

1999

Meditation--Band Chapel Service, St. Olaf College

Erik Haaland

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

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Haaland, Erik (1999) "Meditation--Band Chapel Service, St. Olaf College," *Intersections*: Vol. 1999: No. 7, Article 8.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol1999/iss7/8>

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

Meditation--Band Chapel Service

Erik Haaland

As I was thinking of what I might say for this brief meditation, I stumbled on the realization that what we are doing here, right now, is a curious thing. How many communities, at least in this country, gather daily in an activity such as this? Why do we gather together in an activity like this? Why did you as individuals choose to come here to this place, now? What do you find here? While I'm not presumptuous enough to try to answer these questions for *you*, I will attempt to answer them for myself. And in the process, I would like to share a few perspectives on worship that I have adopted during my time at St. Olaf.

This place and this act of worship fill a need within me in a way I struggle to describe. It's something spiritual, something emotional, something deeply human. And although I struggle to describe it, I know it has something to do with the totality of this experience. All of the elements around us are involved: the candles, the architecture, the stained glass, the music. Now, in this bit of rambling, I have conceptually combined two things--the deeply human and the manipulation of the physical world. And in my mental meanderings, I have found, in the combination of these two ideas, no better way to broadly define art--the expression of what is deeply human through the manipulation of the physical world.

But should we even be talking about the arts in worship? Given our Protestant history, this is a valid question. Christian worship and what are commonly thought of as the arts (especially music) have had an interesting and even antagonistic relationship. Church leaders have condemned the arts in worship at times, believing that our worship forms (liturgy or scripture reading) are specifically commanded by God. They believed these forms should not be polluted by human creativity.

As a committed humanist, I have to disagree with

this interpretation of worship. I do not believe that worship is set on us from above as an obligation or duty--instead, it comes from deep within us as an expression of needs and experiences that touch the very core of who we are. And, if my definition of art has any value, then it should come as no surprise that our religious needs and experiences find expression in a worship that is infused with art--indeed a worship that is art. With architecture, stained glass, music, and on days with more qualified chapel speakers, eloquence, our worshipful response to God is art, and it flows through so many of the mediums in which our humanity has found expression. And for what greater endeavor could we use our artistic gifts than to proclaim the word of God's saving grace?

However, my Lutheran tradition has always been very leery of allowing worship to look anything like a secular performance, and rightly so, for our worship should remind us of God's kingdom--not our own. But this concern should not prohibit us from realizing that our worship is really an art form, and as such, it requires our best and most sincere efforts. For as Christians, we have faith that what we express here is of infinite importance, not only for our lives, but for all of creation. So let me repeat; this worship/this art requires our best and most sincere efforts.

And if I might, I have one more perspective to offer. I can only speak from my own experience, but I know there are times when the God we worship and the salvation we proclaim do not seem to be very near. And if our worship were only the bare proclamation of those ideas in, say, a confessional creed, Christianity would have at those times little to offer those of us with questions and doubts. But in artful worship, we are presented not with something we must believe against our intellect, but something real and tangible we can hold on to. Here power and truth can be known experientially, even if not

conceptually. At least for me on my faith journey, this reality has been an infinite help keeping the faith, even if I have sometimes found my belief at an impasse.

Perhaps you are confident in your faith and knowledge of God—perhaps you are not. But no matter who you are, take heart in what we do here today. Seek to experience truth in what you see,

hear, and say. For at its best, this communal experience in which we are engaged has the power to bring us a glimpse of God and of the kingdom. And as we now see in a mirror only dimly, worship has the power to bring us a glimpse of our salvation. Amen.

Erik Haaland is a senior at St. Olaf College.

LETTERS

To the Editor:

I am a Lutheran pastor out here in the Pacific northwest struggling to articulate the Gospel in meaningful ways while not abandoning the core convictions we live by. I am also on the Board of Regents at Pacific Lutheran University, where I graduated in religion and history some nineteen years ago. I am writing to you out of a sense of perplexity regarding the current assumptions in the church related institutions. I recently read in the *Christian Century*, a review of a book by James Tunstead Burtchaell titled *The Dying Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. Apparently Burtchaell feels we are merely paying lip service to the gospel in the so-called Christian university. He articulates what he believes has been a whole hearted selling out of Christian core assumptions in deference to a watered down, less than offensive language of character building and lives of service for our fellow human beings. As a regent at PLU, I believe I understand some of the perplexities of appealing to a wider spectrum of people under the

guise of openness and tolerance. I wonder, however, if we have lost, amidst the generic language of service and leadership, a compelling word of hope and forgiveness in Jesus Christ? Have we, in an effort to become tolerant, abandoned our core convictions because of the offense? I write to you with these thoughts because I was impressed with the article you wrote for the *Intersections* journal on some of these very issues. I am neither a Christian without sensitivity to the cultural assumptions, nor do I consider myself among the ranks of those who are seemingly appalled when the Gospel is rightly proclaimed and articulated. I write as one convinced of the need for openness and necessary contemplation of varying perspectives and persuasions. Simultaneously, I am concerned for a differentiation between a liberal arts school unaffiliated with the church and one, that at least in theory, still yearns for the connection. I thank you for your consideration in this vital matter.

Pastor John L. Vaswig
Spokane, Washington