

2017

Full issue, Number 45, Spring 2017

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



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

(2017) "Full issue, Number 45, Spring 2017," *Intersections*: Vol. 2017 : No. 45 , Article 1.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2017/iss45/1>

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

SPRING 2017

Intersections

Faith, Learning, and the Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education



IN THIS ISSUE

Education in the Age of Trump

Intersections is a publication by and largely for the academic communities of the twenty-six colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Each issue reflects on the **intersection** of faith, learning, and teaching within Lutheran higher education. It is published by the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, and has its home at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, the institutional sponsor of the publication. **Intersections** extends and enhances discussions fostered by the annual Vocation of the Lutheran College Conference, together lifting up the vocation of Lutheran colleges and universities. It aims to raise the level of awareness among faculty, staff, and administration about the Lutheran heritage and church-relatedness of their institutions, especially as these **intersect** with contemporary challenges, opportunities, and initiatives.

About the Cover and Artist

Cam Best

a pleasure to burn

Book pages, wax, glue, acrylic, paper on stretched canvas

(previously featured in SAGA, Augustana College's art and literary magazine, vol. 80, 2016-17)

Cam Best is a 2017 English and Art Education graduate from Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. Best has begun to explore the overlap between art and literature by creating visual artwork to represent works of literature, including Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. The background of the collage, *a pleasure to burn*, was made from the torn out and burnt pages of *Fahrenheit 451*, and only the flimsy book frame remains intact. As *Fahrenheit 451* is one of her favorite texts, Best feels that Bradbury would have appreciated the destruction of his text during the present moment where unlawful censorship is on the rise in the United States. To quote the author, "There are worse crimes than burning books. One of them is not reading them."

Intersections

Number 45 Spring 2017

Mark Wilhelm Publisher
Jason A. Mahn Editor
Michele Hill Editorial Assistant
Angie Williams Secretary
Leanne Paetz Graphic Designer

PUBLISHED BY

The Network of ELCA Colleges
and Universities

INTERSECTIONS ONLINE

[http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/
intersections/](http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/)

PUBLISHED AT

Augustana College
639 38th Street
Rock Island, Illinois USA 61204-2296

EDITORIAL BOARD

Jacqueline Bussie Concordia College
Lynn Hunnicutt Pacific Lutheran
University
Darrell Jodock Gustavus Adolphus
College
Tom Morgan Augsburg College
Kathi Tunheim Gustavus Adolphus
College
Ernie Worman Newberry College

Contents

- 4 From the Publisher
Mark Wilhelm
- 5 From the Editor
Jason A. Mahn
- 6 Higher Education in the Age of Trump
Daniel B. Braaten
- 12 Resistance in the Age of Trump:
An Interview with Ivonne Wallace Fuentes
M. Ivonne Wallace Fuentes | Jason Mahn
- 16 Religion in the Age of Trump
Daniel A. Morris
- 21 Room at the Table: Reflections on Identity and
Inclusion from a Lutheran-Friendly Muslim
Rose Aslan
- 29 Jonah: The Anti-Hero of Vocation
Martha E. Stortz
- 32 Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road?
A Homily on Liminality and Vocation
Lori Brandt Hale
- 35 Poetry: After Months of Clouds, the Sun;
First Bird
Farah Marklevits

From the Publisher



Since the founding of the ELCA in the late 1980s, the colleges and universities related to this church have changed their self-definition of Lutheran higher education. ELCA colleges and universities have shifted the definition of Lutheran higher education away from adherence to

institutional markers, such as the percentage of Lutherans on the faculty or in the student body, to an alignment with educational values derived from the Lutheran intellectual tradition. *Intersections* has recorded the development of this re-definition, as well as the arguments for it and the debates about it, since the journal's beginning.

The re-definition of Lutheran higher education began before the 1980s, and a full embrace of the new definition does not yet exist. The institutional-marker definition of Lutheran higher education remains dominant in the ELCA and among many non-Lutherans involved in ELCA higher education. Nonetheless, ELCA college and university leaders have widely accepted the new definition. Recent discussions among college and university presidents have focused on deepening their understanding the new definition and the public articulation of it.

The new collegiate association for ELCA higher education, the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU), is working to assist the presidents with these tasks. NECU convened religion and theology faculty from eight ELCA schools, inviting them to prepare recommendations for

summarizing Lutheran higher education defined by values drawn from the Lutheran intellectual tradition. Their suggestions will be presented to the presidents who will gather in Chicago for a conference on Lutheran identity in June 2017.

The breadth of research into the Lutheran roots of higher education has unearthed a wealth of insights. Faculty specialists in religion and theology can navigate the historical, theological, ethical, and pedagogical complexities of the research. (You can find their discussions in back issues of *Intersections* at <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections>.) They can readily describe the values for higher education rediscovered by this research, how these values do and should continue to drive ELCA higher education, and how an alignment with these educational values strengthens the Lutheran identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities far more than a focus on numbers of students, faculty, and administrators who are personally Lutheran. Furthermore, they can articulate how alignment with these values has allowed ELCA colleges and universities to embrace diverse constituencies while continuing to enroll and educate leaders for the Lutheran community.

This work, however, is daunting for non-specialists in religion and theology, including most ELCA college and university presidents. The June conference is designed to fill the gap. My hope is that the presidents will find the faculty working group's recommendations a wise, shared framework for articulating our common Lutheran identity—both within our schools and to all our external constituencies.

Mark Wilhelm is the Executive Director of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities.

From the Editor

It has been a difficult academic year. (I say this not as an explanation—or excuse—for why this Spring issue of *Intersections* may be arriving to your faculty mailbox after Spring term has ended.) This year has been uniquely difficult for many of us, and difficult for unique reasons. Some of those reasons are meant to be captured by the title of this issue: “Education in the Age of Trump.”

It was about a month before Tuesday, November 8, 2016, when I fully realized that my work with students and colleagues was different this year. Augustana had had what we refer to as the “chalking” incident. College Republican students had written a number of comments on campus sidewalks one night, including: “Build that Wall,” “Make Augustana Great Again,” “The West is the Best,” and Milo Yiannopoulos’s tagline, “Feminism is Cancer.” A debate between the right to free speech and the devastation of hate speech (as many international students, students of color, and others interpreted the chalkings) quickly ensued.

A week later, I joined a student rally and protest that was organized by Latinx Unidos, including by a senior student leader who attends the same local Lutheran church as me. It was moving to hear students of color speak about their place (and sometimes their perceived *lack* of place) on our campus, and a bit surreal to join them in chanting “Who’s home is it?” while passing alumni during homecoming weekend. Later, I volunteered to host one of the open conversations for students returning to campus for Winter trimester just days after Trump had been elected to office. The other faculty and administrators

and I prepared ourselves to listen closely to the fears of many marginalized students, including international, minority, and DACA students. We ended up also listening closely to students who claimed that they could not be publicly “out” as Trump-supporters for fear of being demonized as racists, sexist, or xenophobic.

The academic year continued apace, with many of us trying desperately to figure out whether and how to talk about divisive issues in the classroom, whether and how to support marginalized students without marginalizing others, and whether and how to engage in grassroots political action while carrying on with our teaching and research. These challenges have not gone away—at least not for me. They were with us before November 8, and yet feel far more acute today.

The essays to follow carefully (re)imagine the vocation of Lutheran higher education during our anxious political climate. Some were written before Trump’s presidency; others were written after and about it. Each of them offers invaluable information—and even guidance—for our collective calling to educate for vocation, to search for truth in an era of “alternative facts,” and to remain realistically hopeful and broad-minded among widespread cynicism and despair.



Jason Mahn is Chair and Associate Professor of Religion at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, and Director of Augustana’s new Presidential Center for Faith and Learning.

DANIEL B. BRAATEN

Higher Education in the Age of Trump



In the 2016 Presidential campaign, the issue of sky-high tuition at American colleges and universities, and the severe debt loads students take on to attend those schools, became a front and center issue. Candidates offered major proposals for dealing with these issues and

had vigorous debates about how to best implement and fund these plans. The interesting thing is that this debate only took place on one side of the aisle. The two main rivals for the Democratic Party's Presidential nomination—Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton—offered different means to roughly the same vision, which was some form of free higher education for most Americans. Either of these policies promised to dramatically alter the state of higher education in the United States.

The Bernie Sanders plan would have made public colleges and universities tuition free, and the main mechanism for financing this policy was a Wall Street transaction tax which was estimated to bring in \$75 billion per year (Sanders). Hillary Clinton's plan, although not quite as extensive as the Sanders plan, also offered free tuition at public colleges and universities but only for families that with an income below \$125,000. Clinton's plan also came with a host of additional requirements such as requiring students to work 10 hours per week at work-study jobs (Clinton). For both candidates, these

plans were a significant part of their overall campaign proposal portfolio. This was not the case on the Republican side.

Education after the Election

The question of student debt and the cost of higher education was not a prominent issue in the Republican primary. The eventual Republican nominee, Donald Trump, had very little to say about higher education during the general election campaign even after Hillary Clinton outlined her higher education affordability plan. Because of the asymmetry in the plans for higher education between the candidates from the two major political parties, the 2016 Presidential election offered a consequential choice for the future of higher education in the United States. Now that the election is over, and proposals for free tuition are unlikely to surface at the federal level again for a few years, what can we expect for higher education from the new administration? It should be said that late in the campaign Donald Trump, during a stop in Ohio, spent a few minutes discussing higher education. In a short six minutes, candidate Trump mentioned high repayment rates on student loans and administrative bloat at universities, criticized universities for not spending more of their endowments, and voiced concerns about free speech on college campuses as elements of higher education his administration would take on if he were elected (Jaschik, "Trump").

Since President Trump's election, his administration has not taken up any of the issues he mentioned in his brief

Daniel B. Braaten is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Lutheran University in Sequin, Texas. His main research interests are in United States foreign policy and human rights.

statement. Since his election, the only specific movement President Trump has made on higher education has been his selection of Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education. Mrs. DeVos was one of President Trump's most controversial cabinet selections out of a host of controversial cabinet selections. The controversies surrounding Secretary DeVos's nomination stemmed from her lack of experience and her strong support for voucher programs for K-12 public education. Her views on higher education are less well known, but shortly after her confirmation she gave a speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) indicating she will take a critical stance towards institutions of higher education. To the CPAC audience she stated that "the faculty, from adjunct professors to deans, tell you what to do, what to say, and more ominously, what to think. They say that if you voted for Donald Trump, you're a threat to the university community. But the real threat is silencing the First Amendment rights of people with whom you disagree" (Jaschik, "DeVos"). The selection of a Secretary of Education is the only specific thing President Trump has done at the time of this writing with regards to public education.

However, shortly after the election, Jerry Falwell Jr, President of Liberty University and son of the right wing evangelical leader Jerry Falwell, said the Trump administration had asked him to head a task force on higher education. The purported purpose of this task force is

"Now that the election is over, and proposals for free tuition are unlikely to surface at the federal level again for a few years, what can we expect for higher education from the new administration?"

to look at "overreaching regulations" coming from the Department of Education towards colleges and universities (Blumenstyk). At the time of this writing, the White House has not confirmed or denied that any such task force has been organized or that Mr. Falwell will lead it. There has been speculation that President Trump and Mr. Falwell have a mutual interest in rolling back some Obama-era regulations, specifically ones that strengthened standards

for accrediting agencies which allow universities access to federal financial aid, and regulations which allows students who have been cheated by for-profit colleges to get their student loans forgiven. Liberty University enrolls over 65,000 students in online only courses (with approximately 14,000 residential students), and was the recipient of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal financial aid last year (Carey). Liberty University operates the second largest online university (only behind the University of Phoenix), so one can easily see how that institution is concerned about regulations that may shut off student financial aid and also empower students to greater recompense from the student loan burden in which they incurred from such institutions. Of course, this is also of interest to President Trump as the Trump Organization operated the now defunct for-profit institution, Trump University, for which the organization recently settled a \$25 million dollar lawsuit from former students claiming fraud.

Perhaps the main focus for the future of higher education at the federal level is the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The Higher Education Act governs the administration of all the student loan and grant programs in the United States among a host of other issues. Congress has been trying to reauthorize the Act since 2013. Now with unified Republican governance, there might be some movement on the Act. Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, the chair of the Education Committee, has some ideas for the reauthorization. His focus has been on scaling back regulations and streamlining the financial aid process. Senator Patty Murray of Washington, the ranking Democrat on the Education Committee, stated that her goals for the reauthorization were in "reducing college costs and the burden of student debt" (Stratford). After the expiration of the last reauthorization in 2013, bipartisan working groups were formed to see what common ground could be found for the next reauthorization. However, the political obstacles for a quick passage of the Higher Education Act are formidable; one should not expect a lot of quick movement on that legislation. Major legislation, such as this, usually requires some signaling from the administration along with some policy direction so that Congressional majorities can anticipate whether the administration will be receptive to the legislation. Since the Trump administration has not yet

put a priority on higher education, no such signal or policy directive has been forthcoming, nor does one appear on the horizon anytime soon. This is especially the case with the Trump administration and the Republican leadership in Congress currently prioritizing big fights over tax reform and health care, which will consume much of the legislative agenda. This is not to mention many of the scandals emerging from the early days of the White House over the Trump campaign's ties to Russia and ongoing concerns over the President's conflicts of interest from his failure to adequately disengage himself from his business dealings.

International Students, Immigrant Students, and Trump's Executive Orders

The most consequential move for higher education taken by the new administration was an action that was not taken towards higher education directly. It has nevertheless already had a significant impact on colleges and universities in the United States and portends even more. That of course was the Trump administration's travel ban instituted by Executive Order (EO) in late January, 2017. The EO, titled "Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States," suspended the United States' refugee admissions program for 120 days, placed an indefinite ban on refugees coming from Syria, and suspended visas for 90 days for anyone coming to the United States from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen—seven predominately Muslim countries. The EO had the immediate impact of preventing people en route to the United States with valid visas and green cards from entering the United States. This also included many undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. The Association of American Universities issued an announcement stating that the organization was filing an amicus curiae brief to a lawsuit against the Executive Order, stating that "its 60 U.S. universities may have as many as 10,000 students and faculty from the seven affected countries" (AAU).

Colleges and universities in the United States seemed universally against the travel ban. This was not because of the immediate impact they felt as their students and faculty were denied entry into the United States, but also because of the underlying values that the travel ban represented. The political scientist Mark Lynch compiled a list of statements

from college and university leaders representing 264 separate institutions about the travel ban from across the United States. He found that not one statement was issued in favor of the ban and many statements emphasized that the ban struck directly at the global and open exchange of values and ideas that are at the core of the higher education mission in the United States (Lynch). Colleges and universities across the United States are not only concerned about the immediate impact the travel ban will have for their students and faculty, but are also worried about the long term consequences—such as creating a chilling effect for students contemplating studying in the United States, as well as undermining important values on which institutions of higher learning pride themselves.

"The ban struck directly at the global and open exchange of values and ideas that are at the core of the higher education mission in the United States."

Along with the President's Executive Order mentioned above he also issued a second Executive Order on immigration, "Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States," which allows for a much broader priority system for deportation than under the Obama administration. Under the Obama administration, undocumented immigrants who were convicted of crimes were considered a deportation priority; under the new EO issued by President Trump that priority list has expanded to seven additional categories including: if someone has been charged with a crime, has been misleading in connection with any official matter before a government agency, has misused a public benefit or program, or who otherwise poses "a safety risk" in the judgment of an immigration officer (Alvarez).

These categories obviously increase the chance of deportation for many undocumented immigrants, including students at colleges and universities and their families. These categories are so broad that they might also put so-called "DREAMers" in danger of deportation. DREAMers refers to a category of undocumented immigrants who qualified under the Obama administration's

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allows them a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation, and eligibility for a work permit. To be eligible, an individual would have to be under the age of 30, have entered the United States before the age of 16, and have been in the country continuously for 5 years. He or she also could not have a criminal record, and currently must be enrolled in school, graduated from high school, have gotten their GED, or have served in the military. The DREAMers label comes from the legislation the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act that so far has failed to pass Congress but includes many of the same people eligible for DACA. Many colleges and universities around the country enroll in DREAMers. A possibility of a crackdown on their status could mean a serious disruption for these schools, not to mention the upheaval in the lives of the students who would be deported. President Trump has stated that DREAMers “shouldn’t be very worried,” but the detention of two DREAMers in Seattle and Mississippi have not served to assuage those fears (Levin).

Sanctuary Campuses

The possibility that students at universities and colleges across the country, including at many Lutheran colleges and universities, may be deported requires colleges and universities in the United States to consider the extent they are willing to go to comply with these laws. The concept of the sanctuary campus has been garnering attention since the election of Donald Trump. Sanctuary cities are perhaps more common than sanctuary universities, but the concept is much the same. Although the law does not define the term sanctuary city, its most narrow definition is a city (or country) in which the police will not hold people for 48 hours after their release at the behest of a detainer request by Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) (Cameron). More broadly, the term is associated with the political orientation of a more open and welcoming view towards immigrants, both documented and undocumented. A sanctuary city, therefore, is a place that has taken some steps (even if it means just not complying with an ICE detainer request) to protect (at least some) undocumented immigrants from deportation.

What would it mean then for a college or university to become a “sanctuary campus”? Essentially, it would mean that the school would institute policies to protect undocumented students from deportation (Funke). There are a variety of policies that schools can institute which would minimize their collaboration with ICE. For example, the president of the University of Pennsylvania has stated that it is the university’s policy to not allow ICE, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), or United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) onto campus without a warrant, and they will not voluntarily share any information about undocumented students “unless presented with valid legal process” (Heilweil). Other institutions, such as Wesleyan and Colombia, have instituted similar policies. In essence, what these schools—and others that have similarly designated themselves “sanctuary campuses”—have claimed is that they will not voluntarily comply with any orders that make them complicit in the deportation of any of their students. In addition to these pronouncements, a sanctuary campus may also consider additional things it can do to protect their undocumented students.

“What would it mean for a college or university to become a ‘sanctuary campus’?”

Perhaps the most important thing they can do for their students is exactly what they are good at—providing information and education. Colleges and universities in the United States can offer their undocumented students, and students who have friends and family who are undocumented, information on the protections that are afforded them by law, as well as information on paths to citizenship. They should also offer access to legal services, or utilize the legal services at their disposal, to help those students who may be facing deportation or have family members who may be deported.

Out of all the issues discussed in this essay, perhaps the most immediate and important concern for colleges and universities is to ask themselves what they are willing to do for their undocumented students and what obligations they have to them. In the current political climate it may be tempting for institutions of higher education to shirk the

responsibilities they have toward their students. President Trump's Executive Order that expanded the categories of people prioritized for deportation also stated that cities and counties that failed to cooperate with immigration enforcement could face penalties from the federal government in the form of withheld funds. In states like Texas, the governor has taken extreme measures towards punishing so-called sanctuary cities. He has also threatened to cut off funding for public colleges that don't adhere to immigration law (Reigstad). (How the governor can do this without the consent of the legislature is unclear.) One should not underestimate the desire by the conservative leadership in many states and the president to enforce these very strict immigration policies, but colleges and universities must also remember their obligation to their students to provide a safe and welcoming learning environment.

There is a special role in the sanctuary campus debate for Lutheran colleges. In the determination as to whether to make their campus a "sanctuary campus" (whether explicitly by that name or not), ELCA colleges and universities should look to the church's social mission on immigration. The message provides a tremendous amount of wisdom for ELCA colleges and universities to use as a guide. Of particular importance to the current issue of deportation of the undocumented is the following quotation:

Newcomers without legal documents also are among the most vulnerable. Congregations are called to welcome all people, regardless of their legal status. Persons who once were or now are without documents are members of our congregations, and we want them to feel and know that in the Church they are part of a safe and caring community. We encourage bishops and synods to show their support for congregations composed of or working with immigrants—who may or may not have documents. (ELCA 4-5)

This message makes it clear that Lutheran colleges and universities have an obligation to protect their most vulnerable students. This obligation goes beyond their obligations as educators, but is at the core of their identity as Lutheran institutions.

Works Cited:

- AAU. "AAU Files Brief in Travel Ban Case Detailing Impact of Travel Ban on Universities, Student, Faculty." *American Association of Universities*. February 16, 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.aau.edu/news/article.aspx?id=18402>
- Alvarez, Priscilla. "How Trump is Changing Immigration Enforcement." *The Atlantic*. February 3, 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/trump-executive-order-immigration/515454/>
- Blumenstyk, Goldie. "Jerry Falwell Jr. Says He Will Lead Federal Task Force on Higher-Ed Policy." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. January 31, 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Jerry-Falwell-Jr-Says-He-Will/239062>
- Cameron, Darla. "How sanctuary cities work, and how Trump's executive order might affect them." *The Washington Post*. January 25, 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/sanctuary-cities/>
- Carey, Kevin. "With Falwell as Education Advisor, His Own University Could Benefit." *The New York Times*. February 1, 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://nyti.ms/2jZjC8V>
- Clinton, Hillary. "Making college debt-free and taking on student debt." hillaryclinton.com 2016. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/college/>
- ELCA. "A Message on Immigration." Church Council of the ELCA. 1998: 1-11.
- Funke, Daniel. "Here's where the sanctuary campus movement stands." *USA Today College*. December 19, 2016. Accessed 1 May 2017, college.usatoday.com/2016/12/19/heres-where-the-sanctuary-campus-movement-stands/
- Heilweil, Rebecca. "Penn, Trump's alma mater, becomes sanctuary campus for undocumented students." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. December 1, 2016. Accessed 1 May 2017, http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20161201_UPenn__Donald_Trump_s_alma_mater__becomes_sanctuary_campus_for_undocumented_students.html
- Jaschik, Scott. "Trump on Higher Ed." *Inside Higher Ed*. October 14, 2016. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/10/14/trump-makes-his-most-substantial-comments-yet-higher-ed>
- Jaschik, Scott. "DeVos vs. the Faculty." *Inside Higher Ed*. February 24, 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/24/education-secretary-criticizes-professors-telling-students-what-think>

Levin, Sam. "Seattle judge demands an explanation after undocumented 'dreamer' arrested." *The Guardian*. February 15, 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/15/seattle-daca-dreamer-arrested-judge-trump-immigration>

Lynch, Mark. "Universities overwhelmingly objected to the Trump travel ban. Here are the values they emphasized." *The Washington Post*. February 20, 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/20/universities-overwhelmingly-objected-to-the-trump-travel-ban-here-are-the-values-they-emphasized/?utm_term=.88eb70d4d6c4.

Reigstad, Leif. "Here's What You Need To Know About Sanctuary Campuses." *The Texas Monthly*. December 8, 2016. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.texasmonthly.com/the-daily-post/heres-need-know-sanctuary-campuses/>

Sanders, Bernie. "It's Time to Make College Tuition Free and Debt Free." *BernieSanders.com* 2016. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://berniesanders.com/issues/its-time-to-make-college-tuition-free-and-debt-free/>

Stratford, Michael. "Higher Education Act overhaul a long shot for this election year." *Inside Higher Ed*. February 2, 2016. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/02/02/higher-education-act-overhaul-long-shot-election-year>

Resistance in the Age of Trump: An Interview with Ivonne Wallace Fuentes

Jason Mahn, editor of *Intersections*, came to know of Ivonne Wallace Fuentes's work with *Indivisible* after reading an article in *In These Times*, an independent, nonprofit magazine.¹ In the following interview with Ivonne, he asks about her work with the progressivist political action group, how it connects with her teaching and research, and how such advocacy (*advocare*) work informs her sense of vocation (*vocare*).

What does your work at Roanoke College entail?



As an Associate Professor of History at Roanoke College, I usually teach three courses a semester, mostly on Latin American history. I also teach our Methodology class, and teach on Latin America and Spanish history for our general education curriculum. I also currently chair our Faculty

Personnel Committee, help coordinate the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Concentration, and am involved in ongoing conversations about pedagogy and digital humanities initiatives. My research agenda is at a point of transition: my book, *Most Scandalous Woman: Magda Portal and the Dream of Revolution in Peru*, is forthcoming this October from Oklahoma University Press. I will start working on a couple of new projects, including one on revolutionary internationalism in Central America in the 1960s-1980s.

M. Ivonne Wallace Fuentes is Associate Professor of History at Roanoke College, in Salem, Virginia, and the local leader of *Indivisible*, a progressivist political action group devoted to resisting the Trump agenda. Her book, *Most Scandalous Woman: Magda Portal and the Dream of Revolution in Peru*, is forthcoming from Oklahoma University Press.

When and how did you first get involved with political movements/protests?

I was completely shocked by the election results in November. I had been following the polls and other analysis, and did not believe Clinton would lose. After that loss, I was in school and despondent. A week after the election, Our Revolution in the Blue Ridge, a local Sanders group, called a meeting for all progressives to gather and plan next steps. At that large meeting, I organized a breakout group into a rapid action task force meant to come to the aid of our local communities who would, if the Republican campaign promises were honored, bear the brunt of the new administration: our Muslim and Latin@ neighbors, refugees, women, people who depend on Medicare/Medicaid/Social Security, and the LGBTQ+ community.

When and how did your work with *Indivisible* start?

During winter break, I read some of the analysis that I had collected since November and saved for after I finished grading. One of those links was the *Indivisible Guide*. It really resonated with me. It offered a concrete,

almost recipe-like roadmap to do exactly what our task force wished to do: local, defensive action to protect our communities and progressive values. I registered our group that very night, on January 2. The next day, the first day of Congress, my House Representative, Bob Goodlatte, made the news when he proposed an amendment that would have gutted independent ethics review in Congress. We organized our first action within 48 hours: a visit to his district office to deliver New Year's cards. Our group, which at that point may have been about 20 people and email addresses, now has nearly 1000 members.

For those who may not have heard of it, would you describe the philosophy of Indivisible and why you were attracted to it?

The *Indivisible Guide* distills the best practices of constituent advocacy into a concrete, easy to use 25 page handbook. It stresses that influencing your three (for most, sorry DC) members of Congress is the most effective way to get your voice heard as a citizen at the federal level. It explains that all members are always thinking about re-election, no matter how "safe" their seats may appear. As such, if enough constituents raise their concerns about an issue, they pay attention—as demonstrated by the calamitous roll out of the Republicans' American Health Care Act and their attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The Guide stresses that the most effective advocacy focuses on issues currently under consideration for a vote and comes from constituents, not just concerned people from other states or districts. It also highlights how the amount of effort any action takes matters: members of Congress and their staff pay more attention to correspondence and phone calls than signatures on a petition, and an in-person visit to a district office or town hall ranks even higher. I was attracted to it because it was such a clearly detailed plan, and because these tactics of civic engagement have a proven track record.

Are there ways in which your paid work as a professor of history and your work in political organizing inform or bear on one another?

Yes! I tell people all the time that the skills that I am using as a leader and coordinator of Roanoke Indivisible are those that I have honed in the classroom. Preparing

actions is like preparing assignments. I ask myself the same things; What do I want to communicate? How can I make a complicated issue clear and accessible? How can I make this fun, active, and participatory? My own training as a historian also means I think a lot about texts—how to write documents and explanations, sure, but also how to craft messages, how to craft digital communications, how to translate press releases into language that moves people. My own research interests are on revolutionary movements, so I analyze how societies mobilize in other contexts, asking what strategies proved effective.

What "mobilization" have you seen that has related to your research?

I am particularly interested in how this moment of mobilization here in Southwest Virginia is led by women who would not have identified as political leaders or agents before; that suggests to me that this is a new fount of energy, a new cohort of leaders activated by the misogynistic tenor of the campaign. We have seen similar moments in Latin American history before, and such women-led activism has profoundly changed the lived politics of places like, for instance, Argentina.

What do your students think about your work outside the classroom? Do they know of it? Engage it? Critique it? How do you connect with students who have very different political persuasions than you?

I think this is a very important question, and one that I have dealt with as long as I have been in the classroom in part because I teach courses that have a high political component. I am currently teaching Latin American Revolutions, for instance. My position has always been to be direct about my personal political opinions if students ask me a direct question, but I explicitly explain at the start of the semester that all my courses are spaces of inquiry where our communal learning is most enhanced if we allow and engage with all positions, as long as they are respectfully proposed, and let the evidence and the strength of logic and argument decide which position makes most sense to any individual. Here at Roanoke, some students have found some of the media coverage Roanoke Indivisible has garnered and have spoken to me about it, all in support. But I know that there are many

students who do not share my political positions. With students of all persuasions right now in this particular historical moment, I try to be the kind of mentor and teacher I would have wanted if such momentous political earthquakes had happened when I was at their life stage.

How can students learn to think critically about the current political state?

I counsel students that in times of upheaval, there is wisdom in not jumping to conclusions from any side, and that often the media and politicians are working hard to generate a gut response for their own reasons, not for our benefit as citizens or humans. I counsel them to focus not on personalities but on institutions, and to ground themselves in the most stable political foundations we have: the Constitution and other founding documents. It is likely that political labels are currently in a transition phase, a phase of realignment. I counsel students that they need not let partisan labels define them. Instead, they can first decide what principles and values they want to see in the world, and find the political persuasion that comes closest to that moral compass.

What gives you the most hope about resistance and grassroots political organizing? What are the biggest challenges that progressive community organizers presently face?

Honestly, what gives me most hope is seeing people like me, fellow travelers, become activists. I talk to people who tell me they had no idea who their representative or state delegate was a few months ago, but now they have those phone numbers in their “favorites” and have set a daily alarm to remind them to call. I deeply believe that this is not a far-right country; it’s not even a far-right electorate. The current monopoly on federal power that the Republicans enjoy is not a popular mandate as much as a carefully engineered and incredibly well-funded tapestry of gerrymandered districts, voter suppression laws, and exquisitely calibrated agitation propaganda.

The current president would never have won if he had openly campaigned on the extreme agenda he is now proposing—an Ayn Rand budget proposal, attacks on health care, and so forth. These are significant political obstacles, no doubt, but they are not insurmountable. And if we work

towards a more authentic democratic society, one where all votes are welcomed and courted, one where citizens and not just giant donors have influence in the halls of power, I have faith that our society will then better reflect what I see to be our shared values of community, opportunity, and care.

You work at one of our 26 ELCA-related schools. Are there any ways in which the institutional identity or church-affiliation of Roanoke College supports, runs against, or otherwise bears on your advocacy and resistance work?

I think it supports it, absolutely. While I do not ground my own activism in the Lutheran heritage, I draw my own moral compass from a broadly New Testament injunction to take care of the least among us—to care for the weak, the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the prisoner. And here at Roanoke, we ground our educational philosophy and mission statement in care for the whole person, which we argue can then prepare students to be active, engaged agents in their world. And of course, one of the ways that we are active is as citizens in our participatory democracy.

Marty Stortz from Augsburg College had been reminding many of us that vocation (vocare) and advocacy (advocare) can and should be intimately linked. Would you describe how your own sense of vocation is influenced by your advocacy work, and vice-versa?

In part because this is a new facet of my own life that has emerged in reaction to what seems like a blitzkrieg assault in the last few months, I am not sure I have given this the careful thought it requires. But on first appraisal it rings true to me. I have always thought of my vocation to be a teacher and a scholar, but being a scholar of Latin American history by definition entails advocating for peoples either long-forgotten (who was that indigenous tribe, anyway?) or dismissed as a “dead end” of history. I am guided by the belief that every human story, no matter who, when, or where, is worthy of consideration and has much to teach us about our shared lived experience of being human. I am also guided by the belief that such consideration must entail a clear-eyed analysis of the structures of power that define, constrain, or empower individuals in their time and place. This approach emerged in the biographical approach I took in the book I just finished, a gendered analysis of Magda Portal, the only female national leader in Peru’s most

important twentieth-century opposition party. And it guides my advocacy now—we are nowhere near as disempowered as some of the historic agents I study and teach. There are billions of other humans on this planet right now who have less influence on the structures of power in the United States, which, given geopolitical realities, affect them—especially now in an area of accelerating climate change. Let’s use that voice. We must use that voice.

Endnotes

1. Kate Aronoff, “The Left Group Shaking Up Congress from the Grassroots.” *In These Times*. February 13, 2017. Accessed 1 May, 2017, <http://inthesetimes.com/article/19871/indivisible-trump-resistance-left-tea-party>

Contribute to the Conversation!

Intersections accepts submissions of academic articles, reflective essays, excerpts from longer projects, book reviews, chapel homilies, responses to other authors, letters to the editor, poetry, cover art, and more.

.....

Please direct submissions or inquiries to Jason Mahn, editor at jasonmahn@augustana.edu



DANIEL A. MORRIS

Religion in the Age of Trump



I teach and write about volatile political topics. My training is in religious studies. Within that broad discipline, I work at the intersection of Christian ethics, American religious history, and democratic politics. The “democratic” part of my work means that I focus on “the people,” especially as

they are included or excluded from their own governance. Here at Augustana College, the classes I teach that deal most directly with these issues are: “Race, Ethnicity, and Religion;” “Sexual Ethics;” and “American Christianities.” I love teaching these classes; it is a tremendous privilege and uniquely fulfilling to introduce undergraduates to ongoing conversations with obvious contemporary relevance.

It’s hard, though, to know whether and how to allow my own political voice into the classroom. I am firmly committed to a pedagogical model that empowers students to inform themselves about political debates and stake out their own positions within them. I consider it an abuse of my power in the classroom to persuade students on religious, moral, or political questions. Also, objectivity is presumably an important value in scholarly inquiry. I feel an obligation to model objectivity within the classroom, even (or especially) when dealing with divisive topics. And yet, complete objectivity is obviously not possible. I make choices to include, exclude, and emphasize certain voices

when constructing and revising the syllabus, for example, and we all make moral judgments, even in the classroom, about politics, religion, and America’s history of racial and sexual oppression. I have never heard anyone call for strict objectivity in discussions of the transatlantic slave trade, and yet for some reason teachers are expected to maintain moral neutrality when discussing the murders of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, and others. In recent years I have also come to the painful realization that students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and Muslim students often perceive academic objectivity in the classroom as a glaring lack of support. To make this pedagogical difficulty worse, the murmuring public perception that academics shamelessly promote political liberalism was recently turned up to 11 when Betsy DeVos, the United States Secretary of Education, stated that “faculty, from adjunct professors to deans,” tell students “what to do, what to say, and more ominously, what to think” (Jaschik).

“I have also come to the painful realization that students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and Muslim students often perceive academic objectivity in the classroom as a glaring lack of support.”

Daniel A. Morris is a Lecturer in the Religion Department at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. His first book, *Virtue and Irony in American Democracy: Revisiting Dewey and Niebuhr* was published in 2015. In his next book project, Dan explores the rhetoric of force to pursue racial justice in relation to the Christian just war tradition.

I will likely never stop thinking about what objectivity means in the context of teaching classes at the nexus of religion, ethics, politics, race, and sexuality. I am certain, though, that my political activism and my scholarly activity must now inform each other more than they did before Donald Trump won the Electoral College vote in November, 2016. I am both a scholar of religion and politics, and a political actor in our democratic experiment. I cannot ultimately separate these two roles. And now, under the Trump presidency, I feel called to bring them closer together. If I don't make my research and writing active in

"As I watch Trump's policies and rhetoric tear families apart, abandon the poor, and strike fear in the marginalized, I am convinced that my scholarship and political action must inform each other more directly than they had before."

civic life, I will fail in my responsibilities to empower the oppressed and restrain the forces that would dominate them. If I leave my political vision completely out of the classroom, I will fail in my responsibility to show students how high and asymmetrical the stakes are in debates about religion, politics, race, and sex. As I watch Trump's policies and rhetoric tear families apart, abandon the poor, and strike fear in the marginalized, I am convinced that my scholarship and political action must inform each other more directly than they had before. Other scholars who feel this pull must determine for themselves where their expertise and political passions meet. For me, at this moment, they coalesce around one main question: what is the role of religion in Trump's America?

As I think about this question, my mind turns immediately to evangelical politics and the status of Islam. If you are reading *Intersections*, you are likely aware that 80% of evangelicals voted for Trump in this election. I want to reflect on that statistic within historical contexts of evangelicalism in American politics, and I want to suggest the following two theses: (1) evangelicals' standard conception

of Godly participation in political life has lost the coherence it once had; and (2) evangelicals' historical tendency to exclude others from political life has now become directed at Muslims. Telling a story with these two theses at its heart is one way in which my scholarship and activism mutually inform each other.

This story must begin by noting that evangelicals have believed consistently throughout American history that their religion has a very important role to play in political life. The Puritans believed that God had led them away from the repressive political and religious climate of England, where their vision of church and government was not being accepted, toward New England, where they could establish their own Godly society. A Calvinist style church was at the center of Puritan society and politics. Leaders of this community, especially John Winthrop, insisted that the Puritan faith and practice was absolutely necessary for New England's political society to thrive. According to Winthrop and others, God had selected Puritans to lead England and the world by showing everyone that the perfect society is one with this specific church and set of religious beliefs at its center. Winthrop likened the Massachusetts Bay Colony to a "city on a hill" in his famous sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," which he preached aboard the *Arbella*. His reference was biblical; he was drawing on Matthew 5, which attributes these words to Jesus: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:14-16). This vision imagined the Puritan experiment as a model for the entire world to follow, which is the origin of the "exceptionalist" tendencies in American evangelicalism. The Puritans thought of themselves as "exceptional" because they offered a moment of Godly discontinuity from typical human religious and political activity. The fate of America's political experiment (to say nothing of humanity's relation with God) depended upon the nation following this exceptional example. American evangelicals have maintained this sense of exceptionalism down to today, believing that their particular religious and moral vision was necessary as a grounding for American civic life. By our standards today, Puritan society was theocratic:

church power coincided with civic power, many forms of religious belief were not tolerated, and so forth. Roger Williams was exiled from Massachusetts Bay Colony partly because he critiqued Puritanism and began moving toward separatism. The example of the Puritans, then, shows us two important historical tendencies in evangelicals' political activity: they have believed that their religion must guide American politics, and they have excluded others as part of that belief.

"American evangelicals have maintained this sense of exceptionalism down to today, believing that their particular religious and moral vision was necessary as a grounding for American civic life."

Evangelicals' participation in politics has ebbed and flowed throughout American history. They were highly engaged in political life in the early nineteenth century, bringing their religious beliefs to questions about temperance, dueling, and the morality of slavery. In each case, they believed that their religious morality needed to shape policy or else American civilization would fail. This is the basic tenet of evangelical belief that the United States is a "Christian nation." As they turned toward premillennialism after the Civil War, they started to invest less in civic life. The Scopes Trial of 1925 sent many evangelicals retreating into a sub-culture, further away from political life than before. Then, in the mid-1970s, evangelicals came storming back into politics in a major way, through the formation of the Religious Right, a coalition of conservative evangelicals who resisted the perceived liberalism of the counter-culture, the sexual revolution, the Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, and the civil rights movement. This coalition has shaped evangelicals' engagement of politics from the late 1970s to today. The Religious Right is the primary reason why evangelicals tend to embrace political conservatism in America, although, as I will explain shortly, the religious fervor behind this embrace lacks the coherence it once had.

Just as evangelicals' engagement of politics has waxed and waned, so too has their social and political exclusivity changed over the years. After the ratification of the First Amendment in 1791, evangelicals accepted, however grudgingly, the fact that the federal government would not support, sanction, or mandate any specific religion. (Even though on the state level, Connecticut and Massachusetts didn't disestablish the Congregationalist church until well into the nineteenth century.) While they didn't usually try to explicitly or overtly dismantle the wall of separation, evangelicals did continue to believe that, because their religious and moral vision was divinely inspired, other groups should not be allowed full participation and inclusion in our democratic experiment.

One obvious example of this belief is how evangelicals thought about black Americans in the nineteenth century. Writers like George Armstrong argued that slaves should not be freed because they were inherently inferior to the more civilized race of white people, that God had made the races in such a hierarchy that a Godly social order would reflect that, and that slavery actually protected such an inferior race from being destroyed by their superiors on a level political playing field. Evangelical abolitionists weren't much better in their assumptions about racial superiority and inferiority. Evangelicals have harbored deep suspicions about Catholics, too. They regarded Catholic immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a clear threat to the moral and political stability of the nation. Their perceptions of Catholic drinking, superstitious ritual, and deference to papal authority made evangelicals believe that Catholics could not participate well in American democracy. Such assumptions persisted well into the twentieth century. When John F. Kennedy made his case for the presidency, he faced evangelical pearl-clutching about whether a Catholic could govern the country effectively, and what a Catholic in the White House might mean for our collective identity as a Christian nation. These are just a few examples of evangelicals' tendency toward political exclusion, which is the flip side of the claim that evangelicals must have a privileged place in United States politics.

Now, on to Trump. What is the status of evangelical participation in politics today, after the 2016 presidential election? One answer to this question is that evangelicals

are still engaged in American politics, and their engagement generally follows the model of the Religious Right, which has been the norm since the 1970s. However, the religious story on which their political activity is built is not nearly as coherent or compelling as it once was. Back in the 1970s, politically conservative evangelicals could tell a story about how God desired an orderly society, leavened by the religious morality of born again Christians. That orderly society, they thought, would properly acknowledge differences between sexes, respect authority, value life, and resist government interference in church and market. Whether you think that story has merit or not, at least it was coherent and consistent with some premises developed from Christian sources like the Bible.

Things were different in 2016. There was no coherent story motivating evangelical support for Trump. Trump spoke awkwardly, at best, about his own religion. He has been divorced twice, and divorce has always been a major moral concern for evangelicals. He doesn't have clear positions on the basic political issues that have motivated politically conservative Christians since the 1970s, such as abortion or same-sex marriage, and on and on. (Of course, the disconnect between Trump and politically liberal

"In the era of Trump, evangelicals are voting by inertia, without a clear and coherent story about why they engage in politics the way they do."

Christianities is even greater. Trump's disregard for "the least of these" makes him an even worse fit with politically liberal Christianities, but that's not the point I'm trying to make.) The poor fit between Trump and evangelicals is likely a major reason why he selected Mike Pence as his running mate. The "normal" connection between political figures and conservative evangelical voters simply was not there. And yet, they voted for him. Overwhelmingly. Eric Metaxas, a prominent evangelical writer, argued that evangelicals should actively vote for Trump—not abstain from voting or vote for a third party, but actually vote for

Trump—because he was anxious about Hillary Clinton's ability to shape the Supreme Court, her private email server, the support she gets from Planned Parenthood, and so on. (Metaxas) His reasoning is thin and tortured. It is nothing like the robust story that grounded the work of the Religious Right in the 1970s. In the era of Trump, evangelicals are voting by inertia, without a clear and coherent story about why they engage in politics the way they do.

A second answer to the question, "What is the status of evangelical participation in politics today, after the 2016 presidential election?" has to do with evangelicals' tendency to exclude other groups. Whereas at one time evangelicals excluded African Americans, Catholics, and other groups, today the focus has shifted decisively toward Muslims. The dominant assumption among evangelicals is that Muslims cannot participate well in political life, largely because of the concepts such as jihad and sharia law. At a campaign rally in New Hampshire, a white male constituent had this comment and question for Donald Trump: "We have a problem in this country. It's called Muslims. You know our current president is one. You know he's not even an American...We have training camps growing where they want to kill us. That's my question: When can we get rid of them?" (Schleifer). Trump didn't denounce this terrifying question. He interjected with a comment that made light of this constituent's bigotry, and then he responded by saying, simply, that he would be "looking at a lot of different things." In addition, he issued this infamous statement December 7, 2015: "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on" (Horton). This statement came five days after the San Bernadino shooting, and Trump exploited the fear and ignorance of a huge portion of the American electorate, which was ready to castigate an entire religion as un-American and anti-democratic.

Ben Carson has made similarly misguided claims. He argued insistently against allowing a Muslim to become president because he, Carson, believes that sharia law is incompatible with the United States Constitution. Carson believes that in order for a Muslim to become president of the United States, he or she would "have to reject the tenets of Islam." He elaborated on this belief by saying, "I would have problems with somebody who embraced all

the doctrines associated with Islam...If they are not willing to reject sharia and all the portions of it that are talked about in the Quran—if they are not willing to reject that, and subject that to American values and the Constitution, then of course, I would” (Bradner). Carson’s and Trump’s beliefs about the relationship between Islam, sharia, and the United States Constitution are ignorant. They also clearly violate the spirit and (maybe the letter) of the First Amendment, which says in part, “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” and Article VI of the Constitution, which prohibits tests of religion as a prerequisite for serving in public office.

“If the story grounding evangelical politics has fallen apart, the tendency to exclude has not. The assumption that Muslims cannot be good participants in American democracy is consistent with evangelical views from earlier eras about black people, Catholics, and other groups.”

These beliefs are not, however, at odds with one of the basic political impulses of American evangelicalism. If the story grounding evangelical politics has fallen apart, the tendency to exclude has not. The assumption that Muslims cannot be good participants in American democracy is consistent with evangelical views from earlier eras about black people, Catholics, and other groups. It is an intolerant and factually ill-informed assumption, but it is consistent with evangelicals’ engagement of politics. So what is the state of religion in Trump’s America? With regard to evangelicals and Muslims, it is, in part, this: evangelicals have lost the coherent narrative informing their politics but have maintained their exclusive and

intolerant impulses, while Muslims are subject to anti-democratic forms of intolerance.

Muslims are not the only people who face intense persecution in Trump’s America. Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ people do, too. I offer this story about evangelicalism and Islam in America as a way of engaging issues of power and oppression at a moment of crisis in United States history. Scholars who work on similar issues have the power—and thus the responsibility—to tell such stories in ways that restrain the powerful and empower the restrained. In Trump’s America, telling these stories well means being both scholarly and politically active. If our appeals to objectivity lead us away from this task, we abandon our Muslim, Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ students and neighbors at a critical moment, and we indulge in a luxury that they are not afforded.

Works Cited

- Bradner, Eric. “Ben Carson Explains Concerns with a Muslim President.” *CNN*. 27 Sept. 2015. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/27/politics/ben-carson-muslim-president-sharia-law>
- Horton, Helena. “Muslim Ban Statement ‘Removed’ from Donald Trump’s Website.” *The Telegraph*. 10 Nov. 2016. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/10/muslim-ban-statement-removed-from-donald-trumps-website>
- Jaschik, Scott. “Education Secretary Criticizes Professors as Telling Students ‘What to Think.’” *Inside Higher Ed*. 24 Feb. 2017. Accessed 1 May 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/24/education-secretary-criticizes-professors-telling-students-what-think>
- Metaxas, Eric. “Should Christians Vote for Trump?” *Wall Street Journal* 13 Oct. 2016: A.13. Print.
- Schleifer, Theodore. “Donald Trump Doesn’t Challenge Anti-Muslim Questioner.” *CNN*. 18 Sept. 2015. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/17/politics/donald-trump-obama-muslim-new-hampshire>

ROSE ASLAN

Room at the Table: Reflections on Identity and Inclusion from a Lutheran-Friendly Muslim

Every time I leave my office in Soiland Humanities Building at my university, I pass by a brass statue of Richard Pederson, the son of a Norwegian immigrant who ran a working farm with crops and chickens. He leans heavily on a shovel that represents the hard work he put into his farm, and a look of satisfaction seems to be on his face as he looks over the expanse of the university. According

to California Lutheran University (CLU) lore, Pederson, a Lutheran himself, donated his 130-acre farm in 1957 to the California Lutheran Educational Foundation (CLEF) to establish the first Lutheran college in California. Pederson told Orville Dahl, the executive secretary of CLEF, that he had been waiting for him and that it was his destiny to donate the land. Pederson's wish had been to "provide youth with the benefits of Christian education in a day when spiritual values can well decide the course of world history" (Swanson 100).

Founded by Lutherans, initially taught by Lutherans, and with almost an entirely Lutheran student body, CLU was created as a regional college for Lutheran students. Despite its origins, the university quickly diversified due to



Rose Aslan (center) with students from California Lutheran University.

its location in southern California, and is currently involved in an ongoing discussion to define its relationship to Lutheranism.

In this essay, I discuss the opportunities and experiences of teaching Islam in the Religion Department at CLU, an ELCA-affiliated university located in Thousand Oaks, California.

Before working at my current institution, I taught courses on

Islam at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina, which is affiliated with the Quakers. There I gained some sense of what it means to teach religion in a university that has religious roots and therefore differs from my public education experience.¹ Trained in religious studies at a public Research 1 university, I had not been fully prepared to teach in a small liberal arts university that had a church affiliation. However, I quickly embraced my new role and made an effort to study the lingo of my Lutheran context.

To understand the place of Islam at CLU, I will first look at discussions among Lutherans about their understanding of Lutheran higher education and the transformation (at some ELCA institutions) from a Christian-centric approach to a more inclusive one that continues to make use of

Rose Aslan is Assistant Professor of Religion at California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California. A longer version of this essay will appear in the Fall 2017 issue of the *Muslim World Journal*.

Lutheran concepts to galvanize its identity. I will then reflect on my personal experience of teaching Islam inside and outside the classroom. CLU's Department of Religion has been taking serious measures to integrate interfaith studies into its curriculum. By educating students about religions other than Christianity, my department hopes to increase students' religious literacy and ability to live in a religiously diverse society.

Lutheran Identity and Vocation

To understand what it means to teach Islam at a Lutheran institution, I first delve into the question of what it means to a university in the United States to be Lutheran and how it affects the teaching in their religion and theology departments. Lutherans stress that the denomination is unique because of its stress on critical thinking, debate, and the questioning of authority. The movement developed out of critical discussions that took place at the University of Wittenberg, where Martin Luther and his colleagues strove to reform the Catholic Church as part of a broader educational mission (Christenson 15). Many colleges and universities in the United States have undergone what some Lutheran scholars call secularization whereby they have drifted from their Lutheran identities. Because of these changing factors, Lutheran institutions have had to reevaluate the role that their religious tradition plays in institutional identity (Childers 6).

"Lutherans stress that the denomination is unique because of its stress on critical thinking, debate, and the questioning of authority."

Over the twentieth century, these universities and colleges developed into full-fledged institutions with a growing non-Lutheran population among students, faculty, and administration. These institutions were no longer "for Lutherans or by Lutherans," and some church leaders and alumni mourned the loss of these Lutheran-centered campuses where activities such as attending chapel stopped playing a central role in campus

life. Additionally, Lutheran institutions were no longer responsible for the "preservation and promulgation" of Lutheranism (Christenson 23). Instead, these institutions became well-reputed liberal arts universities and colleges with a Lutheran heritage that did not directly impact most students, faculty, or staff. Lutheran colleges and universities are currently facing identity crises where they need to market themselves to primarily non-Lutheran prospective students while figuring out what to do with their Lutheran heritage and mission.

Vocation is one of the most important concepts within the Lutheran tradition, and it is also part of the discussions on the identity of Lutheran institutions. Lutherans define vocation in various ways. One popular way to understand the term is as "the calling to serve, in love, the deep needs of those we have at hand to serve" (Christenson 27). Another more general definition of vocation looks "to help...students seek truth and meaningful service in the context of a religiously diverse community" (Reed 94). Some Lutheran scholars believe that Christianity needs to be part and parcel of a Lutheran educational institutional, while others hold that the concept of vocation should be understood more broadly to include—and even celebrate—students, faculty, and administrators from diverse, non-Lutheran backgrounds. Many Lutheran institutions, including CLU, have begun to adopt the "vocation model," as inspired by Luther's understanding of vocation. Luther developed the concept of vocation to apply to every person to ensure they were fulfilling their calling in life to fulfill the needs of their neighbors, be it as a scholar, a cobbler, or a physician, as a servant of God, but not necessarily in the realm of religion (Simmons 25).

Of course, whether "vocation" is expansive and inclusive enough to connect non-Christians to mission depends on what one means by it. Ernest L. Simmons sees vocation as primarily a *Christian* mission. According to Simmons, the education offered by a Lutheran college or university should be Christian in essence, although it should not force religion on its students and employees. Simmons sees the tension of ensuring that faith is part of the conversation without pushing it onto others as a part of the "creative expression" in Lutheranism. Reconciling the confessional movement with secularism is at the heart of the tradition. Simmons holds that non-Lutheran Christians

and people from other religions can contribute to the Lutheran project of identity formation (Simmons 7, 21).

For Simmons, the paradox of wanting to infuse the campus with a Lutheran spirit and encouraging non-Lutherans to take part in this mission is both refreshing and frustrating for faculty and staff. It would seem that non-Lutherans first need to learn more about Lutheranism and then need to ensure that they work towards this mission while remaining faithful to their religious affiliation or non-affiliation. Simmons proposes that, while a Lutheran university should create a pluralistic society by ensuring that all faith traditions are welcomed, the Christian perspective and Christian thought should be “brought into relationship with every discipline on campus in whatever manner is appropriate to that discipline” (Simmons 69). Simmons’s proposal would mean that Lutheran institutions would expect their non-Lutheran employees to embrace values that may differ from their own and to further them as part of the university’s goals; they would sometimes need to conform to fit into a uniquely Christian/Lutheran context. The clear mission of the university would not provide the more pluralistic model of CLU, and I do not know many members of the campus community who would be comfortable with this form of privileging of Christian power, space, or learning.

Simmons proposes that dialogue with the Christian faith be part and parcel of every discussion and class on campus (Simmons 67). Some of what Simmons describes as the mission of a Lutheran institution is part of the mission of CLU’s Religion Department as well as the Office of University Ministries and the Office of Mission and Identity, but not necessarily other departments on campus. For some, maintaining a Lutheran spirit on campus means infusing life on campus with Christian ideals, but for others, including CLU, it means reimagining the mission and vision of a Lutheran institution from the ground up.

From Guest to Cohost at CLU

Traditional understandings of Lutheran higher education appear to be on the wane in the twenty-first century as Lutheran institutions grapple with the changing nature of their campuses. A more standard approach to Lutheran identity, at least at CLU, recognizes the importance of

the Lutheran aspect of the university but represents a more inclusive approach that allows non-Lutherans to chime in on the future and identity of the university. One of my colleagues in CLU’s Religion Department (who is a non-Lutheran Christian) grapples with this issue a lot and posits that:

We need to recognize that there is a grieving process among Lutherans because we are losing what we thought our identity was all about. But the good news is that it’s an opportunity to realize that those were just trappings, but the core of Lutheran identity, the ruthless search for truth, doesn’t let institutions stand in the way. The great challenge is to maintain a degree of malleability....We can talk to other traditions now, but we can discover where our place in that is. We have to let go of what we thought ... Lutheran and Lutheran higher education were all about.

My colleague’s words reflect that of other colleagues who have given me hope that non-Lutherans, and even non-Christians, can begin to take more ownership at the university instead of remaining as guests. This colleague proposes that members of the campus community consider themselves part-Lutheran as a form of institutional identity. I would rather consider myself a Lutheran-friendly Muslim (as in, a Muslim who is well-versed in Lutheran terminology and identity politics) rather than part-Lutheran. As a non-Christian, I strive to be a valued member of my university because of who I am and what I teach rather than because of my relationship to Lutheran ideals. I do draw inspiration from Lutheran ideals for higher education, but also draw from other sources.

An example of a Lutheran college grappling with its identity comes from Jacqueline Bussie, who teaches religion at Concordia College in Morehead, Minnesota. Bussie highlights “reconciled diversity,” which is inspired by an ELCA social statement on ecumenism, to explain the importance of interfaith engagement on campuses. For Bussie, the ELCA must “embrace, not erase, diversity; [it must] seek reconciliation in diversity’s midst” (Bussie 36-37). Because of their interfaith work, Bussie’s college eventually came up with an official college statement on interfaith engagement that places emphasis on this work

“because of its Lutheran dedication to prepare thoughtful and informed global citizens who foster wholeness and hope, build peace through understanding, and serve the world together” (Bussie 37). Faculty and members of the administration at CLU are currently exploring approaches similar to that of Concordia College. I often hear colleagues and members of the administration expressing their mission to create a pluralistic campus *because* of the university’s Lutheran identity.

California Lutheran University is the newest of Lutheran universities and colleges that were founded around the country beginning in the 1800s. CLU—then California Lutheran College (CLC)—was established in 1959 and opened to students in 1961. Three different branches of the Lutheran church helped create CLU through a land donation by a chicken farmer who owned a ranch in the burgeoning bedroom community of Thousand Oaks, which is about an hour’s drive from central Los Angeles (Solberg 312). CLU remains the only ELCA university in California and is only one of two ELCA universities in the western United States, with Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, being the other one.² Unlike most other ELCA universities, CLU was founded by Lutherans from multiple ethnic groups and was meant to be inclusive of Christians rather than just Lutherans. And yet, in its early years, CLC required all new hires to be Christian, students to take four courses in religion, and for the entire campus community to attend chapel services. In CLC’s early context, “Christ [was] at the center” as the host. The entire campus was expected to live their life according to Christian values (Swanson 102).

“CLU was founded by Lutherans from multiple ethnic groups and was meant to be inclusive of Christians rather than just Lutherans.”

A report on Lutheran education from 1975 categorized California Lutheran College as a Christian college. The mission statement of CLC at the time was “to provide the intellectual, spiritual, moral, and cultural environment where Christian scholars may nurture the talents and develop the character of their students and guide them to

lives of more effective service to their fellowmen, motivated and empowered by a love of Christ, truth, and freedom. The basic aim...is to prepare students for meaningful adult lives through the achievement of their best Christian potential” (Gamelin 8). Compare this mission statement to CLU’s current statement: “to educate leaders for a global society who are strong in character and judgment, confident in their identity and vocation, and committed to service and justice” (*Strategic Planning*). It was not until a 1983 WASC evaluation that recommended CLC become “multiculturally inclusive” that the college revised its mission statement to welcome “students of all ages as well as all cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds” (Swanson 111).

Teaching Religions in a Lutheran Institution

In previous years at CLU, the Religion Department primarily offered courses on the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, theology, ethics, Christian history, as well as on topics such as Judaism, world religions, and women and religion. With this model, the university prioritized the scriptural traditions of Christianity for the student body, and other courses were primarily taken only by majors and minors. This approach ensured that Lutheran identity remained at the forefront while also allowing others to be “self-conscious” about their personal religious beliefs and identities, and to engage in what Simmons calls “confessional dialogue” between traditions (Swanson 23). This understanding differs from how my Lutheran and other Christian colleagues at CLU presently discuss Lutheran identity. My colleagues do not expect me to teach about Islam from a Christian perspective—although I do utilize a textbook, *Oil and Water: Two Faiths One God*, by Amir Hussein, that contextualizes Islam for primarily Christian readers. By using this book, written by a Muslim scholar of Islam who lives in Southern California and teaches at a Jesuit University, I believe that I can help students learn about Islam from their perspectives while also giving them a distinctively Muslim perspective. I would probably not use this textbook if I were teaching at a public or private secular university, but it seems to work well in my current context.

There is a small population of Muslim students on the campus, including some international students primarily

from Gulf countries, as well as Muslim American students. The university's Samuelson Chapel also contains the Wennes Interfaith Chapel, which contains ritual items and scriptures from many of the world's religions, including a collection of prayer carpets. The chapel is open 24 hours a day and students can use it for their five daily prayers. At the time of writing, work is underway to establish a Muslim Students Association and to eventually hire a Muslim chaplain to coordinate activities for Muslim students.

CLU's Religion Department is a hybrid between scholars trained in religious studies and those trained in theology. Most of my colleagues see these two approaches as going hand in hand in their research, activism, and teaching. As someone trained in religious studies at a public university, I see myself becoming more of a hybrid scholar because I not only teach about Islam and Muslims but also am invested in and work with local Muslim communities.

The department has two sets of majors and minors. The first is in Religion, which is equivalent to religious studies, and which familiarizes students with methods and theories of religious studies as well as different religions. The other major/minor is in Theology and Christian Leadership, and it offers students four different tracks through which they can gain prepare for Christian seminary or ministerial church vocations.

In recent years, the Religion Department has been completely overhauled as senior faculty retired and a new generation of faculty from a wider array of disciplinary and confessional backgrounds came in. With this change, the department gains a more comprehensive approach to teaching about religion, with emphasis on religious pluralism and interfaith understanding and more thematic courses that include, but do not exclusively study, Christianity.

The department's former mission was to focus "on the Christian tradition in its manifold expressions." Undergraduate students presently must take two religion courses to graduate: the freshman seminar called "Introduction to Christianity" and then any upper division religion course. In order to reflect the interests and backgrounds of an increasingly diverse student body, the department is currently transitioning from teaching "Introduction to Christianity" to teaching a new iteration of the course called "Religion, Identity, and Vocation." Any faculty member can teach this course according to their

strengths and interests. The new name and configuration of the course also ensure that faculty place emphasis on vocation as a Lutheran concept, albeit one that students can investigate through multiple lenses.

Teaching Islam, Christianity, and Pluralism

When I began teaching at CLU in the Fall of 2014, I had the immediate challenge of having to teach "Introduction to Christianity" and "Global Religions" in my first semester. I had primarily been trained to teach introductory and specialized courses on Islam, but here I was, fresh out of graduate school, and I felt as if I were expected to become an expert on Christianity and many of the world's religions. The other non-Christian faculty member in the department (a practicing Sikh) has also taught "Introduction to Christianity" for the past six years and now considers himself, perhaps jokingly, a part-Lutheran Sikh. Despite the course name, my colleagues reassured me that my religious identity was no barrier to teaching the course and that they wanted me to teach the course because of the Lutheran ideals of inclusivism.

To handle teaching a course on Christianity, I decided to approach the course from my strengths, and after consulting with some of my new colleagues, I formulated the course to focus on the "Abrahamic religions." At the beginning of every semester, I find myself explaining that the course will not follow the course title directly and instead will divide the course up evenly between the three religions. Teaching about Christianity at a Christian university to a majority of students who identify as Christian or who come from a Christian home is intimidating. But by introducing Judaism and Islam alongside their study of Christianity, students learn to appreciate the diversity of religion and the vital role it plays in society. I have continued to develop and tweak my iteration of the course, and the entire department has been working to redevelop the course to reflect the university and department's evolving understanding of the role of the Religion Department, and what we think we should be offering to our students.

Many of the students at CLU come from Christian backgrounds and have a mixed response when I tell them what we will be covering in class. Based on student feedback in person and my evaluations, the majority of students are excited to study different religions than the one they

have learned about for much of their lives, yet a small minority is a bit disappointed that we do not spend enough time on Christianity. Some students also admit to being surprised at the beginning of the semester that I will be their instructor for the course, considering that I am a younger female professor who wears a headscarf that identifies me as a Muslim. Because of my headscarf, I cannot deny or hide my religious identity like other, less visible, Muslim professors. I must find creative ways to combine unbiased approaches to teaching religion while also acknowledge my own positionality in the classroom.³

In the Spring semester of my first year, I was able to teach two sections of the “Introduction to Islam” course. Although I have taught iterations of “Introduction to Islam” at two previous institutions, I found that I needed to revamp my syllabus once again to meet the needs of the students. I start the semester by having my students read Diana Eck’s short piece “From Diversity to Pluralism,” which is used by many of my departmental colleagues as well (Eck). This short reading prompts a discussion on why students need to learn about religion and how it can contribute to creating a more cohesive and healthy society in the United States. It also iterates why students from all majors benefit from studying religion.

I always begin the course with two weeks that involve unpacking the baggage that “Westerners” have in regards to the study of and interaction with Islam, relying on opening chapters in Carl Ernst’s *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*. Once we have established that the “West” has a long historical tie with Muslim societies, not all positive, we take the time to discern and analyze biases in the media. We spend several days on critical analysis of media, learning about how it functions in the United States. Nearly every day during the semester, one student gives a presentation on a current news event connected to Muslims, offering analysis of coverage from different news outlets. My students often have a sense of skepticism regarding the media, but I try to raise their awareness of the actual workings of news corporations, sensationalism, and the power and pitfalls of social media. After having established a strong critical approach to the study of Islam, I lead my students through a brief overview of Islamic history before we cover one thematic topic per week.

Islam and the Lutheran Ideals of Inclusion

One uniquely Lutheran structure at CLU is the presence of the convocators, which is a group of 85 people who are chosen from five synods of the ELCA, as well as faculty, students, the university president, and members-at-large. Most of the convocators are Lutheran, although it is not a requirement for membership. This group represents the university and its interests, especially concerning issues of religious identity. They also elect some members of the Regents (*Mission and Identity*).

Colleagues have explained to me that there was some worry among Lutheran beneficiaries and supporters of the university that CLU was losing its Lutheran identity. Members of the Religion Department, myself included, have spent time explaining the mission of our department to the convocators and how it fits into Lutheran ideals. In my conversation with the convocators, I explained that while I appreciate and frequently draw upon my critical training in religious studies, I have also come to cherish being a Muslim professor who teaches about Islam at a church-affiliated institution. I explained that because of the openness that existed on the campus around religion, I felt at home even though I did not share their same religious convictions. My department’s efforts were well received and much of the anxiety that the convocators had—anxiety that came from the lack of understanding about what scholars of religion do inside and outside the classroom—was resolved.

Now that I am in my third year at CLU and have come to learn more about Lutheran higher education and identity, I have come to understand that my words to the convocators implicitly spoke to these Lutheran values of inclusion and pluralism. The convocators are one university institution that helps the university adhere to its Lutheran values, and also to adjust them according to ongoing changes on the campus and in the community.

From Classroom to Chapel

In addition to my teaching duties, I also began to receive invitations to speak on campus and outside, as I am the default resident scholar of Islam on campus. Being surrounded by female Christian and Jewish religious leaders who are either ordained or have leadership roles in their religious traditions has inspired me to test the

boundaries of my community and to encourage other young women to do the same.

Over the 2015-16 school year, the theme for the CLU chapel services was "Room at the Table." Those who gave sermons grappled with defining what the table is and who is included at the table, and who has the power to make the invitations.

One of the most moving experiences I have had was being invited to give the sermon for Thursday chapel services. I was asked to give the sermon (other non-Christian university members have also given them), and the date of it turned out to be the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, which came a day after the Jewish mourning holiday of Yom Kippur. Because I had been teaching that morning, I was unable to attend Eid prayers, and ironically gave what I like to think of as an Eid *khutba*, or sermon, in a Lutheran church to a crowd of mainly Christians, as well as people of other and no affiliations. As I am unlikely to be invited to give a sermon at the mosques,⁴ giving one at CLU turned out to be especially meaningful.

Delivering a sermon in a Lutheran chapel on one of the most sacred and joyous holidays in the Islamic calendar was a surreal experience. I felt as though I was host and guest at the same time. My talk came during the peak months when Syrians migrants were entering Europe in the hundreds of thousands. I appealed to those present to consider the Syrians and others who have had to leave their homes by force as people who belong at the figurative table. In this context, I appealed to our common humanity and shared a story from both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an—the story of Hagar and Ishmael. At the same time, during my sermon, I was conscious of the fact that there was a large cross with the crucified body of Jesus Christ right behind me and that the altar of the sacraments was next to me. The Lutheran liturgical hymns and rituals preceded my sermon and continued afterwards. I know that I am privileged to have been given the opportunity to speak in this Christian context. One might say that, while I had a few minutes to speak as a host in this Lutheran context, I was a guest before and after.

As professor of Islamic Studies who identifies as Muslim, I struggle to figure out where I fit and if I am a guest at the table of my Lutheran hosts or if I am also a host. In conversing with colleagues from my university, I have received different answers to this issue. Some

Lutherans talk about God being the host and everyone on the campus being guests of God, while many non-Lutherans view the Lutherans as the host. I have attended numerous chapel services over the past three years and even bring my first-year student seminar to services with me once a semester, but I still feel like a stranger in the congregation. I quietly follow the lyrics of hymns and recite the general prayers with the congregations. I am always warmly welcomed into the chapel, but remain cognizant of the fact that the dominant religion is Christianity and that I am not a host, but rather a guest who is given generous hospitality by my Christian colleagues.

By attending chapel services, I can expand my worldview, appreciate my Christian friends' faith and liturgy, and enjoy the musical and choral interludes. But I would have to leave the chapel alone and go into the small interfaith chapel where I can pull out a prayer rug in order to find my spiritual home. Even though members of campus ministries are careful to speak about "God" instead of "Jesus" and use language that is technically cross-religious, the service and discussion of religion on campus has a decidedly Christian slant that will always remain. I do not have a problem with this because the university is indeed affiliated with a Christian denomination. But I do have hope that in the future the campus community, including university ministries, will work to include the voices of non-Christians in their efforts to create an inclusive community.

Concluding Reflections

So the question remains: How does one maintain an authentic Lutheran spirit that does not forget its Christian roots while also staying faithful to the goal of inclusivism and pluralism?

I have found that being in a church-affiliated university gives me another outlet, and perhaps more freedom, for exploring my place in the academy and my personal religious tradition. Teaching about Islam in the religion department of a Lutheran institution means that I somehow have found myself in the midst of an ongoing internal Lutheran discussion that I can, at times, contribute to. At other times I feel like an outsider. It also means that I can challenge myself to learn new material and perspectives by teaching outside my field of Islamic studies. As the

only faculty who specializes in Islam in the entire campus, I have made it my duty to bring relevant speakers and performers to educate the community on issues related to Muslims. I try to maintain a balance between my campus and community service, research, teaching, and personal life, but sometimes find myself giving too much of my time away to the detriment of my other work.

When I was in the middle of my secular graduate program in Islamic Studies, I never imagined that I would end up at a church-affiliated university like CLU. I have been pleasantly surprised at how welcoming the campus has been and how a university with a religious affiliation can support and nurture faculty from other religious traditions. What I find most striking about working at CLU is that many of my Christian colleagues are willing to listen to others in their attempt to readjust their understandings of religious identity and the role of this identity in an educational institution. The religious identity of the university is changing and dynamic, based on concerted efforts to reach a consensus about the connection between the university and its heritage. There are as many perspectives about the direction CLU should be going as there are members of the campus community. Only time will tell us what methods and approaches the CLU community will adopt in its effort to create the sort of inclusive and pluralistic community it espouses.

End Notes

1. The majority of my education has been at public schools and universities, although I did receive my MA from the American University in Cairo, a private university, which is secular despite its original missionary roots.

2. For a map of ELCA colleges and universities, see <http://www.whygolutheran.org/>.

3. For more on the insider/outside dilemma of teaching religion see, Elliott A Bazzano, Audrey Truschke, and Jayme M Yeo, "Forum: Insiders, Outsiders, and Disclosure in the Undergraduate Classroom," *TETH Teaching Theology & Religion* 19, no. 3 (2016): 276–95. For more on the challenge of the interactions of the academic study of religion with a professor's religious identity, see John D. Barbour, "Professing Religion," in *Claiming Our Callings: Toward a New Understanding of Vocation in the Liberal Arts*, eds. Kaethe Schwehn and L. DeAne Lagerquist (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

4. That said, I have had the opportunity to give a sermon at the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles and have spoken at several mosques, but the majority of Muslims in the United States are not comfortable with a woman giving a sermon or leading prayers in a mixed congregation.

Works Cited

- Bussie, Jacqueline. "Journey Toward Pluralism: Reimagining Lutheran Identity in a Changing World." *Intersections* 40 (Spring 2014): 36-37. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2014/iss40/9>.
- Childers, Eric Sean. *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012.
- Christenson, Tom. *Who Needs a Lutheran College?: Values Vision Vocation*. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011.
- Eck, Diana. *The Pluralism Project*. Harvard University. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://pluralism.org/encounter/todays-challenges/from-diversity-to-pluralism/>.
- Gamelin, Francis C. *Church-Related Identity of Lutheran Colleges*. Washington, D.C.: Lutheran Educational Conference of North America, 1975.
- Mission and Identity: The Convocation*. California Lutheran University. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.callutheran.edu/mission-identity/congregational-relations/convocators>
- Reed, Barbara E. "Meaningful Lives, Religious Pluralism, and the Case of the Bodhisattva." In *Claiming Our Callings: Toward a New Understanding of Vocation in the Liberal Arts*, edited by Kaethe Schwehn and L. DeAne Lagerquist. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Simmons, Ernest L. *Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction for Faculty*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998.
- Solberg, Richard W. *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1985.
- Strategic Planning: Identity, Mission, and Core Values*. California Lutheran University. Accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.callutheran.edu/president/strategic-planning/identity-mission-values.html>
- Swanson, Bryon R. & Margaret Barth Wold, "Faith and Learning at California Lutheran University." In *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.

MARTHA E. STORTZ

Jonah: The Anti-Hero of Vocation

The following essay was originally given as a chapel talk on September 16, 2016 at Augsburg College in Minneapolis as part of a series called Vocation 2.0. Here vocation becomes a civic calling, a summons to be public, to be in public, and to participate in public life. This talk looks back on a season of violence in cities across the country: the Dallas police shootings in July 7, 2016, escalating murder rates in the city of Chicago, and, closer to home, the deaths of Jamar Clark in North Minneapolis on November 15, 2016 and Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota on July 6, 2016. Now, in the wake of a divisive presidential election, violent rhetoric enters the public square, polluting cities with hate speech and hate crimes. Ever relevant is Jonah, the reluctant urban prophet, whose story underscores the importance of the city to the people—and the many animals!—in them, but also, and especially, to God.



In this series on Vocation 2.0, Jonah seems an odd subject. After all, Jonah may be the great anti-hero of vocation. He's also the person we need to pay attention to even—and especially—now.

God calls Jonah; Jonah runs in the opposite direction. God asks him, a good and upright Jewish man, to "Go to great city of Nineveh and tell them to end their wicked ways." Now, to a Jew Nineveh lay in enemy territory; it was in the country of the Assyrians. Nineveh was the Paris, the Mexico City, the Shanghai of the ancient world, an "exceedingly large city," a city of "a hundred and twenty thousand people—and many animals," a city it takes "three days to walk across."

Maybe Jonah thinks this calling is beneath his pay grade. Maybe he crosses borders with difficulty. Maybe his passport has expired. But he's quite certain the God of Israel should not bother with the Ninevites and Assyrians, because they're not part of the "chosen tribe." They don't

worship the God of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel and Leah. So Jonah boards a ship heading across a different sea. He thinks he can outrun God's call.

A huge storm comes up and threatens to sink the ship. The sailors row mightily against the waves, then determine some god among their passengers is angry. The question is: whose? Only under pressure does Jonah say who he is, whom he worships, and why this God might be a bit upset with him. He recommends the sailors pitch him overboard.

"So Jonah boards a ship heading across a different sea. He thinks he can outrun God's call."

Martha E. Stortz is the Bernhard M. Christensen Professor of Religion and Vocation at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is author of *A World According to God: Practices for Putting Faith at the Center of Your Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2004), *Blessed to Follow: The Beatitudes as a Compass for Discipleship* (Augsburg Fortress, 2010) and most recently, *Called to Follow: Journeys in John's Gospel* (forthcoming). She writes on ethics, spirituality, and pilgrimage.

The sailors do not worship Jonah's God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they strive to save their entire cargo. They struggle valiantly against the wind and the waves. But finally, and only as a last resort, they do as Jonah urged and throw him into an angry sea. Immediately, the waters calm, and the sailors give thanks to Jonah's God. Meanwhile, under a sea grown suddenly quiet, Jonah is gobbled up by a great fish.

From the belly of a whale Jonah pleads to his God for deliverance, promising to do anything he's asked. It's a beautiful prayer—and heartfelt. Distress has a way of focusing devotion. The great fish spits Jonah out onto dry land.

God has other plans for Jonah.

Again, the call comes to Jonah: "Go to the people of Nineveh and tell them to end their wicked ways." And this time, Jonah does as he promised from the belly of the whale. He goes to the great city of Nineveh; he walks around the city for three days, preaching repentance.

And lo! It works. The king decrees a city-wide fast, and the people comply; the king decrees that all the people—and all the many animals, put on sackcloth, and they wrap up like hot dogs. The king decrees wailing, lament, and loud expressions of repentance, and there's lots of noise.

And now we come to the crucial passage:

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over

his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (Jonah 3:10-4:11)

Gone are the sailors and the big waves; gone the king and his urgent decrees; gone all the people and the many animals bound in sackcloth. The story ends with only three characters left standing: the great city of Nineveh, God, and Jonah. There's a worm-eaten bush, but that's only a pedagogical device. What could this odd trio—a city of 120,000 people and many animals!, a God who changes his mind, and the anti-hero of vocation—possibly have to tell us about Vocation 2.0?

"Cities were places where trade bustled, arts flourished, and people of all origins and colors and gods forged a common life. Yes, it was messy and yes, it was contentious."

First, the great city of Nineveh. It's the whole reason for the story in the first place. In the end, Jonah is not even the hero of his own story; the great city of Nineveh is. For in the ancient world, great cities mattered. Cities were places where trade bustled, arts flourished, and people of all origins and colors and gods forged a common life. Yes, it was messy and yes, it was contentious. Yes, violence erupted, but on those rare occasions when it worked,

great cities sparked human hope and divine delight. Great cities mattered, and all the lives in them—black and white, yellow and red, four-pawed and two-legged. Talk about public calling; this is the public to which God calls Jonah.

Now, let's turn to God. Nineveh is not only the public to which God calls Jonah. Nineveh is the public that calls God. This great city commands divine attention. When God regards the conversion of the great city, God's own heart softens. Nineveh's repentance converts God, daring God to display in it the full sweep of divine mercy. For in the end, God's mercy always outruns God's judgment.

And then finally, there's Jonah, that anti-hero of vocation. He wants God to be merciful to him and to his tribe—and judge everyone else. He'd rather die than believe in a God whose mercy extends into enemy territory.

So Jonah tries not only to outrun his own calling, he even tries to outrun the plot line of his own story, attempting to close it out in an overseas escape, in an angry sea, in the belly of a whale, and finally, in an outright appeal to God to end his life.

And do you know what? That's OK: the story is not about Jonah anyway. He's not going to lose his identity; he'll just lose the privilege of having God all to himself. He's not going to lose his life, he'll just lose his story. But if he can stand it, he'll gain a dazzling display of divine compassion.

Because in the end, the story of Jonah is not a story about Jonah, his gifts, his calling at all. It's a story about the vastness of God's mercy—and the futility of trying to dictate it or even resist it. It's not a story about public calling. It's a story about being called by the publics in our midst. It's not a story about a hero at all, but a story about the compassion of God for a great city—and the dare to be similarly moved.

"The story of Jonah is not a story about Jonah, his gifts, his calling at all. It's a story about the vastness of God's mercy—and the futility of trying to dictate it or even resist it."

Vocation 2.0? Maybe we need a new operating system for the human heart, an operating system that opens us to the great cities in our midst. Think of Ferguson, Baltimore, Dallas, Chicago, North Minneapolis, Falcon Heights.

May we all be called by the cries of the great cities in our midst.

Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road? A Homily on Liminality and Vocation



Sometimes homilies are like sitcoms. They both start with a funny story, they highlight a problem or dilemma of some sort, and they resolve that same problem neatly and quickly (in 22 minutes—commercials don't count—on TV and 5 to 10 or maybe 15 minutes from the pulpit). To do so, they use a

platitude or passage from scripture that is, ultimately, a word of support for the present and hope for the future.

I have used this formula myself. Many times. The funny story usually is at the expense of the privacy of one of my kids and has, in the past, included tales of throwing up, swearing, and licking the toilet. Today I *really* wanted to tell you the story about driving home from my night class two weeks ago with a frog in my car, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find a pertinent or pithy theological point to the story. Maybe some day I will figure out what it means and whether or not it connects thematically to another story of mine from a couple of summers ago about catching a chicken—with the help of my middle son and while wearing a swimsuit (with shorts, I might add)—on a very busy street in Maplewood, Minnesota, and quite literally, pondering the question, "Why did the chicken cross the road?"

But I think the very reason I am not up to that formulaic challenge today is buried in that very familiar and very *existential* question. The distance between "Why did the chicken cross the road?" and "Who am I?" and "What am I to do with my life?" or "What is my vocation?" is not so great.

Vocation. We talk about that term a lot. We try to make it easy, or, at least, accessible. We talk about a sense of calling and a caller, maybe God, calling. We talk about the self and those skills, strengths, and passions that make us who we are. We talk about the neighbor and the community and the world. We talk about their needs. We believe we are called to serve our neighbor. The intersection of that calling, those passions and needs—that is vocation. But it is not that simple.

"The distance between 'Why did the chicken cross the road?' and 'Who am I?' and 'What am I to do with my life?' or 'What is my vocation?' is not so great."

Some of my students, right now, are reading *The Other Wes Moore*, by Wes Moore. It is a story about two boys growing up in the same rough neighborhood of

Lori Brandt Hale is Associate Professor of Religion at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is an international scholar of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and recently co-authored *Radical Lutherans/Lutheran Radicals* (Cascade 2017) alongside four colleagues working at ELCA-related colleges and universities. Hale will be a featured speaker at Sojourner's 2017 Summit for Change in Washington, D.C.

“Adolescence itself is a stage of liminality; refugees and immigrant teenagers possess a ‘double liminal status’ and truly struggle with issues of individual identity.”

Baltimore at the same time, with—coincidentally—the same name. Both smart, driven, charismatic, capable. They did not hear the voice of God; they did not have *that* sense of calling. They navigated the neighborhood, day to day. The calls they heard were familial—one Wes Moore heard and, ultimately, heeded the voice of his mother. She removed him from the neighborhood, and sent him away to school. The other Wes Moore heard the voice of his brother, emulated his street-savvy business practices, sold drugs, robbed stores. The first Wes Moore went to college, became an officer in the military, got a Rhodes Scholarship. The other Wes Moore shot a police officer and has a life sentence without parole.

Other students of mine are reading *Outcasts United*, by Warren St. John. It is a story about a town on the outer perimeter of the Atlanta metropolitan area where thousands of refugees from all over the world have been placed. It is a story about a Smith College-educated, Jordanian woman, Luma Mufleh, who starts a soccer program for refugee boys. It is a story about long-standing racism and resistance to change. It is a story about adaptation and acceptance. It is a story about conflict and war around the world. It is a story about hope for a better life in a safe place. It is a story about high expectations and accountability. It is not a religious story, but it is a story of vocation. Luma has a vocation that is tied up with service and education. But I don't think she would call it that. But it is also a story that highlights “liminality.”

Liminality is a state of being between two worlds, in which a person “becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification,” according to anthropologist Victor Turner (Turner 232). Adolescence itself is a stage of liminality; refugees and immigrant teenagers possess a “double liminal status” and truly struggle with issues of individual identity.

This idea of “being between” needs to be part of our conversations about vocation. Starting college is a liminal experience. Literally, the word means threshold. Leaving high school and starting college is exactly like crossing a threshold. How long do students stand with one foot on each side? Increasingly, we have students who have this “double liminal status.” We have Hmong students, Muslim students, Latinx students, particularly those who are immigrants or the children of immigrants, all of whom are continually pulled between cultures, languages, and expectations. Our LGBTQ+ students, maybe coming out for the first time, experience liminality as do our students in Augsburg's StepUP recovery program. Our non-traditional students find themselves in liminal spaces, too: torn between their identity as student and professional, student and parent; they are balancing work and school while simultaneously caring for children and aging parents. This list is not exhaustive and these experiences are not limited to students. Those of us on the faculty and the staff also can list the ways we find ourselves *between*, between two worlds, with different pulls and competing priorities.

Are these considerations part of our reflections on vocation? Maybe they have been all along—and I am the one who has missed it or misunderstood. For a long time, I thought Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reflections on vocation stood as a corrective to some of the seemingly cursory discussions of vocation (particularly conversations that lead people to believe that vocation is some one thing they have to find). Bonhoeffer writes of vocation as responsibility and claims that “vocation is the whole response of the whole person to the whole of reality.” (This is a paraphrase of his work in *Discipleship*.) I still stand by this idea. I think it functions as a hermeneutic, giving us a way to see vocation related to the whole of our lives, and to think

“If one is already torn between competing claims on one's identity, might not the idea that one must respond to those claims with the whole of one's life simply render decision-making and prioritizing impossible?”

about vocation as the way we live in the world, in relationship with others, how we make decisions and choose our actions and reactions. But I have started to worry that this idea of vocation as responsibility puts those who live in liminal spaces in an even more difficult position. If one is already torn between competing claims on one's identity, might not the idea that one must respond to those claims with the whole of one's life simply render decision-making and prioritizing impossible? It stretches them even more tightly and thinly across the divide.

Perhaps Bonhoeffer himself is the best one to address this concern because he lived the end of his life in prison, on the threshold between two worlds and two ways of understanding himself: as the one others saw, poised and confident, and the one he knew himself to be, unsure and weary. His famous poem, "Who Am I?" gives voice to his own state of liminality. The poem begins by asking

Who am I? They often tell me
I step out from my cell
calm and cheerful and poised,
like a squire from his manor.

Later in the poem Bonhoeffer gives his own assessment:

Am I really what others say of me?
Or am I only what I know of myself?
Restless, yearning, sick, like a caged bird,
Struggling for life breath, as if I were being strangled...

The poem ends with this:

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions
of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest me; O God, I am thine.
(*Letters and Papers* 459-60)

Bonhoeffer's poem does not resolve his internal disruption but points us to the possibility that the surrender to the divine is one way through it. In that way, we can begin to glimpse the liminal as a place of transformation. The African-American slaves, and as slaves, the very embodiment of liminality, chose to enter the liminal space offered by song and prayer to "go down to the river to pray" as a way to transcend their liminal condition.

Honestly, I am still not clear on the relationship between liminality and vocation—how selves torn between identities can listen for the call that requires their authentic self to show up. But maybe there is power in the experience of liminality. And maybe there is choice, like Ruth's choice, in Ruth 1:15-18, to return to the land of Judah with Naomi. And maybe the real answer to the question, "Why did the chicken cross the road?" is something like "to make a new life on the other side."

Works Cited

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Discipleship*. Translated by Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.
- . "Who Am I?," in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Translated by Isabel Best, et. al. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.
- Moore, Wes. *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011.
- St. John, Warren. *Outcasts United: A Refugee Soccer Team, An American Town*. New York, Spiegel & Grau, 2009.
- Turner, Victor. *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974.

After Months of Clouds, the Sun

Dry leaf breezes more wish than
shhh. Sun shines somehow. You can
walk into a space of wishing. Not

sit at your desk head and despair.
Not screen your eyes to blur.
Get up. Walk into breeze and light.

The few stiff rags still hanging on
branches all say locked too long
inside rooms with and without

a window but always the screen.
The kind of looking out you were
doing there was not looking

but addiction to latest explosion
and aftermath. See how the world
holds together—trunks stay rooted,

branches still etch a delicate corner
of sky. The combined shadows of
stop and street signs suggest

weathervane. How to spin
on weather's hinge
into joy.

First Bird

*I thought if I could only live
Till that first shout go by—
Not all Pianos in the Woods
Had power to mangle me—*

—Emily Dickinson (348)

Mid-January in the Midwest. Worms twist
in workable loam. Cooled-ash feathers skip
a glowing coal from redbud branch. Its alien
eye gleams, flits, sends spring wheeling.

First bird luck plucked from the bloody crown
of Christ, fire created or stolen. Phenology,
a fairy tale that lures robin from shadows
to glyphs of grass and buds over lawn.

The trouble is when, is should. Remind me
how it happens, the sudden violence that
gets a person feathers. Do the words of forest
music simply frighten or do they mangle?

Give me this season of dread and urge to live in it.

Farah Marklevits's writing has appeared in *Literary Mama*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, and other magazines. In 2014 her poetry manuscript was a finalist for Milkweed Edition's Lindquist and Vennum Prize and a semi-finalist for the Crab Orchard First Book Prize. She lives in Iowa with her family and commutes across the Mississippi River to teach first-year writing and creative writing at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois.

Intersections

Augustana College
639 38th Street
Rock Island, IL 61201-2296

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Rock Island, IL
Permit No. 23

ELCA College and Universities

Augsburg College MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Augustana College ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS

Augustana University SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA

Bethany College LINDSBORG, KANSAS

California Lutheran University THOUSAND OAKS, CALIFORNIA

Capital University COLUMBUS, OHIO

Carthage College KENOSHA, WISCONSIN

Concordia College MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA

Finlandia University HANCOCK, MICHIGAN

Gettysburg College GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

Grand View University DES MOINES, IOWA

Gustavus Adolphus College ST. PETER, MINNESOTA

Lenoir-Rhyne University HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA

Luther College DECORAH, IOWA

Midland University FREMONT, NEBRASKA

Muhlenberg College ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Newberry College NEWBERRY, SOUTH CAROLINA

Pacific Lutheran University TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Roanoke College SALEM, VIRGINIA

St. Olaf College NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA

Susquehanna University SELINGROVE, PENNSYLVANIA

Texas Lutheran University SEGUIN, TEXAS

Thiel College GREENVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

Wagner College STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

Wartburg College WAVERLY, IOWA

Wittenberg University SPRINGFIELD, OHIO



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.