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## A View From the Other Side

Daiseybelle Thomas-Quinney

This presentation comes from the perspective of a non-Lutheran, and an outsider and novice to the Lutheran community. So it will be colored with my "otherness."

Before 1995, I had heard of the Lutheran Church and its traditional theology, but was not sure what its center or "heart" was. What was and is the Lutheran center raised two distinct questions: (1) Is the contemporary Lutheran center different, or is it the same as at inception? (2) If it is the same, why does the theme imply fragmentation?

After many interviews, reading, and writing this paper, there are still many questions in my mind about what the Lutheran center is supposed to be. It has not been clearly articulated in theory or demonstrated in practice at the church-related school where I am currently employed.

What is the center or "heart" of Thiel College? This is a question that our community is still trying to answer. How do we really promote the "heart" of what we do? We are a long way from consensus. Once we learn how to live out our mission statement in visible ways, the center of the Lutheran tradition can be celebrated by all those who work, learn, and grow in our institutions. It is declared in St. Matthew 6:21: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart (center) be also."

In this presentation, I will talk about the difficulty experienced trying to understand what the Lutheran center is, and thus its integrity and fragmentation. I will share some personal experiences, the historical perspective of Thiel College, theological foundations of the Lutheran tradition, and conclude with some commentary on inclusiveness and diversity. The reality of my presence here today is connected to a long line of predecessors on whose backs I stand, for they bridged this gap for me. The rich oral history -- one of storytelling. I am a

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storyteller.

Now, I believe what will be helpful to begin my presentation is to briefly share with you my story of how I came to be a part of this rich Lutheran tradition: After graduating from a Presbyterian seminary in 1994, as an ordained minister of the Church of God, I found myself in the marketplace seeking employment. I responded to a job announcement for the position of Adjunct Professor in the Department of Religion at Thiel College in Greenville, Pennsylvania. It was the spring semester in 1995. I was hired. In retrospect, I can truly say that those early days at Thiel College were some of the most bittersweet days of my teaching career.

Those days were characterized as bittersweet because I worked alone, isolated from the community. The library staff graciously offered me a quiet place to hang my hat and coat. Among the books in the library archives, I sat down to contemplate about my new job, the students, and this community. What was God saying to me in this "chilly" environment?

In the 1960s, I attended a small church-related college, as a first generation student. That was the era of mandatory chapel attendance, a strong moral and ethical ethos and constant God-talk around the campus.

In my naivete, I looked for some of the same characteristics at Thiel College. That kind of philosophy was not a priority at Thiel. Even with the best efforts, the campus pastor found it difficult to arouse an interest in faculty or students for attendance at regular Sunday worship or the special holiday worship services. This was a church-related school? What specifically distinguished Thiel College from a non-Christian college? I wanted to know.

In the midst of that isolation, there was tremendous opportunity for ministry. That made it sweet!

Upon arriving, I was introduced to my department colleagues. There were no efforts made to introduce me to others in the community. There was no discussion about the Lutheran legacy during my brief orientation. This is not offered as a criticism, but highlights the nature of the adjunct status at most educational institutions. I didn't have any sense of what the rest of the community was like. I was greeted by some with a polite "hello;" by others with a stare. I was the new novelty on campus. My job was to teach a required course in Judeo-Christian Scriptures for that semester.

I had read the college catalog and the mission statement. What I saw in my new surroundings was not congruent with the mission statement.

With the exception of one African American female secretary and one Hispanic professor, there were no other persons of color on the faculty, staff, or administration at Thiel College in 1995.

On the first day of class, just as I was taking my coat off, I heard an unusual bustling sound in the hallway. Out of curiosity, I moved closer to the door to see what was going on. A group of about 15 African American students rushed into the room and surrounded me. The group's spokesperson explained their presence and excitement: "We came here to welcome you. Now, we have somebody here to help us." This unexpected welcome raised several critical questions in my mind. What did these students mean "Somebody here to help up?" It didn't take long for me to find out. Several of the students began to relate problems about the college and told me they were transferring because of the hostile environment. There were few accommodations for these minority students, both at the college or in the surrounding town. The bottom line: the students were depressed, isolated, and let to fend for themselves the best way they could. How could an institution, in the 20th century, recruit these minority students without any representation in administration, faculty or staff?

After several weeks, I conferred with the registrar and learned that there was an enrollment of 38 African American students, most of them males

who were involved in the school's athletic program. Further investigation into their academic standing and conversations with these students revealed that most of them were unprepared for the rigors of college. There were many warning signs that pointed to their failure.

- A hostile environment that had not prepared itself to receive, accept, or nurture these minority students after recruiting them.
- These minority students were recruited for their athletic ability, without serious consideration of their academic deficits.
- The absence of a diverse faculty and administration who could understand the cultural differences these minority students now faced.

"Education is sometimes narrowly conceived to apply to the education of the ind. Thus, colleges and universities typically and appropriately emphasize classroom experiences, teaching, texts, courses, libraries, and the like. Though this constitutes one facet of education, emphasis on this dimension of the education process to the neglect of other factors, can lead a college to cultivate intellectual giants and moral and social dwarfs. Much more goes on at college than the education of mind. Indeed, were students' education measured in increments of time, the business of formal education would not predominate. Learning occurs in the dorm, in the athletic center or on the field, in the music and drama presentations, in the work experience in the community, according to Dr. Rexchenbach in this article, "Mission and Hiring Policies in the Christian College (p. 13 Intersections/Summer 1997).

In his scholarly article, "The Wisdom of the True University," Dr. Samuel Hazo made this suggestion: "What students ought to come to a university (college) to experience are what permits them to do better than what they consider their best, which is all that excellence means" (p. 30).

### **The Rich Historical Roots of Thiel College**

To understand the Lutheran center, the history of this institution had to be examined. From the

famous movie "The Sound of Music comes the wisdom: "Let's start at the very beginning."

As an employee of Thiel College, I had not one serious consideration to the historical specifics of the College. However, in preparation for this presentation, it became necessary for me to do some historical research. Thiel College is one of the 28 ECLA colleges and universities in North America. Thiel College was founded in Greenville, Pennsylvania by a German pioneer who came to the western part of the state in the 19th Century.

From its inception, Thiel College has been church-related, with a Bible-based curriculum, which sought to develop the Christian life of the rapidly changing Lutheran population. It has always been a co-educational college; four women were among the first eight graduates in 1875. However, in its evolution the vision of the Lutheran tradition was not nurtured or clearly articulated, a problem that still plagues the college.

Throughout its history, Thiel College has worked to preserve its liberal arts tradition, based on the whole person through extra-curricula programs. Early academic preparation required freshmen students to have a thorough preparation in English, mathematics, German, Latin, and Greek. The College concentrated on classical subjects and later included Bible study, history, and moral philosophy. Seniors added Hebrew and French. By 1880, a Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees were offered (Thiel College Profiles '96, p. 2).

Thiel College has always received strong support from the Lutheran Synod as a church-related, liberal arts college.

### **A Church-Related College**

Thiel College is a church-related college, not a Christian college. What does this really mean? I was hard pressed to find information on the Lutheran tradition or specifics in the college's mission statement. After interviewing the campus pastor, religion department chairperson, and the

director of church relations, I learned that in the Lutheran related colleges and universities, the college president, the campus pastor, and some of the trustees and faculty must come from the Lutheran faith tradition. There are not required church-related activities for students. Instead of requiring its students to attend church services, the Lutheran tradition is open to biblical interpretation and exploration of the history of Scriptures. As such, one must examine how faith and learning takes place at the college. I have difficulty understanding how a college could be related to a Christian tradition without being Christian? A lack of clarity of these differences by students, some faculty and especially the non-Lutheran constituency, has directly impacted and will continue to fragmentize the Lutheran center. Looking for the Lutheran center is a bit like the parable Jesus told in St. Matthew 13:31-33: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the large of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough" (New International Version).

In my quest to understand the difference between a Lutheran church-related college and Christian colleges, I explored the theological constructs of "Two Kingdoms" and observed specific details about the educational life of the institution.

The "Right Hand Kingdom" in Lutheran traditional thinking asserts that their faith is visible in concessions, such as the Augsburg Confession. Article 4 of the Confession reminds the Lutheran that he/she is made right with the Creator through justification by faith, not by good works. It is God's action in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, on the cross, and through the forgiveness of sin. We cannot earn God's grace; it is a gift, freely given. That is confessional faith and the theological understanding of the "Right Hand Kingdom."

The "Left Hand Kingdom," in Lutheran traditional

theology is personal involvement in the structure and order of society as active participants in politics, family, church, and school. In the "Left Hand Kingdom," education is the work of God. The integrity of the educational institution is revealed through its openness to the issues of life. The curriculum is composed of courses that support theological reflections, exposure to other faith traditions, western culture, and global heritage.

Dr. Samuel Hazo supports this "Right Hand Kingdom" perspective by stating, "Finally, a true university should maintain and preserve a hierarchy of studies. In the church-related universities (colleges) this means a respect for theology as the queen of all studies" (p. 31). Dr. Hazo cautioned church-related institutions to guard against becoming like corporations. In striving to become like a corporation, a university or a college will turn to cost effective courses which become considered as a product. When this transition occurs, we no longer educate--but that has been known, though, and taught in this culture. We simply prepare students for serving in the system. The survival of the academy must not be relegated to cost effective curriculum.

I believe the mission statement can serve as the agent that helps us locate and identify areas of wholeness and areas of fragmentation. Colleges and universities must be willing to acknowledge, name, and critically examine all the areas of student life, personnel, curriculum, resources and vision that are detached from the mission statement. Here is a case in point, as my story continues:

Thiel College's mission is to develop through exemplary education all aspects of the human character--the intellectual, the personal, the moral, and the religious--so that lives inspired by the truth and freedom may be committed to service in the world.

Where was this "exemplary education" in regards to those students, minority and others, in the athletic program with leaning deficits?

My initial observation suggested that these ill-prepared athletic recruits would have difficulty

competing at the same intellectual levels as many of their peers, some of whom were members of academic honor societies and had established themselves as leaders. How could those participating in the athletic program give the required attention and yet keep up with the expected academic rigors of the College? What was the rationale for recruiting this caliber of student? Was it to develop a winning sports team at the cost of academic bankruptcy? Many of the students were barely able to read. This deficit should not have been overlooked when reviewing high school performance records. Was this exemplary education or a "set up" where these students would eventually fail? The mission statement should guide every facet of what we do, how we do our work, and with whom we do our work.

I refer to the explicit claim of Dr. Bruce R. Reichenbach in his article regarding Mission and Hiring Practices in Christian Colleges: "In effect, in defining the purpose of the college as educating the whole person, focus must be placed on every dimension of student life. Hence, the entire college community should be knowledgeably committed to the college's mission as the college attempts in its diverse educational role to assist students in their education" (p. 13). Thiel College was very fragmented in its diversity of "exemplary education" to the total person, in the case of the minority athletic recruits. This very recruiting process created a major retention issue for the College. These students could not compete at the required academic level because of poor preparation. Many were later dismissed or placed on academic probation; others transferred because of what they felt was a lack of support from the faculty and administration.

The faculty was not diverse. The "chilly" environment did not leave these students with alternatives when experiencing difficulty with college life. In her book, "Coloring the Halls of Ivy," Dr. Josephine D. Davis asserts that "Minority administrators play monumental roles in making 'chilly' campus climates more welcoming to students of color. This fact, however, is hardly known and rarely celebrated" (p. 4). I would like to

add that the majority student population also benefits as well from the presence of minority faculty, staff, and administrators.

To illustrate this point, listen to Tom's story. The first semester, my second day on the job, one of the students enrolled in the course I was teaching, came and stood face to face with me. He stared at me from head to feet, then with a disdainful look said, "So, you are the new professor, huh?" "Yes, I am," was my polite response. "Well, I'm not staying. Please sign my registration card so I can withdraw from this class." I granted his request, and as he walked down the hallway it became clear where I had seen and experienced this kind of arrogance before. It was my native Alabama, a segregated state, where racial hatred runs deep like rivers.

During Tom's next three years on campus, I had several opportunities to assist him with problems as well as affirm his progress. In the spring of his senior year at Thiel College, he enrolled in my class, "The African American Worship Experience." Early in the class, each student was asked about their expectations from the course. Tom stated, "I want to learn as much as I can about African American because you are so nice." As you can see from Tom's story, students from the majority population are helped as well as the minorities from faculty of color.

In his discussion on implementing the college's mission, Dr. Reichenbach stated, "If this assessment of education is correct, then the college's mission should inform all aspects of the college's educational endeavors. Its implementation should occur at all levels of college life, to create a particular kind of community. The same holds true for the Christian dimension of church-related colleges' mission statements" (p. 13).

The defining purpose of our institutions should be to educate the whole person, thus encompassing every dimension of a student's life. I believe Tom learned a lot about acceptance, respect, and tolerance from me prior to his enrollment in my class during his last semester at Thiel College.

## **Inclusiveness and Diversity in the Lutheran Tradition**

Given the mission of the Lutheran church-related college and the reality of how it is implemented suggests a major weakness in the Lutheran tradition with regards to inclusiveness and diversity. While cleaning out my desk drawer at Thiel College, I came across a manual for colleges written by the Lutheran Churches of America in 1985. In the book "Inclusiveness and Diversity: Gifts of God" there is a section about commitments of diversity and inclusiveness with simple goals and strategies which apply to colleges and universities. Part of the notion of diversity and inclusiveness was from the traditional mission statement which implied acceptance, respect, tolerance, and yes, hospitality as part of the Lutheran witness to and in the world.

In his instructions on inclusiveness, the presiding Bishop James R. Crumbly advises: "We strive to be a more inclusive community because we believe it is to be God's will and command. To be faithful in carrying out God's mission in a pluralistic society such as ours, we should increasingly reflect in our membership people of all races" (p. 1).

"The colleges and universities related to the Lutheran Church in America, as one expression of the missions of that church, are committed to becoming inclusive communities. Each community needs to be diligent in making this call to inclusiveness and the celebration of diversity of its own" (p. 6). The integrity of the Lutheran church and related colleges and universities must work to apply the wisdom of that document.

National polls reveal strong public support for diversity in higher education, according to Diversity Digest, Fall 1998. Across all demographic groups, American voters support diversity causes and programs and can observe the educational benefits of a diverse campus and classrooms. An added benefit of diverse education is that it allows the learning of critical skills, including: communicating with those from differing backgrounds, teamwork, and problem solving.

To help chart a new course in inclusiveness and diversity on our campuses, researchers have recommended a comprehensive organizational change--in both attitude and structure. To achieve campus cultures that are truly inclusive, institutions must emphasize cooperation, collaboration, community, and establish institutional rewards for contributing to collaboration and community-building activities.

Restructuring of college campuses, for full inclusiveness, required making a real commitment to implementing cultural diversity. This commitment will mean changing the ways in which administrative and faculty searches are conducted; seeking innovative ways in which newly hired, minority faculty will be integrated into the existing system; establishing a network of advising personnel; providing an effective distribution of

resources for minority students.

In conclusion, the theme for this 1999 conference "Integrity and Fragmentation: Can the Lutheran Center Hold" is pregnant with possibilities and fraught with problems. If we define integrity as wholeness and fragmentation as detachment from the whole, I submit that the Lutheran center cannot hold as is, but has great possibility when its mission statement is followed.

The alternative to defragmentizing the Lutheran center as stated by Dr. Josephine D. Davis will happen when "Coloring the Halls of Ivy" includes the courage to lead!". When our identity and mission is clear, it will be easier to restore integrity, to reach out in hospitality to friends and strangers alike. This is a view from the other side.