarna. “Like other cultural groups, there’s been a coming out” (“Trends 101”). This openness may be due to the fact that for one of the first times in history, this young Jewish person can now decide for herself how she wants to practice her Jewish identity and traditions or even if she wants to be Jewish at all. This ‘dim-sum’ Jewishness, as former *Heeb Magazine* editor Jenn Bleyer has called it, signals a radical discontinuity between traditional and contemporary ways of being Jewish (Shmookler).

Finally, this student is increasingly likely to have one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent—already in 2001, 52% of young Jews between the ages of 18-24 came from intermarried families (Beck). The young adult who grows up in an interfaith family is even less connected to the religious and ethnic dimensions of her Jewish identity than her counterparts with two Jewish parents. She does, however, view her “Jewishness” positively and enjoys activities she considers Jewish, especially holidays (Beck). According to Lynn Davidman of Brown University, “Up until very recently Jews did not really intermarry, except in tiny numbers, so I think we’re at an unprecedented time in Jewish history. People who are born of one Jewish parent are one example of an increasing phenomenon in United States society, which is that people are born with more than one kind of identity” (Lukas).

Over the past few years, some Jewish children from intermarried families have begun to refer to themselves as “Half-Jews,” a term that is not without controversy in the Jewish community. While the Jewish religious denominations have varying views of what makes someone Jewish—the Conservative and Orthodox streams count as Jews only those with Jewish mothers, whereas the Reform and Reconstructionist movements sanction Jewish lineage from either side—the denominations are united in their opposition to the notion of one being “half-Jewish.” But “many children of intermarriage say they simply cannot turn their backs on the non-Jewish half of their identity. Their rabbis may say they are Jewish, but in their hearts they are also whatever grandma and grandpa are,” reports Leah Blankenship in *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*: “This openness to multiple identities is particularly true among college students, according to Daniel Klein and Freke Vuijst, who interviewed hundreds of students for *The Half-Jewish Book* published in 2000. Klein says that those who consider themselves to be half-Jewish ‘feel they are a combination, they are an amalgam, they are bicultural’”

(Blankenship). Rabbi Alan Flam, former director of Brown's Hillel thinks that "this is a radically new question for the Jewish community. Students are talking less about theology and more about culture. They are saying, 'Wait, I have a dual identity,' similar to students who may have one parent who is Asian and one who is black. They are saying, 'I want to figure out a way to affirm both identities in my life'" (Lukas).

"Some Jewish children from intermarried families have begun to refer to themselves as 'Half-Jews,' a term that is not without controversy."

There is a web-based organization called the Half-Jewish Network which provides information, resources, and online forum on issues that affect people that describe themselves as half-Jewish. In a recent post, a young woman provides an eloquent response to the question, "What do you answer when asked 'Are you Jewish?'"

I ponder this question a lot—the short answer is that it depends on the context. My father is Jewish, Jewish-identified, etc., and I spent a lot of time growing up with my (father's) Jewish family. I was basically "born-again" as a Christian when I was young, due to the influence of my mother's Pentecostal, and have no interest in converting to Judaism.

It's probably accurate to say I "look Jewish"—at least more Jewish than not (I get a lot of questions about my "exotic" ethnicity), but on the other hand, my last name (which is both my parents' names, hyphenated) is kinda ambiguous. In other words, it's not Goldstein.

There is too much baggage around Jewish identity to simply say I am "Jewish" when I am not generally recognized as such by Jews. (Although in social practice, I am kinda casually semi-accepted.) Plus, I can never answer all the questions folks who haven't been exposed to Jews want to ask me about "my people."

At the same time, I don't like saying "Well, my father is," or "half my family is," because in so many other contexts that sounds like one is trying to distance oneself from Jewishness, which I emphatically do not desire to do.

"I am of Jewish descent" sounds similarly cold and distancing, if closer to accurate. I am proud to be of Jewish

descent, but I almost, at times, don't feel like I "deserve" to be proud. On the other hand, I am probably most vocal when people break out the anti-Semitism. I am under no illusions that the Nazis and others did/do not make a distinction when it comes to me, my family, et al. On the third hand—ha!—I am probably less sensitive to less-overt anti-Semitism both because I am less Jewish-identified than some folks and because I grew up in a very liberal area that was about 20% Jewish, so, at least when I was a child, it was easy to pretend/imagine that anti-Semitism was largely a non-issue except for "extreme" things that "happened elsewhere" or "in the past."

I don't know. It's one of those crazy things where the greater society defines you one way, and the group itself may see you as something completely different. I mean, a dark-haired, "Semitic-looking" "Sheva Rabinowitz" could be a non-Jew, and a blonde, blue-eyed "Bridget Olafssen" could be a Jew—and they're probably cousins. ("Half-Jewish Network")

Religious Pluralism

Formal Jewish-Christian dialogue, as an endeavor and an arena, now can look back at significant achievements since WWII, especially in the United States. Much of the energy and initiative for this dialogue has derived from clergy, academics, and officials within religious institutions who have engaged in a serious re-evaluation of the Jewish-Christian relationship from the early centuries of Christianity to the present. In the course of this process, a host of new resources have been produced, including new theological and biblical resources used to train clergy and for use by clergy, i.e. commentaries and homiletical resources, curricular resources for use in Sunday schools and confirmation programs, liturgical formations for use in worship, the development of guidelines for interaction with and speaking about Jews and Judaism, and finally, statements by ecclesial bodies and other independent organizations dedicated to deepening the Jewish-Christian relationship that acknowledge the tragedies of the past, and set forth a new vision of the future. While there is still strong interest in some sectors regarding the Jewish-Christian dialogue, much of that initial energy and participation has waned in the last decade or so, and since the college campus was never the primary venue for this dialogue, a new generation of participants hasn't been cultivated. *This does not mean, however, that students are not interested in interfaith issues.*

Right now, college and university campuses are witnessing a growing interest in engaging religious pluralism in ways that are in fact new and promising. Especially since 9/11, religious

conversation and recognition of religious plurality as a legitimate type of diversity are now generating significant interest and involvement on campuses, both private and public. In this developing scenario, the dynamics of interfaith engagement are shifting away from some of the more traditional texts and issues that characterized the stand-alone relationships, i.e. Jewish-Christian and others, to a more action- or service-oriented engagement in which students of all faith traditions (or none at all) are coming together to work toward common goals. The process in some ways reverses that of the stand-alone dialogue in which participants claim one particular tradition, i.e., Lutheran Christian or Reform Jew, are knowledgeable about their tradition, and have a specific interest or objective in engaging the other. Today, on campuses, students who want to be involved interreligiously are coming together without the assumption of any previous knowledge about their own tradition or the tradition of the “other,” and in the course of working toward a community objective they learn more about themselves and the traditions of others.

“The dynamics of interfaith engagement are shifting away from some of the more traditional texts and issues.”

In the opening pages of his recent book, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*, Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) founder Eboo Patel contrasts this view of pluralism with what he sees as older models of interfaith engagement that don’t seem to reflect today’s realities and needs. “Interfaith cooperation,” he writes, “is too often a conference of senior religious leaders talking.” He then continues:

No doubt these leaders play a crucial role in religious bridge building. They have broken important theological ground, articulated frameworks for religious understanding, and sent the signal that cooperation with the religious Other is not only possible but necessary. Yet few in my generation have been involved. (xvii)

In this statement Patel voices appreciation for older models of cooperation that include dialogue, but suggests that these models have had their day, and that the challenges that younger generations face are different, more pressing, and perhaps more complicated. “I went to my first interfaith conference when I was twenty-one,” notes Patel, “and discovered that I was the youngest

person there by some thirty years.” The pattern didn’t change, regardless of which conference he attended, and he came to the realization that “the faces of religious fanatics were young; the faces of interfaith cooperation were old” and that “something

“At Lutheran colleges, we have the opportunity to be more deliberate, to go deeper and to really grapple with difference, where the uniqueness and power of each tradition can often be located.”

had to change” (xviii). As Patel tells the story of how he came to the mission of IFYC, he focuses on developing the framework in which the world is divided between religious pluralists and totalitarians, between being able to make a life together and violence.

The Interfaith Youth Core, an organization that is becoming increasingly popular on campuses around the United States, both captures the changing realities of interfaith engagement, and outlines a vision for students living in a pluralistic world in their definition of religious pluralism as “a state in which we respect one another’s religious identity, develop mutually enriching relationships with each other and work together to make this world a better place.” While Patel’s definition of religious pluralism is only one among many that are in circulation, and he focuses more on youth, as well as the service component in his vision of pluralism, his definition is in large part derived from that of Diana Eck at the Harvard Pluralism Project whose definition of pluralism comprises the gold-standard of the newly emerging field. At the core of her definition, Eck states that pluralism is “the energetic engagement with diversity, the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference, the encounter of [religious] commitments,” and that it “is based on dialogue” (Eck). While she uses the word dialogue, she doesn’t refer to its historical expression in the forms such as Jewish-Christian dialogue, but rather in the nature of dialogue as a give-and-take interaction between participants.

Conclusion

So often, engaging students across religious boundaries can result in uplifting the lowest common denominator, clichés such as, “We all believe basically the same thing anyway,” or “Our differences are unimportant, what matters are our similarities.” At Lutheran colleges, we have the opportunity to be more deliberate, to go deeper and to really grapple with difference,

where the uniqueness and power of each tradition can often be located. In the process of engaging students across in a variety of faith traditions, however, it is important to remember that each tradition has a particular history of its own, and that issues of identity and interfaith engagement pose unique challenges and opportunities to students who come from these traditions. The case of Jewish students on predominantly Christian campuses is a case in point.

End Notes

1. It is important to note that anti-Semitism has not disappeared on United States campuses, although it is generally not as systematic or blatant as it was in the past. Many scholars have actually noted an uptick in anti-Semitic incidents in the first decade of the 21st century and have expressed concern that these incidents are not being taken as seriously as they should be. Cf. Rathner and Goldstein.

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MARK N. SWANSON

The Breadth and the Depth: Dimensions of Christian-Muslim Relations at Educational Institutions of the ELCA

What follows is a near transcript of my remarks at the Vocation of a Lutheran College conference, summer 2010. In my introduction to these remarks, I noted that while I am deeply indebted and grateful to the colleges of the ELCA, I do not teach at one! Therefore, rather than myself reporting on Christian-Muslim relations at the colleges of the ELCA, I proposed to let the participants in this conference do this reporting. I therefore kept my own presentation, reproduced below, brief so as to allow time for conversations in small groups and reports and discussion in plenary. At the conclusion of my remarks, participants were invited to think about the question: "In what ways has your institution 'made room' for Muslims?" Answers might deal with the teaching of Islam; with the reception of Muslim students in the classroom and in the college/university community; and in relationships with the wider community in which the institution is located.

Spatial Metaphors

I would like to reflect briefly on the spatial metaphors that we often use when speaking about our Lutheran institutions of higher education. (At least, I use them, and we've heard them used repeatedly at this conference.) We speak about *depth* and *breadth* dimensions, with the two being in some sort of tension or dialectical relationship. We can speak about "being deeply rooted in the tradition" or "going down deep into the faith," and about "broadening experiences," "the widening of horizons," and generally about "inclusion." Sometimes we bring these dimensions together into a single image. For example, we can think of a *tree*, with deep roots on the one hand, from which it draws its strength, and with spreading branches, in which a great diversity of creatures can live. Professor Jodock has given us the image of a *well*, "dug deep to nourish the whole community."¹ Indeed, he has used this spatial language to explain his "sectarian–non-sectarian" typology, where "sectarian" may demonstrate depth, but

not much breadth; and "non-sectarian" may aspire to breadth, but at the expense of depth. His "third way" then claims *both* depth and breadth and, he argues, it is in fact the depth that *enables* the breadth: "Because this is a Lutheran college, you, a Jewish prospective student, ought to come here." "Because this is a Lutheran college, you don't *have* to go to chapel."

I find this manner of speaking helpful, but I want to add just one word of caution. Professor Jodock suggested that the "both-and" character of this discourse may fit in with a specifically Lutheran paradoxical way of thinking and speaking. Examples abound: "already and not yet," "God hidden and revealed," "*simul iustus et peccator*," and so on. I remember my first systematic theology teacher, Prof. Larry Folkemer of Gettysburg Seminary,² who regularly spoke to us about a "tension between two poles." It is worth stressing this *tension*—lest our formulations become a justification for lazily landing on one side or the other of the paradox. The Lutheran "simultaneously righteous and sinner" slogan, for

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example, names a *struggle*; it should not be an excuse for sinning! The relationship between the depth and the breadth dimensions of our institutions requires constant exploration and tending. The claim that depth *enables* breadth is not a matter of mere observation, but rather a possibility that needs to be realized, or a task that needs to be accomplished, again and again.

I find these spatial metaphors useful in thinking about my own teaching. Depending on the context, and depending on who is in the classroom, I find myself putting stress on one dimension or the other. For example, I have experienced classrooms filled with life-long Lutherans, well catechized, but not very widely traveled. Some of them have known a single pastor for most of their lives; many of them went to college close to home. In such a classroom, I tend to go into “broadening mode”! If I’m teaching Church History, I want the students to meet Christians of other times and other places, some of whom might strike them as really weird. I want them to encounter the wild diversity of ways in which people have attempted to be disciples of Jesus Christ. In a World Religions class, I want them to meet and appreciate genuinely pious, winsome people who do *not* believe, say, in God as the Holy Trinity, or in the redemptive death of Jesus.

But I have also been in classrooms in which the typical student profile is rather different, including many students who have been passionately involved in service to the poor (in the US or overseas), in work for justice or for the defense of the environment, and who somewhere along the way have experienced what they think might be a call to ordained ministry. These students are not necessarily all that well catechized; they may even be relatively new to committed membership in a congregation. In such classrooms, the “deepening” moment in my teaching comes to the fore. In Church History, I want students to learn where the

“In our teaching, we are called to attend to both the ‘breadth dimension’ and the ‘depth dimension’ when it comes to matters of Christian existence in and for the sake of the world.”

Church’s dogmas and institutions came from, what was at stake in the controversies surrounding them, and why these controversies continue to matter. In World Religions classes, my hope is that learning about the faith of the Other, while important in itself, will also be a spur to learning about one’s *own* faith.

I’ve exaggerated a bit in these last paragraphs: the profile of a class is never so clear-cut. What I do want to emphasize is that, in our teaching, we are called to attend to *both* the “breadth dimension” *and* the “depth dimension” when it comes to matters of Christian existence in and for the sake of the world. Furthermore—and now I’m coming to my assignment for this presentation—I want to argue that the study of Islam, and real engagement and conversation between Christians and Muslims, can contribute at both “ends” (as it were), *both* to the broadening of horizons *and* to the deepening of faith.

Broader Horizons

First, the “broadening of horizons.” I begin with a few words about the context in which I teach, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. The Christian-Muslim contribution to LSTC’s horizons is not a new thing. In 1984, LCA missionaries to Egypt, Harold and Neva Vogelaar, spent a year’s leave at LSTC (while my wife and I house-sat for them in Cairo).³ In Chicago, Harold set out to do what for years he had done so effectively in Cairo: he visited mosques and Islamic centers, chatted with whoever would receive him, drank *many* cups of tea and coffee, and made friends. One of those friends was Dr. Ghulam Haider Aasi of the newly-established American Islamic College. Together they helped create the Committee for Improved Christian-Muslim Relations in Chicago. A few years later, when Harold returned to LSTC as a visiting professor, he and Dr. Aasi began team-teaching courses such as “The Bible and the Qur’an” and “Jesus and Muhammad.”

Between 1990 and 2004, a handful of Muslim students found their way to LSTC; one of them became the first Muslim chaplain in the United States Navy. But then in 2004, a group of five Turkish Muslim students, some of them already very well educated in classical Islamic studies, came to LSTC and began an M.A. program; their goal was to learn about Christianity so as better to be able to contribute to Christian-Muslim dialogue. Most of this initial group of students had graduated by the time I arrived at LSTC in 2006, but other Muslim students have followed them. And all the while, Dr. Aasi has continued to teach with us. All this means that, in recent years, Christian students at LSTC have had the opportunity to take classes with a Muslim professor; they’ve almost certainly had Muslim classmates, and, very frequently, friendships have developed. Christians and Muslims have shared space, festivals, a community. And they have shared their faith.

There has been a lot of interfaith activity on campus these past few years, as a generous endowment from friends of the seminary led to the establishment of both a faculty chair in Christian-Muslim studies and a Center of Christian-Muslim

Engagement, the latter with its own full-time Program Coordinator. A grant from the Henry Luce Foundation has helped us in our programming. We've sponsored a variety of conferences and seminars, e.g. the conference in March 2010 that we called "Shared Earth: An Interfaith Conference on the Environment."³ Our Program Coordinator is always on the lookout for interfaith activities *other* than lectures and conferences, including musical and theatrical events. (I thought of this at the present conference when someone mentioned the importance of *imagination* and not simply discourse in our relationships with others.) In any event, it is not very easy for a Christian student to come to LSTC and *not* encounter Muslims (and others) in a variety of contexts. Our students know that it is a religiously diverse world in which they are called to serve, and they have many opportunities to learn something about that world, and sometimes to delight in it.

Deeper Roots

I am especially interested in ways that relationships and conversations between Christians and Muslims not only lead to a broadening of experience and horizons, but *can* lead to learning more about and going deeper into their *own* faith traditions. This, indeed, is my most ardent hope for any kind of interfaith program in the seminary setting. But I need to emphasize the word "can," since this move from breadth to depth is by no means automatic. It is always tempting, and easy, to slip into superficial, lowest-common-denominator speech and ritual.

The Islamic tradition, from its appearance in the 7th century of the Common Era, has posed challenges to Christian belief and practice. Passionately affirming the uniqueness and unicity of God, Muslims have seen Christian trinitarian discourse as confused, at best. While Muslims revere Jesus Christ as an apostle and prophet of God, he is also seen as one of a sequence of messengers that finds its culmination in Muhammad, the final apostle and the "seal of the prophets." Claims that Christ is God or Son of God are clearly rejected in the Qur'an, and even the fact of the crucifixion, let alone its redemptive significance, appears to be denied by the Muslims' scripture.

All this may not seem like a very promising basis for Christian-Muslim theological dialogue! And indeed, from its 7th century beginnings, the history of Christian-Muslim dialogue is full of polemic, as each side searched out ways to claim that the Others' faith was false, or that the Others' scripture was false, or that one's own faith, as a whole, had some kind of divine seal of approval—usually involving prophecies and miracles (see Thomas and Roggema).

However, what some of us are discovering in places like LSTC is that the challenges that pious Muslims bring to

Christian believers are salutary ones. Some of these challenges have to do with things that we Christians may say we believe, but that we rather readily forget. For example, I hear Muslim colleagues and students emphasizing that *the beautiful life is the one lived consciously in the sight of God*, and that *God has a claim on the whole of our lives*, not just some dimension or compartment that we define as "religious." In our society, such convictions are often labeled "fundamentalist." But aren't there some connections between these convictions—e.g., "God has a claim on the whole of our lives"—and what at this conference we have been calling "vocation"?

"Muslims' questions about Trinity, Christology, and redemption can also be salutary."

I believe that Muslims' questions about Trinity, Christology, and redemption can also be salutary. I can bear witness that even at a Lutheran theological seminary, if you announce a pop quiz with a single question—"How is it that belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is not belief in three gods?"—you will cause panic. Some of the eighth- and ninth-century Christian theologians who were asked that question by Muslims took refuge in mystery: "The doctrine of the Trinity is so foreign to ordinary human reason," they said, "that there is no earthly reason to believe it. But people *did* believe it. So they must not have believed it for any earthly or *human* reason ... but rather because of *divine* power," made manifest in the apostles' miracles (Swanson, "Apology").

I don't think that such an answer will do! And, in defense of these eighth- and ninth-century theologians, they didn't stop there, but went on to craft elaborate apologies for the doctrine of the Trinity (Swanson, "Trinity"). But to respond to Muslims' questions, or to my question on the pop quiz, one is driven deep into Christian tradition. Every year I have my Church History students read from Gregory of Nyssa's great treatise, *To Ablabius: On Why Not Three Gods* ("Not Three Gods" 59-62). St. Gregory can help us!

Some of the topics that are most conducive to deep Christian-Muslim conversation are those conundrums of faith common to monotheists, for example:

- *human freedom and responsibility*: How do we rhyme God's sovereignty, on the one hand, with the human experience of freedom on the other?

- *the question of evil and suffering*: God is good; God is almighty; evil and suffering are realities. Can we say all three at once, and if so, how?

There are profound traditions of reflection on these topics in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Here we can go deep into our traditions—*together*.⁵

One of the most exciting classroom sessions that I experienced last semester was in a course that I team-teach with my colleague Dr. Aasi entitled “The History of Religious Thought in Islam.” We had a class of about 25 students, including a couple of Muslims. What began as a presentation of the doctrines of some eighth- and ninth-century Muslim theologians (the early Muʿtazilah, to be specific) turned into a grand conversation about the nature and possibility of speech about God. We discussed anthropomorphic speech in the Qurʾan and the Bible—and in Christian theological discourse today. We had a truly illuminating conversation about the use of pronouns for God, in both traditions, in Arabic and in English. Dr. Aasi and I threw out the lesson plan; instead, we had a conversation not only in which Christians learned about Islam and Muslims about Christianity, but also in which Christians and Muslims learned about their own faith traditions as well. It *can* happen.

Hospitality

To conclude, I’d like to say a few words about a Christian practice in which, it seems to me, the depth and the breadth dimensions of our vocations as Christian educators come together: the practice of *hospitality* (see Swanson, “Commending Hospitality”).

We all, I think, desire that our institutions be hospitable places. But why? Many Christians who have paused to reflect on this question have discovered or rediscovered how very deep into the Bible and the Christian tradition the theme of hospitality can take us. In the Bible, we find St. Paul’s explicit command to “Pursue hospitality” (Rom. 12:13) and, in the Letter to the Hebrews, the exhortation “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers” (Heb. 13:2). Stories about hospitality given and received recur throughout the Bible, culminating in the Incarnation of the Word, who came into the world seeking hospitality (John 1:10-13), who ate with tax collectors and sinners, who was guest and host, and who spoke of the feast to which many will come “from east and west, from north and south” (Luke 13:29). St. Gregory of Nyssa could speak of the entire creation as an act of divine hospitality. Why did God create the human being last, after the fashioning of all the other creatures? St. Gregory responds as follows:

As a good host does not bring his guest to his house before the preparation of his feast, but, when he has made all due

preparation, and decked with their proper adornments his house, his couches, his table, brings his guest home when things suitable for his refreshment are in readiness—in the same manner the rich and munificent Entertainer of our nature, when He had decked the habitation with beauties of every kind, and prepared this great and varied banquet, then introduced man, assigning to him as his task not the acquiring of what was not there, but the enjoyment of the things which were there. (*De officio hominis* 390)

That is, God is hospitable! The act of creation is a great act of hospitality in which God wills to be in relationship with the human creature and prepares magnificent space for that relationship. But then, *our* hospitality is a participation in the hospitality of God. This is a notion that illumines our understanding of other writings by early theologians of the church, of monastic practice, of discourse about the life of the Holy Trinity and our participation in that divine life, and of our participation in the Eucharist. “Why do Christians practice hospitality?” is one of those questions that, if we choose to reflect together upon it, will take us deep into our faith.

“Are we actively seeking ways to “make room” for Muslims in our communities—and in the schools in which we serve?”

That’s the depth dimension. But in the actual practice of hospitality, we *make room* for others (see Pohl). That’s another good spatial metaphor, one that involves breadth.

Our institutions’ hospitality to Muslims is an important witness in the present day. While it has never been entirely comfortable to be a practicing Muslim in the United States of America, we know how much harder it has become in the wake of September 11, 2001. At the present moment there is a great deal of anti-Islamic rhetoric in the air, amplified by the media. There is very loud agitation going on right now against the construction of Islamic centers in New York City, in Murfreesboro (TN) and in Riverside (CA). Politicians seeking an issue that might give them some advantage over opponents have been ratcheting up the rhetoric. This moment is one that tests our convictions. Do we indeed “pursue hospitality”? Are we actively seeking ways to “make room” for Muslims in our communities—and in the schools in which we serve? We have an opportunity to respond in freedom—in the courageous, neighbor-serving freedom about which Professor Jodock has spoken.

End Notes

1. For this and what follows, see Darrell Jodock's contribution to this issue of *Intersections*.
2. Prof. Folkemer died on May 26, 2011 at the age of 95. The previous year he celebrated the 70th anniversary of his graduation from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. Among American Lutherans, he was a pioneer in championing the importance of a theological engagement with the world's religions. Note, for example, his recent publication, *No Mere Dialogue*.
3. For an account of and reflections on this history, see Vogelaar, "Twenty-Five Years," in a special issue of *Currents* on "Christians in a Religiously Diverse World," from which I cite a number of articles.
4. See Bernstein, "Celebrating God," for one of the presentations given at this conference.
5. We'll also discover that Christians, Muslims, and Jews have already been going deep into these issues since the Middle Ages! Cf. Burrell.

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*A Calling to Embrace Creation:
Lutheran Higher Education, Sustainability, and Stewardship*

JACQUELINE AILEEN BUSSIE

Reconciled Diversity: Reflections on our Calling to Embrace our Religious Neighbors

“The problem to be faced is: how to combine loyalty to one’s own tradition with reverence for different traditions.”—Abraham Heschel

“God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason—that we might listen twice as much as we speak.”—Epictetus

In 2005, because of my many years of involvement in Jewish Christian dialogue, I had the immense pleasure of being Capital University’s ambassador to a speaker’s series in Pittsburgh featuring Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize Winner Elie Wiesel. Wiesel told a striking story that weekend about the great Jewish thinker Martin Buber who reminded his listeners that Judaism and Christianity share an obsession with the Messiah. The Jews, of course, are still waiting for the messiah who will come to redeem the world at the end of days. The Christians, although they do believe the Messiah has already come, are also waiting on the Messiah—waiting for Jesus the Messiah to return. And so, declared Buber, let’s all wait together. Buber’s attentive friends, thinking the story ended there, murmured their approval at the teacher’s wisdom and bobbed their heads in agreement. But Buber continued, “And no doubt when the Messiah comes in those end days, someone will lean over and ask in his ear, ‘Hey, have you been here before?’ And when that happens, I hope I’m there too so I can caution him, ‘For heaven’s sake, whatever you do, don’t answer that.’”

I love Buber’s story because it underscores both the promise and the problems of religious diversity. The tale unfolds how much we have in common, but also unveils through humor our insidious tendency to consider all conversations about religion

as ultimately conversations about nothing more than rightness, or—to be more honest—about my rightness and your wrongness. Tragically, in the real world our obsession with being right when it comes to religion all too often trumps our embrace of our common humanity and shared dreams for a redemptive and just future. Part of the goal of responsible Lutheran higher education must be to help our students unlearn this hasty, premature conflation of religion and rightness. Instead, we must help our students move toward a shared vision where collaboration and hope once again become real possibilities for a future that must be lived or lost *together* or not at all.

That same weekend, Wiesel also shared his optimistic assessment that in the 21st century, as a result of decades of post World-War II dialogue, Jewish-Christian relations are stronger than ever before. However, Wiesel pronounced from behind his lectern, from the inception of those dialogue groups that began in the 1960s, we made a terrible mistake. Everyone in the auditorium held their breath ever so slightly, waiting for the Nobel Peace Prize winner to tell us where we had gone wrong. And this is what he said: “When we began those interfaith dialogues, we failed to invite Muslims to the table.”

I couldn’t agree more with Wiesel, but I must push him further and ask, who else are we failing to invite? This question

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leads to the several even larger questions which constitute the primary focus of my reflections in this essay. What can those of us who work at Lutheran universities do to overcome past systemic failures to engage in interfaith dialogue and address

“How can we help our students and our greater communities transmute their fear of religious difference into a sense of awed giftedness at a tapestry of diversity so colorfully woven?”

religious diversity? In a world where the media and politics thrive on divisiveness, difference, and conflict and in a world filled with fist-clenching “us/them” language, how can we help our students to speak in terms of ‘ours’—*our* collective future, *our* children, *our* earth, *our* dreams? What can we do to help our students embrace not only religious diversity in principle, but also the real people behind that principle, namely, our Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist, Native American, Hindu, atheist, and Jewish sisters and brothers? How can we help our students and our greater communities transmute their fear of religious difference into a sense of awed giftedness at a tapestry of diversity so colorfully woven? As a scholar and a theologian who believes theology is reflection upon praxis, I will not address these questions through abstractions. Instead, I want to share with you three concrete and practical recommendations that can be done here and now on our campuses to help us cultivate, embrace, and foster reconciled religious diversity.

Lutheran Listening and Speaking our Stories

The first step we can take on our campuses to achieve greater responsibility to religious diversity is create a safe yet challenging public space for our students to tell their own stories and to learn to listen to the religious neighbor as she tells hers. As the Lutheran pastor and theologian Paul Tillich is said to have written: “The first duty of love is to listen.” As a Muslim student once paraphrased Epictetus to me: “God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason—that we might listen twice as much as we speak.” Living amidst religious diversity in the 21st century demands a politics of love, which entails a politics of listening.

Our students do not come to us culturally prepared to know how to listen. Instead of “listening” to another person express a viewpoint with which we vehemently disagree, many of us are “re-loading” our verbal gun with ammunition so we can fire

off our killer rebuttal. The problem with reloading, of course, is that while we are doing it, we don’t genuinely hear what the other person has said. To demonstrate this commonplace failure to listen in my ethics classes, I often pause the classroom debate at its most heated moment and ask students to summarize the argument of their opponent or of the person with whom they disagree most, and to do so with such accuracy that the person who espouses that argument approves the summary as a genuine encapsulation of her or his own point of view.

Our initial rounds of this ‘recall’ game usually end in embarrassed laughter because we are all called out on the fact that we haven’t really listened to those with whom we disagree. And yet, my students become much, much better at this over time. The moral of this story is: we *can* listen well to one another—it’s simply that we *don’t*. As I have written in my forthcoming new book, *Outlaw Christian: Straight Talk We Never Hear about Faith, Grief, Hope and Suffering*, we do not practice listening or feel we need to be taught it. We misconceive listening as something which comes naturally to us, like breathing, when really, listening is more like swimming, learning not to breathe at the right time.

On our Lutheran campuses, part of our vocational responsibility is to teach our students to swim in the 21st century waters of religious diversity. To do so, we faculty, staff and administrators also need to value and practice authentic listening. We need to teach our students to tell their own stories and create spaces in classrooms and on campus for them to do so. If you ask someone who she is, how does she answer you? No doubt she tells you a story: “I was born in Ann Arbor Michigan and when I was three my family moved to Georgia...”

Our identity is a story. We are our stories. This is as true for individuals as it is for universities, and I have noticed in the 21st century a strange plague on both of these houses. Both individuals in our day and too many religiously-affiliated universities appear to be ashamed of their own stories as if distinctiveness inherently offends diversity. Just as we cannot assume that students will know how to listen, we also cannot assume they feel empowered enough to share their own stories without our intentional modeling and prompting. Religious difference and distinctiveness scare us, and so, strangely, we try to hide them, as if by not discussing them with people different from ourselves they will magically disappear.

On my previous campus at Capital University, our dean took the bold step of establishing a new committee called, aptly enough, the Telling Our Stories committee, of which I served as chair. Part of our committee’s job was to collect the stories of faculty, staff, administrators, and students and disseminate them via wiki, newsletter, alumni magazines, luncheons, forums, university webpages,

and the like. The university has a long way to go, but this intentional effort at celebrative storytelling has already helped cultivate and create a greater sense of shared values and mutual celebration in an environment all too often prone to cynicism, uncertainty, and negativity. Every new story I heard and shared shamed me a little at how little I once knew about my colleagues and their projects and students. At the same time, each new story refashioned my day with a sense of giftedness. I walked through the campus differently, watchful and appreciative.

“Stories can make us rich or leave us poor, and if they go untold, the result is always poverty.”

Such storytelling also has had a remarkable side-effect on our fundraising. When my students in 2008 expressed to me their dream of going on a service-learning trip to South Africa to learn more about the nonviolent end to apartheid and to serve the poor and AIDS orphans, I knew the trip would be too expensive without subsidy. So, I wrote letters and talked to people, and in the end raised over \$25,000 in private funds. Even I was shocked by this radical generosity. All I did to prompt it was to let my students tell their own stories about why they dreamed of going to Africa (I included excerpts from these autobiographies in my fundraising letters). I also told true stories about all my students had done for our local community on a weekly basis in my service-learning classes for the last two years. Both literally and figuratively, I believe our stories are our university community's currency. These stories can make us rich or leave us poor, and if they go untold, the result is always poverty.

Engendering Encounters

This brings me to my second recommendation about how our Lutheran colleges and universities can become better stewards of the God-given gift of religious diversity. Our universities must create occasions for our students to engage in authentic encounters with our interfaith neighbors. If your university is like mine, our student and faculty populations are not yet as religiously diverse as they should be. Changing that demographic is the ongoing responsibility of admissions, recruitment, and the whole institution. But in the meantime, from the grassroots up we must be intentional about taking steps to facilitate opportunities for students to authentically encounter and interact with our religiously diverse neighbors. We cannot wait around and expect diversity

to come to us; we need to bring it to our students right now. For faculty, this means incorporating encounters with diversity into the curriculum through texts, invited speakers, service-learning, experiential learning, internships, and field trips.

I want to share with you some practical examples of how to foster for students opportunities for engagement and genuine encounter with religiously diverse neighbors.

Curriculum Matters

First and most obvious, we can address the reality of religious diversity through the curriculum. The best part of being a university with a religious heritage is that we understand how much religious traditions and heritage *matter*, not just to ourselves, but to everyone who is part of one. One of the things I love best about teaching at a Lutheran institution is that we require an introduction to religion class, in which students are exposed to the basic understandings of the world's major religious traditions. In short, we teach our students religious literacy. Through such a requirement, our sectarian institutions hold themselves accountable to the realities of religious diversity and to the irreducible way it matters in our global society in a way that most non-sectarian institutions with no religion requirements simply do not or cannot. Ever since a student asked me if Muslims worship Muhammad or the Buddha, and because another student asked me if the Holocaust really happened or if Jews just made it up, and because people such as a turban-wearing Sikh man in Texas are murdered after 9/11 for being mistaken for a Muslim, I have become a passionate, unwavering advocate of the importance of religious diversity. Religious illiteracy leads to mistaken assumptions which in turn lead to wild-flung prejudice and hate. Every semester on the first day of class I tell my students why I teach religion: I want to help create a world where people stop hating and killing each other because of their vast ignorance about religious traditions outside their own.

I remain flabbergasted that we as a nation believe that students can be college graduates and not know why their American Buddhist co-worker in the next cubicle is against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or why their orthodox Jewish neighbor would never eat a cheeseburger or drive to synagogue on the Sabbath. Our graduates should know, for example, that only 20% of Muslims in the world are Arab, that Muslims believe in the second coming of Jesus as well as the virgin Mary, or that there are 635 denominations in the United States that identify themselves as Christian, and 9000 different Christian denominations worldwide (9000!).

Our Lutheran and other sectarian institutions lose a genuine critical edge and become irresponsible when we consider

eliminating religion requirements from our curriculum. Diversity in the United States is, in large part, religious diversity, and yet where and how do we educate young people about what that diversity is and what it means? Where and when do we provide young people with the tools needed to acquire religious literacy? Where is a safe place where they can clarify misperceptions about one another and ask messy questions about difference, if not in the university? It is dangerous and deleterious to imagine that young people can learn to embrace the religious neighbor by some imaginary form of cultural osmosis, rather than intentional education. Ignorance about religious diversity in the 21st century leads not to bliss, but to bombs and brutality.

Bridging Communities

A second and relatively simple way to foster encounters with religious diversity is to bring speakers to campus, host interfaith events on campus, or take students to interfaith events out in the community. In other words, build bridges. If your faculty does not have representatives of today's religious diversity who are willing to speak to students, such neighbors need to be brought to campus or students taken to them. Every term, I take students to at least one interfaith event hosted by the Interfaith Association of Central Ohio. I have taken students to observe worship services at mosques, Sikh temples, churches, synagogues, and sweat lodges. One my colleagues hosts an on-campus Seder, open to all students, and once she and I partnered together and had a Jewish-Christian shared Bible study on campus. In my Introduction to Religion class, as we begin our study of each religious tradition—Sikhism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism—I bring to class friends of mine who practice those traditions.

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My Muslim friend Ahmad always makes an especially strong impression on my students. My students, the majority of whom are Christian or Jewish, always ask Ahmad how he feels about the terrorist acts of September 11. Ahmad always says to the class, “That’s such an important question. I’ll answer it by asking you a question back: How do those of you who are Christians

feel about Christians who bomb abortion clinics? I do not feel that those who bombed the WTC were real Muslims. They are extremists and they do not represent what my community believes to be the true Islam.” Though we would never presume this about our own traditions because we are aware of all the inner controversies, we tend to conceive of other faith traditions as monolithic wholes, which is a dangerous misassumption.

When one of my students asked Ahmed about the Muslim concept of *jihad* and what that meant to him, Ahmed pointed out that in mainstream Islam, *jihad* does not really mean holy war: it means struggle, any struggle to follow the will of God. Ahmed then said to the class, my greatest *jihad* is raising my teenage daughter! The class laughed, but this answer gave them a broader understanding of a complex and highly misused and misunderstood term. During Ahmad’s visit, most of my students confessed they had never met a Muslim let alone asked him what the term *jihad* really means is in his daily life of faith.

Every semester I take my Introduction to Religion students to a Ramadan Iftar dinner organized by the Columbus chapter of The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR). There my students and I share a meal served and prepared by our Muslim neighbors. One year, the dinner started right after an OSU football game. My students the next day in class could not stop talking about the Muslim college women they met who wore their OSU sweatshirts along with their *hijabs*, or the kind elderly man who invited them to visit their mosque, or the young people at their table who that very night after the *iftar* had ended sent them friend requests on Facebook. My students had learned so well from the media and our culture to “other-ize” Muslims that all of these small commonalities—Muslim teens root for OSU and use Facebook just like me!—was for them akin to creaking open the lid of a dusty old chest and discovering inside the unexpected gold doubloon-treasure of a shared humanity. If there is one thing I’ve learned from nearly a decade of interfaith activities, it is that meeting people from other faiths transforms lives in a way that textbooks and lectures can never achieve.

On my course evaluations, my students never fail to mention these encounters as the experiences where they learned the most, and it is worth noting that when they do so, instead of the generic labels Muslims, Sikh, Buddhist, or Jew, they now use Ravi, Abukar, Ahmad, and Alfred—the names of real people they have met and now know. Part of our calling as institutions of higher education is to teach our students that diversity is not a “p.c.” buzzword or abstraction. Rather, ‘diversity’ is real people with real names, kids, jobs, and dreams.

I want to share two excerpts with you from my most recent batch of evaluations, because I think both of these comments testify to the phenomenal power of interfaith dialogue and

genuine encounter with religious diversity to transform lives when allotted its proper place within higher education. One student wrote:

People say ignorance is bliss, but I do not always believe that to be true. In fact, I believe that ignorance within religion breeds hatred. Again, I fall back on the example of the world's current situation and the many Islamic nations involved. People consume a majority of what the media says and believe it to be true. Nonetheless, it takes a small amount of research to discover what Islam stands for. This was truly brought to my attention after our speaker. Without this course, I would still be carrying my preconceived notions of Muslims as violent and likely terrorists.

Another student wrote:

I think this is the first lesson in any study of world religion: that individuals or groups are not representative of the whole, nor should they be. Yet so frequently we base our fear, mistrust, and hatred of each other on these episodic experiences that we have condemned the other's religion before we even know what it is or how it instructs.

At this point, you might be thinking that I have made interfaith dialogue sound easy or even Pollyannaish when we all know that such conversations are extremely frightening to many people, which is precisely why we try to avoid them. A lot of students show up to my Religion 101 class with terror in their eyes, and once a group of my Campus Crusade for Christ students protested having to attend the Ramadan dinner by refusing to eat any of the food prepared by Muslims. This resistance raises the question: What are we afraid of as a culture when it comes to education about religion and encounters with the religious

“What we fear most in encounters with the religious ‘other’ is the loss of our own identity and distinctiveness.”

‘other’? What are we afraid of on our campuses when it comes to difficult conversations about religious diversity and all its ancillary, heavily-freighted related social issues such as homosexuality, abortion, and the like?

What we fear most in encounters with the religious ‘other’ is the loss of our own identity and distinctiveness. Our faith and

religious practice is so bound up with the core of ourselves that we fear losing ourselves in such dialogues, being told we are wrong, and being coerced to change. This is especially true for our young students, who are still in the fragile process of discovering their own personhood and who tragically have been taught by our culture to define themselves not by who they are, but by who they are not. In such an environment, diversity is a cause for fear and not celebration.

A strong definition of the religious “other” keeps identity safe, whereas the discovery of a common, shared humanity threatens to blur the edges of our identity. In my decade of teaching undergraduates introduction to religion survey courses, I have discovered that the driving fear-question buried in the chest cavity of interfaith discussions is: “How can I be a part of a ‘we’ and still be ‘me’?” In religious classrooms and other interfaith events, my students overwhelmingly fear betraying themselves and their own traditions. We must show them that it is possible to learn without conversion, and the best way I have found to do this is to teach without evangelism.

Empathy and Collaboration vs. Evangelism and Creed

Our culture unduly confuses education with evangelism, when of course it is possible to learn without conversion, just as it is possible to teach Spanish or learn to speak Spanish fluently and not become a Spanish person. This is why it is important to always state that the goal of interfaith dialogue and even religious higher education is not to convince anyone to change or that we are right and they are wrong, but simply to achieve mutual empathic understanding. I need to write something to that effect on course syllabi. Although it may seem obvious, undergraduates need reminding that understanding is *not* the same thing as agreement. I can understand why you would do something, though I can wish with all my heart you had not done it. How many friends and family members do we disagree with on hundreds of issues yet nonetheless love and understand? Our students do this all the time in their personal lives, and they need teaching, encouragement, and the opportunity to apply many of those same relationship skills to our campus discussions of religious diversity.

Our institutional missions aspire to unity in diversity, but to most of our students this sounds like an oxymoron because they (probably inspired by contemporary politics) confuse sameness with unity. Unity means we have a goal in common—a shared vision—but it does not mean we are homogeneous. This distinction lies at the heart of all communities and certainly to Lutheran universities in the 21st century.

When I talk to my students about this important distinction, I use the analogy of love. Have you ever been in love? Nearly

everyone who has ever been in love recognizes that you don't stop being yourself because of your relationship. No, ask a person in love how love has transformed her and she will usually say, "My love and my relationship has made me a better me than I was before. I am more myself than ever." The question before us in a religiously diverse world on a campus with a particular

"...practicing reconciled diversity, which recognizes both our irreducible uniqueness and our insistent commonalities."

religious identity is this: How can we make our students' four year experience one at the end of which each student can say, "The encounters I had and the relationships I built have made me a better me than when I first set foot on these grounds?"

To achieve our desired goal, we need to show our students examples of how conflict and disagreement can make us bloom and not wither, and how I can still be me and you can still be you, but we are a better 'we' than before we got to know one another. In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The problem to be faced is: how to combine loyalty to one's own tradition with reverence for different traditions." I try to be a living incarnation of both loyalty and reverence for my students and also to introduce them to others who are too, so that part of their education is understanding that such a nuanced position is possible. In my own theological writings, I have often said that one of the best contributions Martin Luther has made to modern thought is his grasp of the paradox, his dialectic understanding of most things in life as not either-or, but instead as both-and. Helping our students and communities to embrace both-and thinking is crucial to practicing reconciled diversity, which recognizes both

our irreducible uniqueness and our insistent commonalities. Surely we are capable of recognizing difference, yet not allowing it to divide.

And so, my third and final recommendation for achieving greater responsibility toward religious diversity is to create opportunities for doing over doctrine, collaboration over creed. By participating in interfaith service projects through organizations such as BREAD (Building Responsibility Equality and Dignity—an interfaith justice ministry) and the Interfaith Hospitality Network which feeds and shelters the homeless, my students learn the important truth that we don't have to agree on every theological or doctrinal issue with our interfaith neighbors in order to get something done alongside them. While consensus on belief is impossible, collaborative action to better our communities is always possible. We don't have to agree with each other on whether the Messiah has already come in order to plant tomato seeds in a community garden, work tirelessly to establish an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, or serve a homeless child a thanksgiving meal.

The obvious activism which unites Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims is social justice. People of all these faiths share a desire for compassion, solidarity, peace, and the defeat of poverty and hunger. This common ground of the world's great religions is an exciting, wide-open portico which beckons us to walk through it with bold steps of collaboration and cooperation.

In the spirit of religious diversity, I'll conclude with a saying from the Koran that my Muslim friend Abukar once quoted as a celebration of our religious diversity: "If God had so willed, He would have created you one community, but He has not done so, that he may test you in what He has Given you; so challenge one another in good works. Unto God you all must return, and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ" (Sura 5:48).

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