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"You Shall Know the Truth, and the Truth Will Set You Free": A Scientist's Response

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**“YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE”
A SCIENTIST’S RESPONSE**

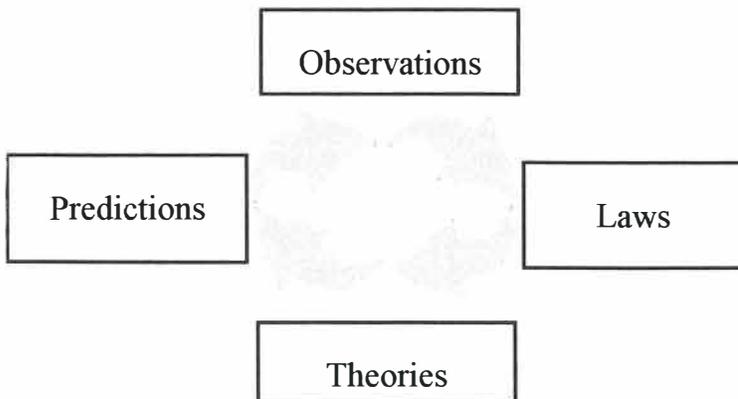
Ben Huddle

Prof. Walter Bowman presented a helpful paper at the 1996 Summer Conference for faculty at Lutheran colleges in response to the question "What is the Lutheran tradition?". He proposed five major themes that inform Lutheran (and other Christian) colleges: the Lutheran tradition is Biblical, catholic, evangelical, sacramental, and world-affirming.

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... I suggest that there is a way for students to look for the Truth that sets them free that is as valuable as the five traditions listed by Bowman: that is the scientific method.
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I am neither equipped nor inclined to critique Prof. Bowman's proposals. As a scientist, however, it seems to me that Bowman overlooks a tradition, albeit a newer one, important at contemporary church related liberal arts colleges. That is a tool for knowing the Truth that was not available to Martin Luther, but is certainly available to twentieth (and twenty-first) century students. That tool is, of course, the scientific method. I would therefore add a sixth tradition critical for Lutheran (and other Christian) colleges.

I do not mean science, although strong arguments can and have been made that citizens are poorly equipped to live in a modern society without a good understanding of science. Rather, I suggest that there is a way for students to look for the Truth that sets them free that is as valuable as the five traditions listed by Bowman: that is the scientific method. This method can be summarized by four steps in a continuous cycle.



The scientific method begins with observations, made either in a laboratory where some conditions can be controlled, or in nature. When an observation is made repeatedly, or related observations are made by many observers, the collected observations are called laws. Theories are proposed to explain those laws. Theories try to answer the question "Why?" at a fundamental level. Theories lead inexorably to predictions, and predictions lead to further observations, and the cycle continues.

Some scientists have seen this cycle as the "engine of science". Others see an ever-expanding spiral representing our knowledge of the universe. Others see an ever-narrowing spiral focussing in on the Truth. Whatever the metaphor, the scientific method has been remarkably successful in understanding and in mastering our universe. It has been so successful that many "non-scientific" fields have adopted it; thus we have, for example, political science.

"Science" comes from the Latin "scientia", knowing. The scientific method is thus a method for learning the Truth. Everyone can participate in the scientific endeavor, if not as an active scientist, as a citizen knowledgeable of the power of the scientific method, who insists on rational answers. Application of the scientific method offers perhaps our best hope for solving many of the next century's problems, including human problems such as poverty, famine, pestilence and war.

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Scientists are expected to speak and act ethically, but too often we don't expect scholars in other fields to know the scientific method.
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Because science is sometimes thought of as being difficult, there is a temptation to excuse our students from understanding science. We don't do our liberal arts students a service when we do this, just as we don't do our science students justice if we teach them science at the expense of ethics. My thesis is that we need to do both. For example, environmentalists are sneered at when they ignore the effects of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Scientists are expected to speak and act ethically, but too often we don't expect scholars in other fields to be aware of the scientific method.

One of the pleasures of teaching at a Lutheran college is the opportunity for "truth seekers" to work together, sharing methods and insights. Not only is this conversation possible, it is (or should be) welcome, even expected. One of the traditions of a Lutheran college should be to treasure, cherish, and zealously protect this conversation. Colleges which stifle the religious tradition do so at the peril of losing their meaning. Colleges which stifle the scientific tradition do so at the peril of losing their significance.

A modest scientist would not claim that the scientific method is the only way to know the Truth, or even necessarily the best way to know the Truth. For two hundred years,

however, it has been an integral part of the human endeavor, and it deserves to be included in the Lutheran college tradition. The scientific tradition is not unique to Lutheran colleges, but neither are the five traditions enumerated by Bowman. And there may be others, but my assignment was to give a scientists' response to Bowman. I would conclude that the Lutheran tradition is Biblical, catholic, evangelical, sacramental, scientific, and world-affirming.

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ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING OUT: A PERSONAL AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE.

Chuck Huff

Several years ago, sitting after dinner on the front porch, my friend DeAne Lagerquist suggested to me that I was likely a Lutheran at heart. I took this remark from such a staunch and storied Lutheran to be a compliment, but felt it as unlikely as my taking up buttered lutefisk instead of buttered grits; cold aquavit instead of warm bourbon. But research on couples suggests that they come to resemble each other more, in both opinion and physical appearance, the longer they live together. I may now have lived long enough among Lutherans to understand why DeAne made her comment, and having now heard Professor Bouman's comments on the Lutheran tradition, may even have some words to put to this foreboding.

In my comments here, I would like to make some personal responses to Professor Bouman's themes of Lutheran tradition, and to offer at least one social psychological comment on his observations. The personal comments are more in line with a conversation that might occur between a theologian and a beginning student -- I bring no special expertise to them, and am aware of Professor Bouman's immense reputation. The social psychological comments are more about who should participate in the conversation that currently defines the tradition on Lutheran college campuses.

A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO THE THEMES:

I am a Metho-Bap-terian, raised in the Southern United

States. Of the three traditions, Baptist is likely the most evident in my foundational beliefs (or at least in those I now react against). This is partly because Baptists are certain to be clear about what they believe (or at least about what you should believe) and partly because the place I picked up my Baptist schooling is Bob Jones University, an oddly apolitical but staunchly conservative institution. After steeping in fundamentalism for some time, I began inexplicably to think. This led to disastrous consequences for my youthful faith, along the lines of Kant's critique, outlined by Bouman.

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I appreciate honesty in people, and coming from the South, am still surprised when I find it in religious scholars.

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My main reason for remaining with the Christian faith has been my conviction that there is a "mysterium" both "tremendum" and "fascinans," and that Christianity is as fine a tradition as many within which to explore it. It has been around long enough so that we have markers for many of the most egregious mistakes (crusades, inquisitions, etc.) and are not likely blithely to believe we are immune from repeating them. Some of Bouman's themes begin to convince me there may be a more stable reason for my choice than the existential and pragmatic one I have made.