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A Response to Paul Santmire

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Santmire argues that the two kingdoms is admirable for the theology of God's grace, but it "leaves much to be desired as an affirmation and defense of the theology of God's justice." Again, I contend it is not the two kingdoms doctrine as such that is to be faulted, but its abuse and misappropriation. For a very insightful discussion of the evolution of Luther's views on law and justice, I suggest F. Edward Cranz, *An Essay on the Development of Luther's Thought on Justice, Law, and Society*, vol. XIX of the Harvard Theological Series, issued as an extra number of the Harvard Theological Review (1964).

It is ironic that Santmire brings up South Africa. The South African Council of Churches used the two kingdoms (correctly interpreted) in its fight against apartheid. I had discussed this very thing with Wolfram Kistner when he was head of the Theological Division of the Council. And Eberhard Bethge had lectured in South Africa on the two kingdoms, seeing it as a theological tool in the struggle.

It is a real stretch to link the two kingdoms doctrine with the alleged non-concern of church leaders for the "groaning of the earth and its masses in this era of global environmental

crisis." I doubt if church leaders know much, or care much, about the two kingdoms. The issue of whether or not to "hold hands with the Episcopalians," it seems to me, has been driven by church politics rather than by theology. If theology were the issue, the agreement with the Presbyterians, the Reformed Church and the UCC would not so easily have glided through the ELCA Assembly in August.

Fundamental issues of social justice are being obscured in our time by many "circles" besides Lutherans. How do we know that "toxic waste dumps. . ." do not "appear" to be a matter of concern for "many" Lutherans today? Who are these "many Lutheran circles"? This is simply too general and too emotive to be taken seriously.

If we are to look for skeletons in our closet, let us search for real bones, not plastic ones. As far as I am concerned, the skeletons are not so much Luther as a departure from Luther. As Bill Lazareth has written, "There is nothing so sick about Lutheran ethics that a strong dose of Luther cannot cure it."

A RESPONSE TO PAUL SANTMIRE

Don Braxton

When asked if Lutheran theology and ethics has anything distinctive about it, my usual response - general but accurate - is that Lutheran thinking is above all else governed by a dialectical vision. Reaching back to Paul and Augustine, Luther's thought is thoroughly dialectical. Polarities such as Law and Gospel, Two Kingdoms, and Freedom and Bondage, are the driving dynamic force behind Luther's powerful Reformation theology. Paul Santmire's address to Capital University delivered on November 14, 1997, clearly embodies that tradition both in form and in content. Because they seem so well rooted in the normative traditions of our Lutheran liberal arts heritage, his suggestions offer the prospect of authentic guidance for the Lutheran college serious about its past - and its future.

Santmire's vision for the Lutheran liberal arts college in an environmental age is clearly dialectical. Formally, Santmire articulates three mandates, each of which is expounded in

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terms of its strengths and weaknesses, or as Santmire puts it, "skeletons in our closets and riches in our own vaults." This formal mode of presentation seems to me very important, for it articulates a basic insight of Lutheran thought on institutional structures. Namely, those strengths which enable an institution to thrive can often lead to the same institutions' decay, either through complacency and even hubris, or through blindness. While Lutheran liberal arts colleges need to draw upon their historical strengths, yet they also need to evolve as institutions to respond to the prospects and dangers of a dynamic world. In effect, they need to identify their social functions historically and serve those same functions today, yet do so under quite different societal conditions. In other words, they must do things differently in order to continue to do what they have always done.

On the content level, Santmire identifies three themes. The first theme is responsibility for spiritual particularity. Addressing a theme Santmire is uniquely qualified to assess, he calls for an honest owning up to the *ambiguity* of the Christian tradition toward the environment. Clearly, there

are skeletons in the closet of the Christian tradition on this account. But there are also profound resources both historically and in the prolific, contemporary field of ecotheology and ethics. Likewise I think Santmire is on target when he warns against a premature flight to alternative religious traditions because of a putative greater sensitivity to the environment. I would point out that the historical record of the actual behaviors of these traditions is rarely critically assessed. At the very least, it must be emphasized that theoretical environmental sensitivity in either the Christian or the non-Christian traditions is no guarantee of ecologically responsible behavior in practice.

The theme of ambiguity is carried over to comments on the distinctively Lutheran tradition of Two Kingdoms. Here again, I think Santmire is fundamentally on target. Yet while he is quite specific about the deficits of typical Lutheran social ethics, he is strangely mute on what the strengths might be. At issue, I think, is whether one views Luther's ethics as dualistic or dialectical. On the one hand, classical Lutheran ethics has been, and often still can be, very quietistic. On matters of social justice, Lutherans often regard the church as unqualified to enter into worldly political and social struggles. At the very most, it has sought to convert the individual conscience for higher standards of behavior in their secular offices. In this day and age, where we recognize the power of social structures to shape and mold character and individual behavior, such a stance is clearly inadequate. But, on the other hand, Lutheran ethics at its best is dialectical, recognizing the interpenetration of church and world, Law and Gospel, eschatological Kingdom and present day realities. History, as in St. Augustine, for example, can be regarded as salvation history, as the dynamic struggle for the birthing forth in bits and pieces of a redeemed world. While Lutherans will always be clear that the world is not the Kingdom of God - the Lutheran emphasis on sin will preclude that - yet they may also look for and cooperate with the signs of the in-breaking of God's glorious New Age, the New Heavens and the New Earth. Such a vision was clearly at the root of the Lutheran Hegel, or the Lutheran theologian Ritschl. Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr certainly fit in this camp, as does the contemporary Lutheran ecotheologian Larry Rasmussen. At its best, the dialectical patterns of Lutheran social ethics grants us a sensitivity - hopeful yet realistic - to the relative approximations of ecological and social justice possible in our various historical moments. It seems to me that Santmire could have done more to point out these qualities.

The other two mandates of responsible social criticism and

the promotion of a responsible environmental ethos can be taken together. Clearly, the objective of the liberal arts tradition is to promote liberal thinkers, liberal in the classical sense of liberated from excessive parochialism. The question only remains, to what extent are Lutheran liberal arts colleges still doing this. Two remarks: First, my experience of many Lutheran colleges and universities is that their liberal arts dimensions have been progressively on the retreat in favor of more marketable vocational training in the areas of business, education, computer science, and the like. It is a matter of considerable debate as to what degree our graduates have managed to imbibe some of the liberal arts ethos, even as they have concentrated on their vocational choices. At least, that is often the rationale one hears for this institutional drift. Second, a brief glance at the promotional materials of our Lutheran colleges and universities will raise doubts as to whether Lutheran higher education promises to lead students deeper into the complexities of modern, urban life, as Santmire calls for. Indeed, I often have the impression that students and their families select private liberal arts colleges because they promise a safe and sheltered learning experience, not one of exposure. Are the products of such educational experiences prepared to enter our complex and wounded world equipped with the critical resources of a liberally educated individual?

Finally, in my opinion, if there is an issue toward which contemporary liberal arts education ought to gravitate, it is environmental responsibility and responsible social criticism of ecologically unsustainable practices. Here, I believe Santmire places his finger on exactly the three dimensions of institutional reform required of contemporary institutions, namely, curricular reform, a pedagogy directed toward creative social imagination, and the practices of reverence and respect before life and its mysteries. Because ecology is the science sine qua non of interrelationships, it constitutes the best available option for a capstone integration experience. Debates have been circulating on the inclusion of an environmental studies component in our core curriculum here at Capital, yet without much success to date. As the world, its populations, civilizations, and ecosystems become increasingly interdependent, I believe that some form of environmental studies component in every educational experience will be an inevitability. A step in that direction would be in keeping with the creative, liberal thinking of our heritage, a sign that our imaginations are already reaching into the future, anticipating an age of greater ecological sanity. Until that time, liberal arts colleges can practice creative workshops known as "liturgies" where a new reality is pronounced, attended to, and dramatized into reality. Worship is a form of resistance

to the compulsions of instrumentalism and the false necessities in our age. Worship creates a space in which human potential can be unleashed, where creative imagination can be exercised, and where a fortitude of will can be developed to enter the world, in Santmire's phrase, daring to be "irrelevant" to its insanity and thereby offering an alternative that may promise a brighter future.

Liberal arts colleges have a tough road ahead. In the face of all these suggestions, many administrators and professors will be quick to point out that competition is stiff and that institutions must strike compromises. Could an institution like Capital really survive if it sought to embody what has been outlined in Santmire's article and my response?

Indeed, in my own dialectical view, with its bent toward

realism, I am willing to go some distance in this conversation. And yet, realism cuts two ways. Is it realistic to believe that we can continue to function in a business-as-usual mode in the face of looming ecocrisis? Is it realistic to believe that liberal arts colleges can shove their liberal arts orientations to the periphery and still be liberal arts colleges with something distinctive to offer the educational world? Is it realistic to believe that we can equip students for responsible citizenship by training them to be articulate members of a global economy whose vision of a good society is an acre of suburban bliss, plenty of horsepower in the driveway, and recreational trips to Martha's Vineyard, Mt. Rushmore, or Club Med? So will the real realism please stand up? Where do you stand?

REVIEW

Buford, Thomas O.
In Search of a Calling: The College's Role in Shaping Identity.
Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995
Karla G. Bohmbach

The term "calling" has long been a favorite among Lutheran educators. And though its precise meaning invites debate - - indeed, perhaps partly because of that very fact - - it continues to be utilized even today in efforts to formulate and refine what it means to be a Lutheran college or university. In such ongoing efforts Thomas O. Buford's In Search of a Calling: The College's Role in Shaping Identity would seem to be a promising participant, not least because it makes use of the term "calling" in its title. What, more precisely, does this book offer towards our thinking about tasks, challenges, and promises facing Lutheran colleges and universities as they move into the twenty-first century?

Like others who have also been writing about higher education (e.g., Mark Schwehn, Page Smith, Bruce Wilshire), the author asserts that colleges and universities are in trouble. What sets Buford's work apart, though, is both his perspective as a philosopher and his assessment that the fundamental cause of this trouble is a crisis of meaning among students.

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One of the first tasks Buford sets for himself is determining the causes of this meaning-crisis; his strategy is to examine discussion. In the process, Buford also more specifically identifies and explicates what he sees as two aspects of the historical background in, through and against which American higher education has developed. Here the concept of "calling" is central, giving shape and focus to the calling. One involves the spiritual, religious, or moral identity of a person (all three terms are variously used). It refers, fundamentally, to that which God has ordained one to do; its roots are in the Hebrew Bible; and it is strongly communitarian. The second has to do with the so-called practical identity of a person. This aspect is much more individualistic; its roots are in the Renaissance; and it centers on the humanists' assertion that individuals have the right and ability to determine their own lives, to discern their particular gifts, talents, and interests and then choose a life and career based on them.

For Buford, both aspects of calling are necessary in order to achieve full personhood. The crisis facing students is that these two are deemed irreconcilable and so have been largely split asunder by the educational system. Moreover, the