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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.

First, I was pleasantly surprised to hear Professor Bouman say baldly what I had often surreptitiously thought, that biblical inerrancy is a non-biblical doctrine. I appreciate honesty in people, and coming from the South, am still surprised when I find it in religious scholars. I was also pleased with his description of the current tension in the discussion of the authority of scripture; that scripture gives us unique access to the gospel, but only the gospel gives real authority to scripture. This preference for a dynamic story rather than a static idolatry (or even bibliolatry) seems to run through many of the themes Bouman explicates. To search for the gospel within the scripture is a fine way of bringing to life what in my youth was a rule book rather than a storybook.

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This distinction between gospel and scripture has the advantage of giving people on both sides of the debate about homosexuality something to say. We can surely say (like Paul in Romans over the eating of meat) that people on both sides of this difficult debate have at least some good intentions. The more usual conclusion relies on conspiracy theories to understand the disagreement. The standard conspiracy theory runs thusly: The plain truth of the scripture (or the gospel) is self-evidently true to me, and anyone who cannot see it the way I do must not be able to see well. Why would they persist in their blindness? Perhaps it is because they are ensnared in a conspiracy to destroy [insert beloved thing here]. The trick is to believe your perceptions are the true ones, and that the other's claimed perceptions are really cover for moral inadequacy. If we found we were both claiming a good, we might be able to have a calmer (though no less difficult) discussion.

I have always been most uncomfortable in those parts of Christian services where we are required to read millennium old committee documents about what it is we believe. On these occasions, having swallowed a resurrection, it seems no large thing to add a virgin birth or two or even a logical impossibility before breakfast. The gospel as a story comes up again as a central issue in Bouman's claim for the Lutheran tradition in dealing with these uncomfortable creeds. As in the scripture, it is the gospel in the creeds we should care about. With one roundhouse conceptual swing (it is about who can make promises unconditioned by death) Bouman helps me to scale off the

Hellenistic accouterments that have puzzled me for decades. It now seems less about exactly what I believe, but rather who I believe in. Whether there is some third (or fourth) way to solving the conundrums in the creeds (e.g. through process or feminist approaches) I don't know. Perhaps another conference will tell us.

Its also nice to see from Professor Bouman's pen that the "evangelical" that first scared me about ELCA is not the evangelical with which I became acquainted in the South. Bouman even makes a fine case that our present day difficulty of finding meaning can be constructed in the same terms as Luther's concerns about finding grace. Both salvation and meaning are, in Bouman's version of Lutheran theology, about death not having the last word. And if death is not the final word, I may have "more to do with my life than preserve and protect it." This makes the gospel relevant to the way I live my life, to the meaning in my life, rather than the simple insurance policy I took out at the altar many years ago.

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The sacramental part of the Lutheran tradition is the one I have the most trouble with. This may be partly because as a Baptist from the South, I enjoy shocking Lutherans at the dinner table by talking about the three times I have been baptized. Each was a different aesthetic experience, though I only remember two, having been cast as an infant in the first experience. Bouman admits his explanation is short and telegraphic. But the Jewish storytelling tradition seems again central in his interpretation of the Lutheran understanding. Having Jesus come "from the future" fits the story-telling tradition well, but I am still left with a question about whether this approach is magic or meaning-making (do we mean really from the future or from the end of the story?).

A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE

The tradition that Professor Bouman gives us is constructed out of the historic conversation, arguments, discussions, and even schisms within the Lutheran church. I, for one, feel enlightened to have heard it, and feel he has done admirably in summarizing a complex subject in a paper short enough

for an empiricist social scientist to read. I am still left wondering about how the conversation he has described relates to the ones I have with my colleagues on a Lutheran college campus everyday.

In many churches, tradition is treated as a reason for doing something. Bouman treats tradition as a continuing conversation about what we ought to do. MacIntyre's description of tradition that Bouman quotes is twofold; it is a historically extended and socially embodied conversation. Bouman gives us much of one and a little of the other. Professor Bouman prefers to avoid demographics as defining characteristics of the tradition. But if the tradition is a continuing one those demographics must be important to understand.

How is the conversation currently socially embodied? Which conversation are we talking about? I presume (and Bouman hints) we are talking about the conversation on college campuses of the Lutheran church. Here, it does matter who is included in the conversation and who is not. The demographics do matter.

A colleague of mine and I thought a year ago to do a study of the social networks on our campus. We were encouraged in this by people who felt that the less religious among our faculty felt like "outsiders," like they were not included in the conversation on campus about what the college was "about." Preliminary interviews led us to a surprising conclusion: everyone felt "outside" in some way. Those who were highly religious, who came from the most storied Lutheran and Norwegian families, felt outside, felt there

weren't very many of "them" left, felt isolated. They suspected the secular turks (or the cold hearted administrators) had taken over. More secular (or at least non-Lutheran) faculty, seemed to think there was an inner cabal of Norwegian Lutherans who ran things and who were loath to explain the rules. Everyone felt outside, feminists, fundamentalists, Lutherans, non-Lutherans, all; no one felt comfortable. This odd pattern stumped us, and led us to discontinue plans for the interviews.

With this isolated morsel of data to motivate a point, let me suggest that the problem of getting the tradition to continue is precisely the problem of getting the conversation to continue. And the conversation has to continue among those who will show up for it. We cannot compel them into it (despite the dinner parable), nor can we simply hope that nice folks will come to dinner. We ought to offer, in the way I think Professor Bouman has, some fine food for thought. We should also invite other people to bring their favorite foods with them to contribute. If we all think we are outsiders, there is no sense having a conversation.

The problem then involves constructing the current conversation in a way that is thoughtful, fair, inclusive, charitable, focussed, and still true to the tradition. To do this will require more than a good grasp of the historical roots of the tradition (though it will certainly require that).

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