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ERNEST SIMMONS

# Lutheran Higher Education and the Public Intellectual

Like it or not, self-conscious or not, we college faculty and administrators are public intellectuals. When we walk into our classrooms, speak at church or other civic groups or interact with the media, we are exercising a role of informed speaking in a public or semi-public arena. Our classrooms and campuses are public spaces. To the degree that we try to share our expertise and understanding, we are functioning as intellectuals. To share that expertise in a way that informs others in our society, we are exercising a public role. We are public intellectuals.

But this understanding raises more questions that need to be considered. For example, what are the functions of a public intellectual today? In a society where individuals struggle for self-identity and meaning primarily through popular culture and materialistic consumption, is there a place for spiritual critique and public theology? What is the relationship of a public intellectual to citizenship and the common good? Is there a role for higher education, particularly Lutheran, to play in cultivating public intellectuals? This essay intends to make a modest response to these questions from the perspective of Lutheran higher education's understanding of the dialectical relationship between Christ and culture.

Such a dialectic can offer both affirmation and critique as it supports dialog involving multiple points of view, contributing to mutual understanding and constructive change. Because of its familiarity with paradox and ambiguity as well as the limitations of the human condition, the Lutheran tradition informs an open and humble educational model that welcomes differing perspectives into the learning dialog while remaining skeptical of all human claims to ultimacy. We must argue neither for a faith so detached from the surrounding culture as to lack intellectual

credibility nor for a faith so accommodated to that culture as to sanctify the idolatry and hubris of our time. The Christian vision of humility and loving service through vocation can function as a critique of the values and assumptions of present day America.

When asking what the functions of a public intellectual are, there are many possible answers. I think that there are at least four. They are to articulate constructive critique to received social explanation in order to nurture dialog and critique; to present a transcendent (theological) perspective to encourage moral and holistic evaluative reflection; to pursue the common good in order to humanize social interaction; and to educate for citizenship in order to cultivate responsible leadership and vocation. In what ways can Lutheran liberal arts education pursue and support these functions?

## Articulate Constructive Critique—Spiritual Searching in Our Time

Human beings are meaning seeking creatures. We search for meaning before our own origins and after our demise. Still today, we quest, as the Greeks knew so well, for that which is lasting and imperishable in a world of perishability and flux. Historically, individuals found personal meaning through the received religious and cultural explanations of their time but no longer. Renate Schacht speaking from a German Christian perspective refers to the formation of what she calls a “collage identity” among many persons, especially the young, today. She observes,

Modern man has no fixed roots. Mobility, flexibility, plurality of standpoints, and freedom of opinion development are key characteristics of modern life. These truly positive

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characteristics, however, bring a dark side of insecurity and disorientation with them, which can retreat behind fundamentally secured walls or vegetate into a “nothing matters” position. The task of education then is to make other paths visible and accessible. (68)

It seems to me that it is exactly the role of a Lutheran college to offer such identity forming alternatives (Simmons 1998: 1-10). Identity is a process, not a possession. And environment forms identity. Lutheran, as well as other Christian, colleges and universities may assist this meaning-seeking, identity-forming process by cultivating an environment in which faith and learning can be kept in dynamic relationship. Faith frees the mind for open inquiry and creative reflection for we are not saved by our own understanding but by the grace of God. Keeping faith and learning in creative relation is a way of directly responding to this spiritual identity crisis and the creation of a “collage identity.”

From the beginning of the Enlightenment through the middle of the twentieth century it had become common to speak of a separation between fact and value, science and religion, nature and history. Nature, as object, had no intrinsic development but was rather to be understood through scientific analysis in a value free inquiry where both human and religious purpose were considered to be irrelevant (Schwehn 22-43). History, on the other hand, was the realm of human purpose and religious value in which civilizations rose and fell, charting their course in dominating an impersonal world. I have come to understand this as a false duality and agree with Parker Palmer that epistemologies have moral trajectories; ways of knowing are not morally neutral but morally directive (Schwehn 25). Ways of knowing necessarily include ways of valuing. So a complete separation of fact and value is not possible. All facts are value laden for it is precisely the values imbedded in interpretive systems that permit the conversion of raw data into meaningful fact. That is the function of theories, models and paradigms whether it be in the sciences or the humanities. As public intellectuals, college faculty and administrators have the responsibility to raise up these interpretive (hermeneutical) assumptions and values for their students and community. Otherwise, unexamined values function like fate.

This condition of separation of fact and value combined with flux, impermanence and mass media merchandizing has led to a collapse of traditional, cultural frameworks of meaning. Today this condition is not only local and national but also global. The resistance of many cultures to what is perceived as the corrosive acids of Western secular materialism have provided fodder for many a fundamentalist radical not only in Islam but also in Christianity and Judaism and even Hinduism. One of the goals of a Christian liberal arts education should be the cultivation of

a new sense of global citizenship to assist in the creation of what Schacht refers to as a “*cultura universalis*.” She observes,

Part of our responsibility of education consists of finding a central point from which the abilities of the youth of today can develop, which create a life with responsibility for oneself and for others. Against the background of rapid social change, the traditional, national-civil education becomes obsolete.

Quoting A. K. Trembl she continues.

The separation from national culture without a simultaneous connection to an international culture of the world leads inevitably to an individual hedonism stylized by the *zeitgeist*, which satisfies itself in living out of enjoyment in the close circles of the everyday life. The legitimate resistance to a national education must lead to an active creation of a “*cultura universalis*” in the horizon of world society. (70)

We must prepare our students to be global citizens and cultivate this sense of “*cultura universalis*” within them for they see it already uncritically mediated through the Internet and MTV!

### **Present a Transcendent (Theological) Perspective—The Critique of Religion in Popular Culture**

When we turn to the function of presenting a transcendental perspective to critique culture, we must keep in mind that for many people today, especially the young, *culture means popular culture*. Many of the students we teach have been conditioned to think about religion more by its portrayal in the mass media than by their own families or religious institutions. Theology, to remain true to its calling, must take such cultural expressions seriously. Fundamentally, the problem with popular culture is its treatment of religion as a form of entertainment or escape from reality rather than as a resource for coping and adapting to reality. This is particularly true regarding human suffering (Simmons 2003).

Being technologically mediated and socialized, the treatment of religion in popular culture often functions as a distraction from, rather than a resource for, coping with suffering. Relying primarily upon mass media for its formation, popular culture does not prepare people to address the ambiguity, suffering and failure that occur in their own lives, encouraging religion as an escape from rather than a grappling with reality. Traditions that used to provide resources for dealing with ambiguity and sufferings are no longer consulted and have lost their power to persuade and inspire.

How does the Lutheran tradition present a transcendent perspective to address suffering in such a cultural context? At the heart of the Lutheran tradition is the theology of the cross. Does a theology of the cross have anything to say to persons

conditioned by the popular cultural portrayals of religion and suffering? In an attempt to answer this question, we will briefly address three areas related to the treatment of suffering in popular culture: the hiddenness of God, the presence of ambiguity, and the response to suffering.

### *The Hiddenness of God in the World*

In reflecting upon the theology of the cross, Luther observed that in the cross God comes in hiddenness, in the form of the opposite, precisely to make room for faith. Faith for Luther was clearly described in the statement in Heb. 11:1, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It is precisely this hidden dynamic of faith and hope that is missing in most popular culture portrayals of God. The experience of hiddenness is not taken seriously. Rather its opposite, manifestation of the supernatural, is most often depicted. Supernatural powers appear in many forms from burning bushes (*Ten Commandments*) to demonic dames (*Ghostbusters*) to beams of light and halos (*Touched by an Angel*) to supernatural cruciform suspension (*Stigmata*) as well as in such movie series as *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings* and the *Chronicles of Narnia*. This is entertaining precisely because the ambiguity of the divine or the supernatural is taken away. The supernatural makes for great special effects. But herein lies the problem.

That which is hidden is "revealed" precisely to entertain or shock because in everyday life it is not. It is not accidental that the portrayal of the divine in popular culture is so obvious, even hokey, because in the more sophisticated understanding of physical existence (the physical and life sciences) the divine is so hidden. The result, of course, is that persons are not enabled to deal with this hiddenness. Instead they are given the sense that the divine would reveal itself if it could, or that in "olden days" God did so but today God does not. Perhaps God is really gone! The God portrayed in most mass media presentations is dead in contemporary society and personal experience.

The theology of the cross takes God's hiddenness and absence seriously. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" It is precisely by meeting this hiddenness head on that ground for meaningful faith is established and a critique of popular culture portrayals becomes possible. We must see that in the self-emptying of the divine into creation comes a hiddenness that is ontological and not simply epistemological. The world cannot and will not contain God so that God's hiddenness is the only way in which God can be present in the creation without destroying it. The Christian tradition at its best has always insisted that God's ways are hidden in creation because of the distinction between creature and Creator. This means that God's presence must be

discerned through faith and not through empirical demonstration. Mass media portrayals of such a God are not impossible but they are not very entertaining. In the absence of such portrayals people go questing after divinity of their own making which will be less hidden and more idolatrously satisfying. Public intellectuals must challenge such self-serving approaches.

### *The Presence of Ambiguity in Life*

Life is complex. It is multivalent and does not often lend itself to clear cut interpretations or meanings. Does the mass media portrayal of religion in popular culture prepare persons to handle such ambiguity? I think not. Its attraction and entertainment value is precisely that the ambiguity is absent. Here, at least, good and evil are clearly portrayed and the good will always win out. Even though Indiana Jones is put through one impossible experience after another, deep down we know that he will get out alive and triumph. Yes, this can inspire but it can also set up unrealistically clear moral expectations which can play into a dualistic ethical mind set. It is precisely when we do not know who is wearing the white hat (or the fedora) that the moral challenge is engaged. This can lead to self-critical reflection and humility in the face of our own morally ambiguous motives. But if persons are not encouraged toward this but its opposite, then we get scapegoating and self-righteous crusades or, through ethical fatigue, moral nihilism.

The message of the cross is that precisely in the midst of the ambiguity of life God is present. The fight of faith is enjoined precisely in the midst of the ambiguity of human experience and moral decision making. To acknowledge ambiguity is to affirm the tensions of human life and the paradoxical character of human existence. This is at the heart of the Lutheran tradition and is central to a public intellectual informed by that tradition whether they are Lutheran or not. We are a part of the universe become self-conscious and able to reflect back upon itself. But this is always the finite attempting, yearning, searching for the infinite, for that which itself it cannot contain. Herein we build our nests in the flux of spatio-temporal duration beyond our full comprehension. To ignore or deny ambiguity is to deny ourselves and our experience of life. Granted, not all life or all experiences are ambiguous, but it is precisely the flattening out of the complexities and tensions of life that leads to an absolutist vision of reality that is the seedbed for totalitarianism and fascism. Simple answers to complex life questions do not encourage growth but rather fanaticism and repression, especially of those who disagree. This condition in itself accounts for much of the self-inflicted human suffering in the world both past and present. Public intellectuals must challenge and offer responsible alternatives to such simple answers.

### *Response to Suffering in Human Experience*

Finally, it is the condition of suffering that is so critically ignored in the treatment of religion in popular culture. The main problem is the attitude with which suffering is addressed. Is human suffering seen as unnecessary and extraneous because technology, especially biomedical technology, can prevent it? Or is the reality of personal suffering trivialized because it is not on a grand or violent scale? What about other types of suffering? Does emotional or mental suffering appear on our societal screens as significant? Alfred North Whitehead once remarked that, "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness" (16). There is the ontological uniqueness and singularity of human existence that must be constructively accounted for if a person is to grow and flourish in life.

At the heart of the Christian tradition it is argued that in this solitariness one is not alone and that at the heart of spirituality is a self-transcending selfhood which enables a person to reach out beyond themselves. As Berdyaev once remarked, "To eat bread is a material act, to break and share it a spiritual one" (Gilkey 229). The treatment of religion in popular culture tends to play into the private individualism of American society and most often encourages a consumer attitude towards spiritual "products." Many of the books, tapes, clinics, growth groups, retreat centers, and religious programming that are offered in American society rely on such individual consumption for their economic livelihood. Religion is hawked like any other merchandise. This encourages a consumer attitude toward the individual resolution of suffering as well as callousness toward its occurrence in others. A theology of the cross provides a viable alternative to such merchandising of religion for it speaks not only to the reality of suffering, individually and collectively, but also to the involvement of the divine within it. The great challenge is how to communicate such a theology in the midst of the cacophony of popular culture. Part of the answer lies in understanding the different ways that faith and culture interact.

### *Pursue the Common Good—Christ and Culture in Paradox*

When was the last time you felt on "common ground" in America? In early New England and throughout much of rural America later on, communities were built upon a "town square model" where an open park (often with a band shell or gazebo) was placed in the center of downtown. It was a place to gather for entertainment, for civic speeches and debate about the common good, the good represented by the common town square. Around this square most of the major institutions of the community were built, the churches, the courthouse, the school and the bank and businesses. While we cannot return to such a situation in our

time with its urban sprawl, one can still ask is there anything that functions like the commons of old? I am afraid the answer is generally no. The mall certainly cannot for it is private property. Try holding a demonstration at your local mall and see how fast the security comes out. One cannot disrupt smooth customer flow. I am afraid that Richard John Neuhaus' famous "Naked Public Square" is not only naked but also absent in most of contemporary American society. There is no common public square to represent the ethical common good of society. There is no "commons." The demise of the commons directly impacts reflection on what qualifies for consideration as the common good. Who is my neighbor and how then am I asked to care for her or him? The mediated electronic community with its pseudo-intimacy has replaced spatial community. Do we as isolated and mobile individuals hold anything in common today? What constitutes the "public" for a public intellectual to inhabit?

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## "Our campuses can be oases of respectful discourse."

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Fortunately, the commons has not completely died away but rather has fragmented. There are various "publics" both natural and electronic that still exist and one of the most obvious is on our campuses. Many still have a "commons." It is certainly in the public of our classrooms that the public intellectual can assist students in reflection on what binds us together as a social community. This can also be done as community and interrelationships are cultivated at all levels of interaction on our campuses from board of regents to dorm floor meetings. Small to middle-sized, private liberal arts colleges and universities have a manageable public that is educable. Awareness of the common good can be cultivated in such an environment as well as encouragement to broader social participation. It is here that the encounter with the "other" can occur on a human scale and pluralism be seen as a normal, existential reality, not a hyperbolic theoretical monolith. Pluralism can be approached through the lens of constructive diversity rather than of ethical and social relativism. It is here in our manageable public that the common good can be focused upon and the beginning of a "*cultura universalis*" explored. In our time of increased pluralism, where there is a need for open dialog among ideas as well as religions and peoples, our campuses can be oases of respectful discourse.

The Lutheran model of higher education certainly encourages such discourse and dialog while at the same time affirming Christian faith as a central part of the discussion. The Lutheran

position models what H. Richard Niebuhr, in his classic work *Christ and Culture*, describes as “Christ and Culture in Paradox.” Luther never thought that human society was perfect so he did not attempt a Calvinist type transformation in Wittenberg. Rather, he saw the Christian as always living in the tension between the world of today and the world to come and not resolving the two. While this world is a good creation of God, it is a fallen creation and can never become perfect. Our lives, while affirming our vocation to care for the neighbor and

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## “Life need not be simple and clear in order to be livable and intelligible.”

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creation, must also keep in mind the kingdom of God beyond the present world. For this reason, Luther and the Lutheran tradition have always retained a healthy skepticism about any program of social or political reform. Niebuhr observes, “Living between time and eternity, between wrath and mercy, between culture and Christ, the true Lutheran finds life both tragic and joyful. There is no solution of the dilemma this side of death” (178). This is the Lutheran sensibility: life is a paradox, a dialectical tension, in the midst of which one must act and live. Life need not be simple and clear in order to be livable and intelligible. With the model of paradox and dialectic there is room for interaction and mutual growth and understanding. The value of a dialectical model is that it maintains the integrity of both sides of the dialectic. In a pluralistic world, this position can support respectful intercultural and interreligious dialog. Bearing witness need not be followed by condemnation or the sword as it has all too often been in the past for all the Abrahamic faiths. It is in such a context that the common good can be pursued even within a global context. Faculty and administration are called to such pursuits as part of their academic vocation and in such dialog may discover that they are engaged in cultivation of the common good as a public expression of their vocation.

### Educate for Citizenship—Christian Vocation

The classical purpose for liberal arts education in ancient Athens was preparation for civic leadership. One could not be an active and informed citizen of the *polis* without such an education. Luther was very familiar with this purpose and argued as such in his treatise of 1524, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools.” He states in a very practical manner:

Now the welfare of a city does not consist solely in accumulating vast treasures, building mighty walls and magnificent buildings, and producing a goodly supply of guns and armor. Indeed, where such things are plentiful, and reckless fools get control of them, it is so much the worse and the city suffers even greater loss. A city’s best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consist rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens. They can then readily gather, protect, and properly use treasure and all manner of property. (*LW* 45: 355-56)

If liberal arts education is to remain true to its roots, it must not lose its originating purpose but find creative ways to express it today. The Lutheran tradition’s emphasis upon vocation is one way to give theological grounding to such civic responsibility. It centers upon one basic question that has two fundamental dimensions.

The question is, “Why are you here?” The first dimension is the practical, why are you *here*? Namely why are you working at this college or university? What are you doing now and why are you doing it here? This is the realm of practical engagement with life on a daily basis. This first dimension of the question is of the here-and-now variety. The second dimension cuts more deeply, however, why *are* you here? That is, why do you exist? This is the existential dimension of the question, the dimension that focuses on the nature and challenges of human life. Why are *you* here and not someone else? Why did you come into life or existence at all? Where did you come from and to where are you going? The practical is composed of the necessary factors of place, history, resources (both physical and human) and structure. The existential is composed of the philosophical and theological dimensions of human existence. In a rather simplified manner, one could say that the practical dimension addresses instrumental questions of value (means), while the existential dimension addresses questions of intrinsic value (ends) for human life.

### *Vocation Occurs at the Intersection of These Two Dimensions of the Why Question*

Vocation, in the Lutheran understanding, addresses the practical from the context of the existential. It seeks to connect purposes and practices, ends and means and not allow them to fall apart into separate realms. Luther was a relational thinker. For him, one relates to God through faith and to the neighbor through love. This is the inner and the outer person referred to in “The Freedom of a Christian” (*LW* 31: 327-77). What this means then is that vocation belongs exclusively to this world. We live, work and serve in this world, mindful of a world to come. The great challenge we face in our time is that the emphasis on material values

and consumption in American society does not keep these two dimensions of life connected but rather gravitates to the practical alone in service to the profit motive. Our students bring such gravitational collapse with them onto our campuses and into our classrooms. They do not see their future careers as possibly serving their fellow human beings but as means to the end of their own self-fulfillment. The role of education at a Lutheran institution is ultimately education for self-transcendence, education that draws the student out of her/himself enough to acknowledge the needs of their neighbor. It is education for vocation.

Today, however, we face levels of social conditioning unprecedented in higher education. There is not only the marketing for consumption but also the erosion of critical thinking skills that otherwise could expose the social manipulation involved. Our student's cognitive styles are in transition from linear and narrative forms, amenable to the Biblical tradition, to more stochastic and multitasking which emphasizes breadth over depth. Our students tend to enter with music video and web windows forms of cognition. They are MTV minds that have videracy but not literacy. Their historical consciousness is limited and emphasis is upon short-term usefulness. In sum, they are dominated by the practical form of the question why. The challenge is to open their horizons of meaning and purpose to the transcendent dimensions of life, bringing depth into dialog with breadth.

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## “Education at a Lutheran institution is ultimately education for self-transcendence.”

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One way to respond to this prevalent condition is to try to open up a dialectical way of thinking which can hold positions in tension without necessarily reducing them to one side or the other. This is one of the great contributions of Lutheran education in our “public” classrooms. The problem is not with a secularized sense of vocation but with only a secularized sense, that is, a nondialectical one, which does not relate vocation to the tension with faith and hope. It is hope and the role of the transcendent future grounded in this hope that can stand in critique over the present. It is in light of what might be that one can become empowered to challenge and change what is. Christian vocation gives one the power to seek more humane, just and peaceful alternatives in the world of today. Christian hope is cruciform hope that takes seriously the suffering and challenges in the world but does not give them the final word. A more complete understanding of Christian vocation would

permit the relating of faith and career in a dialectical fashion as all faith is related to life. This in turn would begin to provide a basis for transcendent critique of the values of our society, one's place within it, and empower clearer civic responsibility. A public intellectual, for the sake of the public, would open up this transcendent dimension to enable responsible citizenship.

### Conclusion

Luther's colleague Philip Melanchthon, who became known in his own time as the *Praeceptor Germaniae* (“Teacher of Germany”) saw the primary role of education to be moral formation. He observes,

Nature has put this difference between humans and animals that animals cease to take care of their offspring after they have come of age. But on man Nature has enjoined to feed his progeny not only in their first years, but even more to mould their behaviour toward honorable attitudes (*ad honestatem formet*). (MSA 3: 69)

Gunter Schmidt goes on to observe about Melanchthon,

Melanchthon's highest educational aims are *pietas* and *eruditio*, “reverence” and a “cultured mind.” *Pietas* and *eruditio* support each other. The first has a refining effect on conduct, the latter enhances sensitivity as to the depth-dimension of reality. Melanchthon's ideal is an individual whose inner life is hierarchically structured and who lives within a hierarchical order of society.... Education has to foster this harmony within individuals and within society. (17)

For Melanchthon faith (*pietas*) is not possible without education (*eruditio*) and education is not possible without faith.

While we might not want to subscribe today to Melanchthon's hierarchical, pre-democratic social order, the critical role of faith in the educational process in helping to form responsible and articulate citizens is as critical now as it was then. The Enlightenment separation of fact from value has led to a so called “value free” education which has in fact not been value free or even neutral but has affirmed a secular materialism without any particular moral imperative beyond the profit motive. The critique regarding the inevitable contextuality of human thought found in post-modern theory has shown this to be the case even in the natural sciences. Pure objectivity is not achievable by human beings and so the best alternative is to be self-conscious and self-critical of one's own biases and presuppositions. But where is one to learn about this and become informed of one's own condition and biases? At its best this is one of the main objectives of liberal arts education. The

Lutheran model of such an education is particularly helpful here because of its dialectical openness to alternative viewpoints and their dynamic interaction. The paradoxical character of the Christ and culture relationship in the Lutheran tradition informs such a social expression and encourages its practitioners to be forthcoming in the public area. The theology of the cross encourages humility both in terms of one's own thought and also in the claims of others. Such a theological perspective can and should confront any claim to absoluteness or finality (Tillich's "Protestant Principle") especially in its secular expressions.

A Lutheran educational program that remains faithful to its founders, Luther and Melancthon, will see the importance of connecting the two dimensions of the why question in order to prepare students for faithful and responsible service in society. Such an education should also include preparation for global citizenship and a sense of the "cultura universalis" referred to earlier. Such an education would also involve value reflection in an intentional and purposive way to prepare students to become public intellectuals in and through their respective vocations in life. Concerning the four functions of the public intellectual listed earlier, the Lutheran tradition has no trouble addressing each of them.

*Articulate Constructive Critique* In bringing one's faith to bear on daily life, one is inevitably engaged in articulating a critique. The key here is that it be constructive. Faith enables self-critique as well as other-critique so that mutual criticism and affirmation becomes possible. Such analysis would help to reclaim Christian criticism from fringe groups and help display intellectual cogency to the wider secular society.

*Present a Transcendent (Theological) Perspective* Involving a theology of the cross as its foundation, such an education would involve moral formation and value reflective inquiry. Here it can take on a prophetic role in the public square by confronting the values present in much of popular culture and the spiritual searching to which it bears witness. The human experiences of suffering and ambiguity in life can be addressed even in the midst of the hiddenness of God.

*Pursue the Common Good* The common good need no longer be seen as a thing of the past or an unachievable ideal because of socio-cultural relativism. Articulate persons capable of finding the common threads of human and environmental need running through diverse cultures can begin to reforge such an ethical vision. Our "town square" is now global and our common ground is the earth itself.

*Educate for Citizenship* Viewing one's activity in life through the theological lens of vocation allows one to see actions as being done for the neighbor and the needs of the wider society. Vocation allows for work to be seen as self-transcending and not self-serving. In such a context more effective civic responsibility is encouraged and creative leadership can be affected.

We have come to realize that contemporary American society is neither a secular wasteland nor a godless society. Religious searching and expression is rampant in twenty-first century America. The great challenge facing mainline religious institutions and faith traditions is to communicate their religious reflection in a way that is accessible to persons living in a technologically socialized, mass media driven, popular culture dominated society. The Lutheran model of Christ and culture critiques contemporary society by bringing it into dialectical engagement with Christ and the Gospel. Such a model does not try to leave the world nor does it believe that a Christian society can be built in this one. Rather, it affirms the vocational value of living one's faith in this life, mindful of a life to come. Such a model avoids what Tom Christenson has termed the "fallacy of exclusive disjunction" (16).

There are middle positions between exclusion and accommodation in Christian higher education and the Lutheran dialectical model is one. As a confessional movement within the church catholic, Lutheranism seeks to build bridges and connections between differing expressions of the Christian tradition. Lutheranism at its best does not elevate one expression to supremacy but rather is comfortable with paradox and ambiguity as well as the hiddenness of God in the world. Such a theology can inform a dynamic interaction between Christian freedom and academic freedom and assist our students as well as ourselves in critiquing the society in which we all find ourselves immersed.

Most of our students enter our classrooms with great ignorance of the Christian tradition and socialized into personal spiritual consumption. Our task as educators (both faculty and administration) is to inform as well as to empower; to inform about the richness of the Christian tradition (as well as other great world religious traditions) and to empower careful critique of religious reflection and experience including contemporary society. This is essential for the education of our students but also for the fostering of an informed critical mass of persons to guide social as well as religious decision-making. Informed religious reflection can assist in cultivating the common good and counter the social pressures against its consideration. A theology of the cross meets these concerns head on and does not deny them or simply explain them away. It does not try to "fix" everything in human life but places it in a wider context of meaning. *Life need not be simple and clear to be livable and intelligible.* By so doing, the Lutheran expression of

the Christian tradition may be empowered to make relevant and constructive contributions to the formation of a *cultura universalis*, to the development of a global culture. What a constructive role for public intellectuals to play!

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