

Valparaiso University

ValpoScholar

---

The Cresset (archived issues)

---

9-2008

## The Cresset (Vol. LXXII, No. 1, Michaelmas)

Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholar.valpo.edu/cresset\\_archive](https://scholar.valpo.edu/cresset_archive)



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

---

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Cresset (archived issues) by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at [scholar@valpo.edu](mailto:scholar@valpo.edu).

# THE CRESSET

*A review of literature, the arts, and public affairs*

Michaelmas 2008



A Seminar on Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century  
led by *Mark R. Schwehn*

Interviews with *Andrew Delbanco, Bruce Kimball, Francis Oakley  
Leon Kass, Amy Apfel Kass, Charles Foster, and Carol Geary Schneider*

Special Issue: *Fortieth Anniversary of Christ College*





# THE CRESSET

Valparaiso University, 1409 Chapel Drive, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383

Michaelmas  
September 2008  
Vol. LXXII, No. 1  
ISSN (0011-1198)

## **Publisher**

*Mark A. Heckler*

## **Editor**

*James Paul Old*

## **Poetry Editor**

*John Ruff*

## **Art Editor**

*Greg Hertzlieb*

## **Copy Editor**

*Sally Messner*

## **Assistant Editor**

*Amanda Florio*

## **Office Manager**

*Emily Jones*

## **General Advisory Board**

*Marcia Bunge*

*John Feaster*

*Michelle Janssen*

*Fred Niedner*

*John Steven Paul*

*Mel Piehl*

*Mark Schwehn*

*Al Trost*

## **Editorial Advisory Board**

*Scott Huelin*

*Kathleen Kostel*

*Gilbert Meilaender*

*David Morgan*

*Andrew Murphy*

*David M. Owens*

*Richard Stith*

*Nelly van Doorn-Harder*

*David Weber*

*Brent Whitefield*

*Stan Zygmunt*

**THE CRESSET** is published five times during the academic year (September through June) by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for informed opinion about literature, the arts, and public affairs. The views presented are not thereby endorsed by Valparaiso University nor are they intended to represent the views of the faculty and staff of the university. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor, and authors who wish their manuscripts to be returned should include a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage. The Book Review Index and the American Humanities Index list Cresset reviews. Periodicals postage is paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Entire contents copyrighted 2007 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383-9998, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden.

Sergio Gomez (b. 1970). *The Nest of Freedom*, 1997. Acrylic and felt pen on paper, 52 1/2 x 42 inches. Purchased by Mark R. Schwehn for the Christ College Campus Art Collection, Brauer Museum of Art, 2000.12.

**Subscriptions:** Regular subscription rates: \$20.00 per year; Student/Senior subscription rates: \$10.00 per year; single copy: \$5.00. International subscriptions add \$8.00. Subscribe online at [www.valpo.edu/cresset](http://www.valpo.edu/cresset).

**Letters to the Editor:** Readers are encouraged to address the Editor and staff at [cresset@valpo.edu](mailto:cresset@valpo.edu). Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity.

Postmaster send address changes to *The Cresset*, Huegli Hall, Valparaiso University, 1409 Chapel Drive, Valparaiso, IN 46383-9998.

# in this issue

## *in luce tua*

Forty Years of Christ College

James Paul Old 4

## *essays*

Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century

Mark Schwehn 5

The State of Liberal Education

Andrew Delbanco 6

Religion, Liberal Education, and Professional Studies

Bruce Kimball 13

Charles Foster 17

Carol Geary Schneider 23

Athens, Jerusalem, and Modern Science

Leon Kass and Amy Apfel Kass 27

Francis Oakley 30

The Beginnings of Christ College

Richard Baepler 34

## *public affairs*

*rereading old books*: The Real Deal?

Harold K. Bush Jr. 43

*nation*: My Favorite Illusions

Neil Elliott 50

*law*: Precedent and Uncertainty

James Brand 53

## *literature and the arts*

*film*: Law, Grace, and Guns

Charles Andrews 56

*fiction*: When "Just the Facts" is Not Enough

Susan Bruxvoort Lipscomb 60

*music*: Knowing Diddley

J. D. Buhl 63

## *religion*

*pulpit and pew*: Cubits and Begats

Paul Koch 65

*being lutheran*: Learning to Speak

Andrew Fields 68

## *books*

Robert Jewett's *Mission and Menace: Four Centuries of American Religious Zeal*

Joe Creech 71

David F. Ford's *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*

Scott Huelin 73

## *verse*

Following

Steven Schroeder 52

In Socrates' Country

Dorothea Kewley 55

Watcher

Vincent Wixon 59

Apollo at the Lute

James Owens 67

## *on the cover, reviewers, and poets*

75



## Forty Years of Christ College

**F**ORTY YEARS AGO, VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY BEGAN a promising experiment in undergraduate education. In 1961, Valparaiso had created its first honors program, Directed Studies. Six years later, that program was succeeded by a more ambitious, free-standing honors college, Christ College, which has proved to be a remarkable success. Over the next forty years, Christ College's leaders, faculty, and students worked together to establish an innovative curriculum and create a vibrant community that honors learning, faith, and social engagement.

From the very beginning, Christ College and *The Cresset* have enjoyed a close relationship. The motivating vision for Christ College came from our founder O. P. Kretzmann. *Cresset* editors Jaroslav Pelikan, John Strietelmeier, and Richard Lee played key roles in imagining and planning the college, and Lee served as a longtime member of its faculty. Year after year, CC faculty members and alumni contributed countless essays, columns, poems, and reviews to our pages. And CC students often serve as assistant editors and office managers for the journal. It is only fitting for *The Cresset* to take advantage of the occasion by offering the current issue as a commemoration of Christ College's fortieth anniversary.

Three features of this issue figure especially in our commemoration. The first is the fascinating set of interviews conducted by former CC Dean Mark Schwehn collected together under the heading, "Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century." Schwehn leads an important discussion with seven leading scholars of higher education in the United States. The interviews were conducted while each scholar was visiting campus to participate in a faculty seminar on liberal education.

Second, Christ College's founding dean, Richard Baepler, describes "The Beginnings of Christ College" through the eyes of someone who not only was there to see it happen but who also played an important role in creating the college that exists

today. Baepler starts from the program's early days as a Directed Studies program, similar to those at many other schools, and then chronicles its development into the unique, comprehensive honors college that exists today.

Finally, among the columnists and reviewers in the current issue, readers will find an unusually large Christ College contingent. Among this issue's columnists are four CC alumni, including Charles Andrews (Film), Paul Koch (Pulpit and Pew), Andrew Fields (Being Lutheran), and James Brandt (Law). Two current faculty members, Profs. Joe Creech and Scott Huelin, have contributed book reviews. Additionally, a poem by CC graduate Steven Schroeder appears in the issue. These contributions span topics from the arts, to religion, and public affairs, and in this breadth the authors give testament to Christ College's success in its mission to inspire the love of learning and enrich Christian moral and intellectual life.

Many thanks are due to everyone who made this issue possible: including the visiting scholars to the faculty seminar who graciously agreed to be interviewed, to Prof. Schwehn who conducted and edited the interviews, and to all of the other contributors to the issue. All of us who enjoy reading the interviews owe thanks to recent CC graduate Robert Pampel who, as Schwehn's research assistant, put in hours of work transcribing them. Additionally, Christ College has partially underwritten publication of this issue.

Finally, thanks must be said to one last CC graduate, Joshua Messner, who for many years has acted as a sort of unofficial editor-at-large of *The Cresset*. After many years of invaluable (and largely volunteer) service to the journal, he has decided that the time has come to leave the "official" editors to fend for themselves. He will be sorely missed. ♣

—JPO



# Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century

*Mark R. Schwehn*

**D**URING THE 2007–08 ACADEMIC YEAR, Christ College, the honors college of Valparaiso University, as part of its fortieth anniversary celebration, sponsored a university-wide faculty seminar on “Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century.” Mindful of Valparaiso’s own character as a Lutheran comprehensive university, the readings and ideas engaged within the seminar focused not only upon liberal education itself but also upon contemporary questions about the relationship between liberal education and professional studies and questions about the relationships between liberal learning and religion. In order to explore these matters at the highest and best level of the current conversation, the seminar invited six distinguished scholars and academic leaders to the Valparaiso University campus to discuss their own writing and thinking on these very complicated and timely questions.

The six scholars who met with the seminar were:

**Andrew Delbanco**, the Julian Clarence Levi Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University;

**Bruce A. Kimball**, Director of the School of Educational Policy and Leadership at Ohio State University;

**Charles Foster**, Senior Scholar, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching;

**Carol Geary Schneider**, President, Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U);

**Leon Kass**, former Chair of the President’s Council on Bioethics and the Addie Clark Harding Professor in the College and the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, along with **Amy Apfel Kass**, who has written about American higher education and who participated in the seminar during her husband’s visit; and

**Francis Oakley**, the Edward Dorr Griffin Professor of the History of Ideas Emeritus and President Emeritus, Williams College.

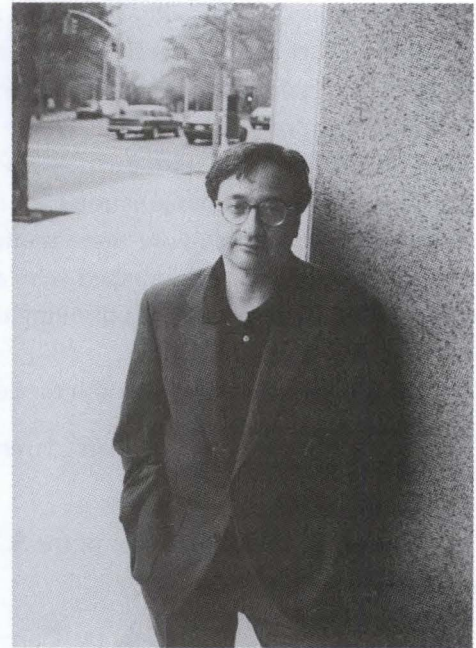
Seminar participants read various essays and portions of books written by the visiting scholars who then spent an afternoon discussing the issues and ideas in their writings. In addition, each of the six graciously agreed to be interviewed while on campus about the major concerns of the seminar and about some of the personal and cultural concerns that provided the background for their writings. The substance of what follows is taken directly from transcriptions of those interviews. In the case of Carol Geary Schneider, the comments were drawn from transcripts of the seminar discussion itself. †



# The State of Liberal Education

## An Interview with Andrew Delbanco

**N**O PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL IN AMERICA IS BETTER PLACED OR prepared to discuss the present state of liberal education and, beyond that, the modern university, than Professor Andrew Delbanco, named by *Time* magazine in 2001 as “America’s Best Social Critic.” An outstanding literary critic as well, and professor of humanities at Columbia University, he is very much in the Columbian tradition of Lionel Trilling. In addition to his many critical and interpretative works like *Required Reading: Why the American Classics Matter Now*; *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope*; *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*; and most recently my own favorite, *Melville: His World and Work*, Delbanco has written a formidable and widely influential series of essays on the state of higher education in the United States. He has especially focused upon how the material conditions and the social and political priorities of colleges and universities have shaped what and how students learn. And he has studied very carefully the growing gap between rich and poor and the problem of equal access to education. Currently, Delbanco is working on a book to be published by Princeton University Press, entitled *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*.



In an effort to learn about his own views of liberal education, I invited him to comment upon the present condition of the two distinct but related strains of liberal education as Bruce Kimball, another visiting scholar to the faculty seminar, has described them: the philosophical or critical thinking strain and the oratorical or “preparation for citizenship” strain.

**Mark Schwehn:** After he develops the distinction between the philosophical and the oratorical strains of liberal education in his book *Orators and Philosophers* (Columbia University, 1986), Bruce Kimball argues that if you go through the whole history of liberal education you frequently find some kind of synthesis of the two, as in most of today’s college catalogues. They emphasize on the one hand character, citizenship, and service to society (orators) and on the other hand cultivation of the powers of the mind in order to be able to engage in self-critical reflection (philosophers). I mention all of this as background to my question, because I gather from your writing that of those two strains, given that we’re thinking about liberal education in a liberal

democracy, you would tilt a bit toward the oratorical tradition, toward formation and citizenship. If I remember correctly, in one of your essays, you argue that the critical thinking discourse, even as former Harvard President Derek Bok uses it in his recent book (*Universities in the Marketplace*, Princeton University, 2004), has been appropriated to a kind of problem-solving, highly technical mentality, so that it’s too easily co-opted by those forces in the university that want to see purely instrumental reasons to educate. Is that a right reading of your thought on this?

**Andrew Delbanco:** The operative term really is synthesis or at least the aspiration to achieve some



kind of synthesis. If you scan some of the recent writings on the state of liberal education in the United States, you'll find, I think, a rising call for something like the former idea; that is, the philosophical, introspective cultivation of the powers of the mind. One of the books I was responding to in that piece you alluded to is by Donald Levine from the University of Chicago, *The Powers of the Mind: The Reinvention of Liberal Learning in America* (University of Chicago, 2007). One associates that kind of education, for which I have the highest regard, with a kind of willed withdrawal from the world and with contemplation in a community certainly, but a community committed to *collective* contemplation, operating with ancient texts at the center of the discourse (at least for starters) and compelling, inviting, encouraging young people to devote their attention to age-old questions. That's a very appealing model of what an educational community should be all about and I'm much committed to it. It's more or less what I try to do in my own teaching, though in part because of my provincialism and in part because of my ignorance, I mainly use texts from an English language tradition as it has evolved in America over the last three or four hundred years, which by now is a pretty rich tradition too. I think also of a recent book by Anthony Kronman (*Education's End*, Yale University, 2007), the former dean of the Yale Law School who has stepped out of his former role as a legal scholar and is now teaching in the Directed Studies Program at Yale, which is a Great Books program—different from ours at Columbia and the one at Chicago because it's purely voluntary. Students apply for it, and something like ten percent of the Yale undergraduates participate in it. According to Kronman, interest is growing. Anyway, in that kind of context, the first model to which you refer is the dominant one. I think, however, that most versions of that model with which I'm familiar imply that the cultivation of the individual mind also has a social good as one of its aims—not just the value of individual cultivation, the development of the ability to enjoy life more fully, more richly, and to contemplate the questions that we all face as we go through life.

The second (the oratorical tradition or the emphasis on preparation for citizenship) I think is in a severely bad way right now in America's colleges and universities. In one of the pieces I wrote, I

quote Derek Bok, who says in one of his books that “faculties currently display scant interest in preparing undergraduates to be democratic citizens” (*Universities in the Marketplace*). I found this statement really startling, and even more startling for the fact that he puts it in a footnote, as if everyone knows it's true and he's just mentioning it along the way as a matter of common knowledge. You can be sure that faculty who show scant interest in preparing students for citizenship show even scant interest in preparing students to be introspective and reflective human beings along the lines that we were just discussing. So the question arises, if Bok's statement is true (which I think it all too often is), what, exactly, are faculties interested in? And we all know the answers to those questions. I'm wary of slipping into a sort of Manichean discourse—you know, “you and I are good people because we care about these things and our colleagues are bad people because they're doing something else.” It's not like that. But the incentive systems within our universities and increasingly our colleges, the tone of the whole culture, and indeed the appetite of the students whom we're encouraged to think of more and more as consumers—all of that pushes in a direction that goes against both of these two ideals, which I take it you would agree, have always been interconnected.

**MS:** Yes, and Kimball himself argues that the two are and have been interlaced and often complementary even though they are based upon premises about human nature and the nature of the good life that cannot be wholly reconciled.

**AD:** Even so, I would think we are not talking about two different things. We're talking about maybe two different emphases. But those two emphases are subordinate and increasingly minor in, at least, the university world that I'm most closely familiar with, which is more and more dominated by a utilitarian idea of education and more and more concerned with rankings in the consumer surveys. I guess another text one might bring into the discussion, which I'm sure most educators are familiar with, is Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University*. Newman's definition of liberal learning has to do with the notion that knowledge (from the perspective of the liberal ideal) is its own end—knowledge



for its own sake. But Newman's ideal—even though most institutions still pay lip service to it—occupies a smaller and smaller place, and is being crowded out by the putatively practical imperatives of modern society. Newman was writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, when England led the way towards industrialization and was already pretty far along that path compared to everybody else. The functions that citizens of an industrial and now post-industrial society have to perform are increasingly specialized. The requisite skills require years of training and rehearsal and testing—all the things that we do through schooling—and become more and more necessary for the purpose of putting bread on the table. So the educational institution that exists in such a society and that says, “wait a minute, for  $x$  number of years with young people, we're going to put our emphasis on knowledge for its own sake, and we're not going to acknowledge the utilitarian imperative,” that institution seems to be announcing its resistance to and withdrawal from the actual world in which we find ourselves living.

There are some institutions that do this proudly—St. John's College, my own college, Columbia College, to some degree, because we say that for the first two years of college, most of what the student must do is going to be a sort of self-cultivation through encounters with the Western classics. The institution that says this raises a lot of questions such as, “for whom is this possible?” As many students have said to me when they read Newman, “this is an idea that seems possible only for the leisured classes.” I mean, if you're not worried about how you're going to make a living after college, it's fine to spend four years improving your Latin and Greek. And, after all, when Latin and Greek were at the center of the curriculum in our venerable institutions in this country, the students attending those institutions were members of

the privileged class almost exclusively, and pretty much knew their pathway was charted out, and for whom there was actually a utilitarian value to the Latin and Greek, because it served as a class marker—something they carried with them into the social world for which they were preparing themselves. I'm merely trying to gesture toward some of the obstacles that lie in the way for those of us who do still believe that the place for liberal education in Newman's sense is still critically important. And we're all trying to find ways to keep it alive.

*Human beings are communitarian creatures, and they are introspective creatures. They've been trying to figure out why they've been dropped into this world ever since they developed consciousness, as far as we can tell. The appetite that liberal education seeks to meet is not going to go away.*

**MS:** Absolutely. I think that it's kind of a miracle that Newman's book still remains so much alive and is still quoted favorably by educators, given its own context and given that most of them wouldn't recognize the kind of context that Newman presumed in order to articulate that vision. For instance, Newman fervently believed that the university should provide a kind of *encyclopaideia* or a “circle of learning” for all students that encompassed all of the various studies and disciplines as they complemented, corrected, and enlarged one

another. And it always occurs to the reader, this is great that you've put together in one place and have jostling about all of these different approaches, but finally where does the fully orbed view take place? Just through a kind of osmosis? This is actually something like what Newman thought, because he was envisioning the collegiate system where you go back after a day of study to your college, and you have dinner with people in history, in English, in physics, in many fields of study. The job of integration really gets done over meals. I think people reading him often don't understand how vitally important that vision of the collegiate system (which Newman had in his bones) was to his argument. We have a whole different set of social formations here in this country within which edu-



cation is done in our remarkably variegated and plural system. We therefore have to think about these questions anew, connecting them up (as you are doing in your writing) to material conditions and the political and social priorities of universities and colleges.

**AD:** I think that is a very good point. I was saying to some of my students the other day (in connection with Newman) that he is basically talking about an English idea. Maybe it has its roots in the school of Athens, or some other ancient precedent, but the idea of the residential college (which, of course, for many centuries was meant for a small number of aristocratic men who gathered together to train for imperial leadership) really caught on in the United States more than anywhere else in the West. I was reading the other day a document by Cotton Mather from the early eighteenth century where he remarks that at universities on the continent students live around town in rooming houses and the like, but here in America, in this college we've just started (Harvard already had been going for fifty or sixty years) we believe that students should live "collegiately." Time has shown that organizing undergraduate education this way is extremely expensive. Only a very small number of institutions have really tried to replicate the Oxford/Cambridge system in all their features—resident tutors, a separate library for each relatively small cohort of students, a dining hall, etc.—but we still have a thriving and very diverse number in this country of residential liberal arts colleges that are basically modeled on the Oxbridge idea, which implies that students have a great deal to learn from one another as well as from their books and their teachers. We all know the financial pressures they're under and the struggles they're engaged in to survive, but the idea of collegiate education still has great power. This gives us another way of thinking about the question of liberal education—how to preserve it or how to adapt it. There are some people who believe that it can be replicated or approximated through the internet. Students in some of my courses now, my teaching assistants who are adept with technology, create discussions groups online, so that presumably my students are talking to each other about common issues online even when they're

not sitting in the same classroom together. I'm a little dubious about how well that works, but that may just be pure old fogeyism on my part.

**MS:** I'm a little dubious about that too. With respect to the liberal arts college in this country, however, some experts are optimistic. For example, Frank Oakley in his book *Community of Learning* (Oxford University, 1992), is quite sanguine finally, because what makes him so much a lover of American higher education is its pluralistic character, the fact that it's *not* highly centralized, and the fact that we therefore have different centers of vitality at different times, and that when the system as a whole gets worrisome, some enterprising group of educators in different institutions will introduce new things and these will filter out and so forth. So he would say liberal education is flourishing at liberal arts colleges. The other side of this is that it is conceivable to argue that the character of today's students is shifting radically, not least because we're having a lot of non-traditional returning students. You might argue that liberal education is flourishing more in extension programs like the University of Chicago's Great Books extension where you have adults coming back and reading the Great Books. Or consider the work of state humanities councils, which have all kinds of folks reading books outside of the university. Many of the conversations that take place under the auspices of these councils would pass muster as liberal education, so that what we might be looking at is not a decline of liberal education but a kind of renaissance of it. It's just that it has new social locations. Is this possible?

**AD:** That's a very good point, and I would add the proliferation of reading groups throughout the country, all of which speak to the point that there's a tremendous appetite for reading, thinking, and sharing of thoughts. After all, human beings are communitarian creatures, and they are introspective creatures. They've been trying to figure out why they've been dropped into this world ever since they developed consciousness, as far as we can tell. The appetite that liberal education seeks to meet is not going to go away. Just anecdotally I know all kinds of young people who've been prepared for careers by our most prestigious educational institutions who achieve the goal for which they've been



prepared and find themselves miserably unhappy and unfulfilled. So I think you make a good point. I don't have the statistics at my fingertips to be able to make the case. I know Frank is a congenital optimist and allergic to the kind of jeremiad view, and in this case I want to go along with him. But there is a place for a narrative of declension as well. I've always thought that narratives of declension are secretly optimistic—intended to be admonitory, to incite people to concern and upset and remedial action.

**MS:** I think you're quite right. That leads me to a follow-up that relates to Frank's sanguine views, which I don't altogether share either. We could still, even if we thought liberal education was flourishing outside of the academy in different places and even among non-traditional students within the academy, worry about what's happening to our young people, even if you take a strictly instrumental view of education. That is to say, you were talking earlier about skills and the need for highly technical skills to flourish in the society we have today. True enough. On the other hand, it's also proverbial (and this is basically the American Association of Colleges and Universities' take on this) that people are going to change jobs three, four, five, six, seven, eight times, and that most of the jobs people are going to go into don't yet exist. Who knew what a *webmaster* was fifteen years ago? So that therefore, in a kind of curious way, the more specialized and fluid a society is, and the more the velocity of history increases, the more you need basically the capacities to learn how to learn, to have that kind of creative resourcefulness and even practical wisdom, if you will, that are very near the heart of what a good liberal education can cultivate, rather than a set of technical skills that are fine today but may not be relevant tomorrow.

**AD:** That's all true. I feel more than once a day more or less fraudulent, because I myself am not liberally educated. I'm not liberally educated in the

old sense of having sound classical learning. I had a little bit. Just as I was beginning to get pretty good at Latin, I stopped it because I had passed an exam. It would have been much better for me if I had flunked that exam. And I'm not liberally educated in what I think should be the twenty-first-century sense of the term, either, because I know practically nothing about science. I guess what I do know is that I don't know, and maybe that's a step ahead of some people. My ignorance is largely my own fault, but it's partly also the fault of the institutions I attended. I mean, I went to Harvard College, and the science requirement that I had to satisfy was a joke. There's all this high-flown talk about meeting

our educational responsibilities at the fanciest places, but I don't know of a single one that has a serious general science requirement for undergraduates—although we have just started experimenting with one at Columbia. Some people make the argument, such as one I heard recently from a biologist at Brown, that science courses should not be required. He wants his course to be something that students take voluntarily and therefore attracts those who really want to learn. Maybe he's right—I personally prefer to teach

courses that are not required, so I don't have to contend with unwilling conscripts in my classes. Still, at Columbia, we have an experiment underway, a compulsory course called "Frontiers of Science," which is (at least temporarily) part of the required core curriculum.

What I'm getting at here is that surely if you take the second view, the instrumental view of education (and I take your point that the more versatile and adaptable you are, the better off you're going to be in this dynamic economy), some competence to travel in the conceptual universe of science is a desideratum if not a requirement. And we're not providing that competence very well for most undergraduates. My son (and this is not meant to be boastful because a lot of things about his performance as a student are not to be

*There's all this high-flown talk about meeting our educational responsibilities at the fanciest places, but I don't know of a single one that has a serious general science requirement for undergraduates.*



boasted about—as he would be the first to admit!) went to Harvard, and he knew he wanted to go to medical school, though he also discovered pretty quickly that he didn't want to do all the pre-med requirements while he was in college, so he actually finished that afterwards and managed to get a general education while in college. Anyway, he did a history major. And he took Michael Sandel's class on justice, among others, which helped him gain a general sense of how the world was put together in the past, and gave him some exposure to philosophical discourse, and yet by now he really knows a lot about biology, genetics, physics, computer science, even a certain amount of math and statistics. In that sense, he strikes me actually as one of the better-educated people I know. But he had to do it voluntarily or for an instrumental reason. He had to take those science courses so he could get himself into medical school. So this two cultures problem that has gotten totally out of control since C. P. Snow first described it is one that, as far as I can tell, our educational institutions are not addressing at all. We leave it up to our students to get themselves educated by instinct or accident or just plain luck.

**MS:** That's right. It may well be the key question that ought to be on the front burner of people who want to take careful thought about liberal education. Part of it, to get really to the roots of this quandary, would force us to face what happens to the character of science in the seventeenth century, such that it's simply invested in the questions of the how, not the why, and can't give an account from within its own vocabulary of the meaning of its own enterprise, which it once could, whatever you might think of medieval and ancient science. And so in an odd way, linking literary study rightly done and historical study rightly done with scientific study isn't like just taking three different subject matters with different purviews, but similar methods. It's yoking radically different modalities of thinking about that which you're thinking about. So a full incorporation of scientific study into a liberal education, something I think every reasonable educator would want, would create its own new problems. For example, you have said that among the deficiencies of the humanities from time to time has been their aping of the sciences, or wanting to

be more like the sciences, which is a whole problem that the social sciences faced in the earlier part of the century. People like Clifford Geertz and others have started to help us think our way out of that by now construing cultural anthropology, for example, as a kind of semiotics, or as he himself puts it, as "an interpretive science in search of meaning, not a positivistic one in search of laws." So he tries to relocate the social sciences in the neighborhood of the humanities. So now for the humanities to be trying to ape the sciences deepens this problematic, because then when you want to have somebody liberally educated you're really making it impossible for them to see life steadily and whole, because you've married things together that are at some deep level not marriageable.

**AD:** Well taken, but on the other hand, some of the most distinguished scientists I've met (I'm thinking of Eric Kandel, a neuroscientist at Columbia, or Steven Hyman, also a brain scientist and physician, who is the provost at Harvard) are people who have had extremely strong liberal educations. They work in the life sciences, but these are people who are able to put science together with what we call the humanities, and I'm sure we all know many people in the sciences who have a highly developed aesthetic sensibility—who also are musicians, artists, readers.

**MS:** Mathematicians, too.

**AD:** Mathematicians maybe more than anyone. It's often remarked how many good scientists are musicians. So, you're quite right. Science doesn't pose or begin to answer the "why" questions, but it does have an aesthetic dimension. One of the things a good literary critic is supposed to do is look at the technical structure of works of art. That's not an altogether different enterprise from what the scientist does. So there are areas of marriageability between the two enterprises I think. And then to go back to the instrumental, surely because of the power of science, and the immense intellectual success of modern science, it has put into the hands of human beings the power to transform the natural world in ways that could never have been dreamt of even seventy-five years ago. We're all beginning slowly to wake up to this reality, whether it's nuclear proliferation, or the degradation of the



environment, or the more subtle (and in many ways perhaps positive) changes in the rhythm of life that technologies bring with them. Surely, we need to have thoughtful, educated people thinking about these consequences of science.

**MS:** I couldn't agree more. And if I thought that the great push in our culture right now for scientific literacy were driven by either the sense that in order to be a responsible citizen, you've got to be able to understand science, since most of the decisions you are going to face involve that basic literacy or by the sense that in order to really have a liberal education you need to know something about the sciences, I would be deliriously happy. But I fear that what is in fact driving the renewed quest for scientific literacy is, "we're behind the Chinese, we're soon going to be behind the Germans." If that's the driver, you can bet that's going to have a deep effect on how science is taught, how it's understood. So it's the right end but the wrong motive.

**AD:** I agree. That's where educational leadership comes in. I see my role (because I have access to some public forums that enable me to amplify my voice) as kind of a gadfly to the leadership of our educational institutions. Somebody needs to be saying, "wait a minute," as in this most recent example. Everybody's talking about globalization and competition and so on, but where are the educational leaders saying that we need to provide an integrated education? My president (like the president of virtually every institution) is talking constantly about how we are going to get more international students. All the schools with more money, and I'm sure practically every school that can afford any degree of innovation, are thinking about getting bigger. They're thinking about getting bigger so that they can stay loyal to their present constituencies—their alumni, their athletic rooters, the local community from whom they draw students—while at the same time adding students from abroad.

What is often not remarked is that many students from abroad want to come here precisely because we have this tradition of liberal education they don't have. I mean, the cab driver that took me to LaGuardia Airport was a nice guy from Morocco,

and he picked me up in front of the Columbia main gate, and he said, "do you have something to do with Columbia University?" I said "Yes," and he asked, "Can you tell me how I can find out about how I could continue my studies there?" He had a BA in finance from a university in Morocco, and he said to me, "You know, wow, Columbia University, I'd love to be able to study here." What is the prestige of Columbia University rooted in? It's rooted in its tradition of liberal education more than anything else. If this young man were to come to Columbia (or some other fine institution), he would experience something closer to the ideal of liberal education, very likely, than he got at his university in Morocco. Anyway, that would be my guess. What did I read somewhere? Not the Chinese Premier, but somebody high up in the Chinese government with responsibility for the education system, has been talking to Harvard and saying, we want to import and replicate the Harvard core curriculum (not knowing that there is none to speak of, that it's all smoke and mirrors). I guess he could pay airfare for Michael Sandel to come over and give some lectures about justice, but that's about where it begins and ends in the Harvard core curriculum, I'm afraid.

**MS:** It's kind of the revenge for our getting lead toys, you see. And then we import contaminated core curricula over there and ruin their educational system.

**AD:** Right (laughter). We're worried about China and India, but they recognize (probably for instrumental reasons, because they worry that their engineers are not creative enough and too lockstep-ish in their thinking) that there's something about the Western tradition of critical thinking and skepticism and individualism that's valuable. They want more of it, even as we're giving less of it to ourselves. It's a strange situation, isn't it? ♣

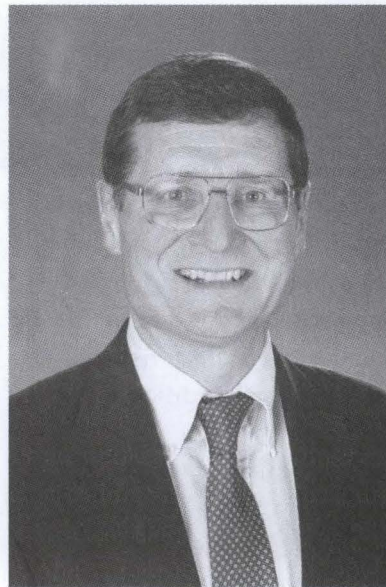
*Andrew Delbanco is the Julian Clarence Levi Professor in the Humanities in Columbia University.*



# Religion, Liberal Education, and Professional Studies

*An interview with Bruce Kimball, Charles Foster, and Carol Geary Schneider*

OF THE SIX VISITING SCHOLARS, THE ONE WHOSE WRITING PROBABLY HAS done the most to shape contemporary conversation about liberal education and its relationship to professional study is Professor Bruce Kimball, Director of the School of Educational Policy and Leadership at Ohio State University. In 1986, he wrote what was, and probably remains, the best book on liberal education over the course of the last quarter-century, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (Columbia University, 1986). He also has written a detailed history of the ideal of professionalism in America, entitled *The "True Professional Ideal" in America: A History* (Ohio State, 1992). When we talked together on 18 April 2008, I began by asking him to revisit the two sometimes competing, sometimes complementary strains that he had identified within the centuries-old tradition of liberal education, the philosophical or "critical thinking" strain that began with Athens and was embodied most memorably by Socrates, and the oratorical or "formation-for-citizenship" strain that was most memorably articulated by Cicero.



**Mark Schwehn:** At the end of *Orators and Philosophers*, you begin to develop the argument that, in fact, in the twentieth century the "philosophers" have triumphed over the "orators," given the ascendancy of the liberal free, or critical thinking, or knowledge-for-its-own-sake ideal, and that the oratorical tradition has been for decades somewhat at bay. Nonetheless, just after you published the book, a great deal of commotion arose that I'm sure you are aware of, some of it initiated by large educational associations like the American Association of Colleges and Universities in projects like "Education for Citizenship" or "Education for Democracy." Such programmatic initiatives are akin to some of the strains of discourse you identify rightly as going all the way back to Cicero and the oratorical tradition. Moreover, a number of philosophers—I am thinking of Charles Taylor in particular—at about the same time came to place a very high premium on articulacy (that is, the capacity to give voice to something) as being integrally connected to the quality of ideas and

ideals. So we have on the one hand philosophers like Taylor and a lot of other people who work in linguistics and philosophy who are returning us to an appreciation of something like Cicero's sense of the integral connection between thought and speech. On the other hand, we have all these initiatives for education for citizenship. I'm just wondering if those taken together have begun, in your judgment, to elevate a bit more the oratorical strain of the tradition of liberal education over where it was when you finished writing.

**Bruce Kimball:** Yes, if I had known more or been prescient I might have seen the beginnings of that trend. I think Richard Rorty called it "the rhetorical turn" of scholarship in general. So it's happening in philosophy to be sure, but it seems to be happening generally in all sorts of social studies and in humanities. There is an emphasis on rhetoric, on the way things are expressed. It goes hand in hand with some of these developments that you spoke about regarding the AAC&U and so forth. I would



interpret them as a broad movement toward the kind of oratorical tradition that's manifested in the liberal arts and in culture more generally. After I wrote *Orators and Philosophers*, I did a study for the College Board on pragmatism and liberal education. I then wrote a long essay, and twenty-five people commented on it (*The Condition of American Liberal Education: Pragmatism and a Changing Tradition*. New York, 1995). Most of them were quite critical. What I tried to say in that essay was that neo-pragmatism, exemplified in Rorty's work, which was very prominent at that point, was an idiom through which this oratorical movement was taking place. I think there is a lot of overlap between the philosophical school of pragmatism and some of the intellectual characteristics of the oratorical tradition.

**MS:** I take it that this renewal of the oratorical tradition is a development you welcome.

**BK:** Yes, it is. My argument in *Orators and Philosophers* was empirical, and I tried not to be advocating either side, although I've been interpreted as advocating the oratorical tradition. And, in a sense, I was, because I was trying to recover it. I felt it was lost. So, to that extent, I was advocating. But my sense really is that these two traditions will persevere indefinitely, because I do see the two strains as coherent, as I argue in the book, each having certain irreconcilable presuppositions about the nature of knowledge and virtue. They represent, I think, very deep aspects of being human, and liberal education oscillates between the two.

**MS:** I gather that you think that the oratorical tradition is in fact as old as the philosophical tradition, perhaps even older.

**BK:** I was struck when you were speaking about Charles Taylor's emphasis upon the importance of

articulacy. That is exactly how I try to characterize Isocrates. There was a term I saw one time—radical linguistic behaviorism. It's a psychological school of thought that argues that if you are trying to study what someone thinks, since you can never get inside their head, you just have to look at what they utter. I think that was Isocrates' and Cicero's viewpoint: you really can't make a distinction between thinking and speaking. Taylor is getting close, but he is still presuming that there is a distinction between the two. But once you make that distinction I think you tend to privilege the interior thought as purer.

Then, you are on Plato's road. If you go to the point where you can't separate the tongue and the brain, then the only way you can evaluate thinking is by what is articulated, what is spoken. In explaining this, I always say to teachers and professors who object to this point that if you ever have been at your desk counseling a student from your course, and the student is sitting there, saying, "I know what I want to say. I just can't say it," and if you've ever turned to them and said, "If you can't say

it, then you don't really know it," then you are at that point a Ciceronian. I think we've all been in that position.

**MS:** Absolutely. That's exactly where I think most of my colleagues would agree. Based upon similar experiences to the one you mention, they have a kind of Ciceronian view of the relationship between thought and speech. E. M. Forster once famously said, "I do not know what I think until I see what I have written." I think that's another way of putting it.

**BK:** I find that too in my own writing, that I think I understand something, and I think I know it, and I start writing and I get so frustrated because I can't express it exactly. Then I see I'm confronted with

*The oratorical and philosophical traditions will persevere because each has certain irreconcilable presuppositions about the nature of knowledge and virtue. They represent the very deep aspects of being human, and liberal education oscillates between the two.*



my own confusion on something that I thought I understand clearly, because I can't express it.

**MS:** Let me ask you another question, if you don't mind getting just a little autobiographical. I was struck by the fact that you did an MDiv at Harvard and worked with the late George MacRae, a New Testament scholar. In any event, I wonder to what extent you think that experience has shaped the way you think, both about liberal education and about (even more especially) professional study. What struck me about your book *The "True Professional Ideal" in America: A History* is that you spend a great deal of time sympathetically engaging the whole profession of divinity, all the way up to the twentieth century. You also take to task some of the students of professionalism who tend to ignore the clergy as any longer a learned profession worth their attention, and you have some great arguments to show how they are completely mistaken. So that would be one example of how your education in a divinity school shaped the book for the better. To what extent do *you* think your education in a divinity school shaped both of the books we're foregrounding here?

**BK:** That's interesting. I had never thought about that, but I think it's very insightful and true in two respects. One way is, I think that divinity training, because I think divinity is naturally, to some extent, a more oratorical profession, directed me at some subliminal level to be sensitive to the oratorical tradition and to see value in it. So that experience may very well have oriented me in my approach to the study of liberal education in that sense, and I had never put that together before. I think the same can be said for the professions book too. I was aware that I was in a sense recovering the theological profession in America when I was writing that book. In reading through the scholarship on the professions (written mostly by historians and sociologists), one of my litmus tests (rapid litmus tests, I should say, crude litmus tests) for whether a scholar was on point or not was whether he or she saw theology as a profession or not. If their scanner (whatever their scanner was) didn't pick up theology as a profession, I knew there was something wrong with the scanner, not only contemporarily, but also histori-

cally. That in turn led me to think about what was a proper methodology for studying the professions. I might point out that I actually (in both of those books) adopted what some have considered a curious methodology, which is that in looking at both topics historically, I am actually following the meaning of the central words historically: *liberal education*, or *profession*. Within the scholarship that had been written in both of those domains, people had pretty much ignored that procedure. My own historical method seemed straightforward to me, and perhaps somewhat banal, but it paid dividends. The point is that when you are in the seventeenth century, if you are asking what liberal education in the seventeenth century is, you have to mean *what the people in the seventeenth century called liberal education*. If you don't approach it that way, you are presupposing something that you define as liberal education or professions, and then you look at what people say about that. But you've introduced a presupposition about the definition.

**MS:** I am very sympathetic, being an historian myself, with the approach you take in both of those books. Many scholars who should know better simply project back onto the past their own current preoccupations and understandings.

**BK:** Of course, I suppose I was projecting back my concern for divinity and oratory.

**MS:** It's conceivable, except that you have substantial, even compelling, evidence for the claims that you make. Let me return once more, though from a different angle, to this question about your formation at the divinity school. Just to lay some of my cards on the table here, one of the worries I have in my own honors college—I shouldn't say worry, one of the consistent issues of exploration—is the whole relation between religion and liberal education. In particular, you show in your book how deeply imbedded liberal learning was within religious institutions for hundreds of years and how that imbeddedness gave to liberal learning a distinctive coloration for a millennium almost. I wonder whether or not some habits of reflection and some virtues like humility that were originally understood as parts of religious practice remain crucial for a complete understanding of texts like



those that have been honored by the oratorical tradition. It seems to me that for a religious tradition that has a whole set of sacred scriptures (where some texts are thought to be presumed wise before you, so to speak, deconstruct them), if you don't understand the text, the problem is with you, not with the text. I think so much of modernity has reversed that. The problem is probably with the text; therefore, our task is to deconstruct it. Many of our basic habits of interpretation would have been unthinkable within a religious tradition. So I guess my question is how essential do you think those collections of habits and a certain kind of piety and a certain kind of tradition of reading are as background for liberal education, particularly within the oratorical tradition?

**BK:** That's a very interesting question, Mark. One thing I notice, to go back to your asking me earlier about my divinity background and what influence that had on liberal education, and I said divinity is oratorical, so it sort of pointed me in that direction—I was thinking to myself, well, why is it oratorical? And the reason is exactly in the text. Law is the same. In writing the work on the history of liberal education, one of the things that pointed me to the professions was the fact that, thinking about orators and philosophers, I saw that in divinity there is the same relationship between preachers and theologians. In law, it's between the advocate and the jurist. So, these fundamental intellectual traditions both ramified into two fields. You don't see it so much in medicine, because it is a necessarily natural and scientific field, but it makes sense that the oratorical and philosophical traditions are felt in law and theology, because they are both text-based traditions. Broaching the question of how that's related to undergraduate liberal education today, I think your observation is very insightful that the study of divinity is related to liberal education or strengthens it because divinity does preserve the text. You can't take the text away. You can't totally deconstruct the text. That's just counter to the basis of the tradition. My dean at Rochester was a critical sociological theorist, and I remember him summing up Derrida's view as, when you take the text away, you have readers, and then you see what is really going on. I always have that picture

in mind of four people in the room discussing a text, and the text is removed, and then you see what they're bringing to it. That's insightful, but you can't take the text away in the traditions of reading in divinity and law. Within those professions, you're going to criticize the text, you're going to interpret it, but you can't take it away. As long as you have a religious tradition ancillary to, or forming, or strengthening a liberal education tradition, it keeps the text on the table. It keeps the text in the room. In that sense, a religious tradition or teachers informed by that tradition, respecting that tradition, would keep the text on the table and in the room. That's a very profound point and observation.

**MS:** Do you remember the moment in your own formation, either at Dartmouth, or later at Harvard, when you really decided you wanted to spend a lot of time thinking and writing about liberal education? What first interested you in that subject? What drew you to it?

**BK:** Actually, I came to liberal education through the question of what is liberal religion. I was brought up in a federated Protestant church in a small town in Massachusetts, which was predominantly Congregational. Then I went to college and (like so many people) fell away from the church, and then went to divinity school on one of those Rockefeller, trial-year fellowships. That was how I got to Harvard Divinity School and then discovered Unitarianism there. I didn't know anything about Unitarianism, which is often called euphemistically "liberal religion" (or that's how Unitarians referred to themselves). And I knew I had gotten (or was told I had gotten) liberal education at Dartmouth, and I didn't know what that was. So I had these two fuzzy ideas, liberal education and liberal religion, and I began during my first year to ask, well what are those things? How are they related? How are they related to liberalism? I went through Harvard with a foot in the Divinity School and a foot in the School of Education, and towards the end of my coursework in the Divinity School I was starting to think about writing a dissertation on the history and meaning of liberal education. And I was getting very confused because there was liberal religion, and there was liberal education, and



then there was liberalism. I was just trying to get some foothold.

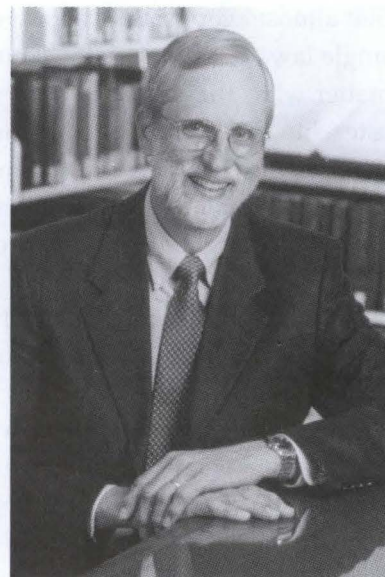
David Riesman had taken me under his wing, because he was teaching in the Harvard Education School, and he referred me to an assistant professor of government for some insight. I went to see him, and said, "I want to figure out what liberalism is, and I thought maybe you could point me to some books about liberalism." He was a young hot shot, and he was totally unimpressed by the fact that I was in the Education School and the Divinity School, and I remember him standing up in his office and saying, "So, you want to know what liberalism is?" and he went over to his bookshelf and he started taking down books and throwing them on his desk and saying, "Here's liberalism! Here's liberalism!" And he piled up over ten books, and I was just sitting there, kind of dumbfounded. He was virtually contemptuous, saying, in effect, "What are you doing in my office? You don't know anything about this." So I just took down the titles and said thank you very much, and walked out, kind of humiliated. I haven't thought about that in a long time.

The experience was very powerful, and it illustrates how I was wandering around Harvard for a long time trying to find somebody to study with. I was puzzled methodologically. Where to begin in order to grasp how political liberalism, liberal education, religious liberalism, and intellectual liberalism are related? It was just a total quagmire. I spent at least a year or two reading stuff and trying to gain some traction. I finished Harvard Divinity School in 1978 and then went to China on a Luce scholarship for a year. So that interrupted my graduate studies, and I spent that year—actually I was in China and then Japan—reading about Japanese religion. But in the back of my mind, I was trying to figure out how to gain a foothold on the study of liberalism. I was spinning my wheels for a long time.

Bruce A. Kimball is Director and Professor at the School of Educational Policy and Leadership at Ohio State University.

**A** FEW MONTHS BEFORE BRUCE KIMBALL TALKED ABOUT THE CONNECTIONS between his studies in the Harvard Divinity School and his later work on both the history of liberal education and the history of the professions in America, Dr. Charles Foster had explored the connections between liberal learning, professional studies, and divinity schools from a very different perspective. Since 2001, Foster had been a Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching where he directed a massive study that resulted in the publication of the widely discussed book, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (Jossey-Bass, 2005). That volume is part of a very ambitious "Carnegie Preparation of the Professions Project" that is studying the formation of lawyers, engineers, doctors, and nurses, as well as clergy.

Whereas Kimball thought about the relationship between professional study and liberal learning historically, primarily through the linkages between the oratorical strain of liberal education and the character of professional life as it evolved in the United States, Foster thought about similar linkages pedagogically by examining the way that professionals are now being formed in seminaries and divinity schools and then wondering about how those pedagogical processes resemble liberal education. He was especially well prepared to do this kind of comparative reflection, since in his many publications he has written on both teaching and congregational life, he had taught for thirteen years at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and he had served as a consultant to scores of institutions that are part of the Association of Theological Schools. We began by discussing the ways in which any given profession can be understood in terms of the "signature pedagogy" that characterizes the education of its practitioners.





**MS:** Where did the idea of a “signature pedagogy” come from? Was it the outcome of an inductive process, developed after you finished all your work? Or was it a kind of loose articulation of the kind of thing you were looking for and hoping to find, a sort of normative paradigm that you had in mind before you started?

**Charles Foster:** The way you’ve asked the question actually highlights one of the tensions we experienced in the study, because the notion of “a signature pedagogy” was one that Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation, had been exploring for some time. Its origins may be traced back to his experience as a cognitive psychologist helping Michigan State University in the establishment of its medical school. Lee was the educational consultant to that entire process. As he worked with MSU and as he worked with professional educators in professional schools in subsequent years, one of the things he noticed, particularly in medical and legal education, was something he came to call a “signature pedagogy.” His notion of a “signature pedagogy” was confirmed in the Carnegie study of legal education. In legal education, it is the case-study dialogue methodology that almost every single faculty member in every single law school across the country employs, no matter what the particular area of law he or she is teaching. This “signature pedagogy” dominates the teaching in law schools. In medical school, by way of contrast, faculty members engage student learning through *three* “signature pedagogies.” In the most common one, students follow the professional, the doctor, on his or her rounds while answering questions that lead to a diagnosis of a particular patient’s situation.

Lee anticipated that there would be a signature pedagogy in clergy education as well. He expected that it would center predominately on hermeneutics—homiletics. His hunch sounded reasonable to us, but as we began to interview faculty members, and as we were observing classes, we saw something more than the attention to interpretation, whether it be interpretation of texts, interpretation of what we increasingly came to call contexts, or interpretation of human situations and conditions. Something more was going on in these classes. While the notion of a

signature pedagogy seemed valuable, the data was saying to us that it had to be tweaked. We noted the frequency of faculty attention to interpretation or hermeneutics that Lee had assumed. But we also noticed considerable attention to what Bill Sullivan, the director of the Carnegie Project, has called an identity or normative apprenticeship. In other words, we were observing faculty members anticipating certain expectations or normative patterns for the character of their students as priests, rabbis, or pastors through their teaching. We saw faculty members attending to these expectations in highly cognitively oriented classes as in the way prayer functioned in a class on biblical exegesis or the way that an assignment would be directed. Students would be asked to think about interpreting a passage for a preaching occasion, so that it focused not only on the text and its meaning, but also on its significance for the setting in which that preaching event might occur. In those same classes, faculty members might also be paying attention to the challenges of performing those interpretations in a sermon or teaching event. So attention to professional practice would be included in the academic teaching of these faculty members. Students might teach a component of the class or preach a three or five minute sermon in the class. This latter emphasis grew out of a growing awareness during the 1960s and 1970s of the influence of social location on the meanings and relationships to be found in any given context. All this has meant that seminary educators often teach to help students understand both the content and agency of context as primary forces in their efforts to be agents of change or transformation in the contexts of their ministry practice.

We ended up identifying four pedagogies in theological education: interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. In some cases, a faculty member would emphasize a pedagogy of interpretation with some attention to the others. Another faculty member might attend to pedagogies of formation, with attention to others. Among the faculty members that had been identified for our study, in almost every case, most attended to all four. Each developed in a somewhat distinctive way an integrative framework through which he or she engaged each of these pedagogies. We ended up calling it a “sig-



nature pedagogical framework” through which they would weave a teaching practice (which is another concept that we develop in the book). Through that teaching practice, they modeled the interdependence of their expectations for student learning and then coached them into it.

**MS:** I had not known the deep background about Lee’s initial conception based on his observations of medical education and how that was then more than tweaked but considerably elaborated in some of your own efforts to interpret what you were seeing in the classroom.

**CF:** You’ll see in each of the Carnegie studies of professional education great attention to the notion of a signature pedagogy. In the law study, which is now out, the case-study method is discussed in detail. As we listened in to the conversations of our colleagues engaged in the engineering study, we heard them describing three signature pedagogies. If I remember correctly, one is analysis, one is design, and one is lab. Analysis pedagogies are heavily cognitive historically. Design pedagogies emphasize practice and identity, because this is the creative edge of the engineer’s work. Lab pedagogies emphasize practice, practice, practice.

**MS:** Let me see if I understand something correctly with respect to clergy education as distinct from the other professions; there is a kind of interesting problematic here. In every profession, except for clergy, the knowledge base does not itself include questions like, “How should I live before God?” “How shall I love God and neighbor?” By definition, of course, engineering and nursing and law wouldn’t have questions having to do with how we are to be before God. These ethical normative issues are built into the knowledge base of the clergy person, and they are even foregrounded

there. So when questions of formative apprenticeship arise within ministry, the student is obviously, on the one hand, being formed into the professional *clergy person*, but on the other hand being formed rightly as a *human being* or a child of God. Potentially these things could come into conflict (the professional identity more narrowly and more broadly the identity as a child of God) in a way that, for example, they sometimes do with law. If you are taught to think and be a lawyer all the time, you are going to have trouble as a parent perhaps, because, as King Lear sadly discovered, trying to

rule your family as though it were a kingdom can lead to catastrophe. Or to take another example, it seems to me that engineers may think by virtue of their professional formation that everything can be fixed, but alas in human life more broadly understood, one often has to come to grips with the fact that some things cannot be fixed and one has to learn how to live with that. I am using these as examples to suggest that in the other professions you could imagine some tensions between what it meant to be formed as a human being and what it meant to be formed as a lawyer, engineer, etc. More-

over, the knowledge base in those other professions does not foreground these very normative questions which show up again in the formative apprenticeship side of things. Am I right in seeing clergy as anomalous in those ways? Or is this overdrawn?

**CF:** The picture you have painted is exactly the agenda that prompted the study. One of the premises for the Carnegie Preparation of the Professions Project is that in the modern research university, the tension you are describing has become too pervasive in professional education. For example, critical ethical questions emerge in medical education as faculty members and students engage the relationship

*One of the premises for the Carnegie Preparation of the Professions Project is that in the modern research university the tension between being formed into a skilled and competent professional and being formed into a human being of overall moral virtue has become too pervasive.*



of their notions of wellbeing and health with some vision of society and how people are to function and thrive in society. The challenge medical educators experience when teaching students how to do the diagnostic work around cancer, for example, inevitably poses a whole series of ethical questions having to do with the relationship of the doctor not only to medical knowledge and skill but also to the person and life-world of the patient and the community from which the patient comes. These questions ultimately have to do with the identification of the medical student with the values and norms of the profession and practice of medicine. Similar ethical and normative issues can be found in legal education around the relationship of law and the notion of justice. Carnegie colleagues involved in the study of law schools often observed that a significant number of people enroll in law school because they want to address some justice issue. Although it is often drummed out of them during their education, students enter law school with some sense of what it is the profession can be about, what it can do, all rooted in some kind of ethical framework. They bring to their education some kind of ethical expectations, if not norms, about the contributions lawyers can make to society. The same thing can be said of engineers. The collapse of the bridge in Minneapolis, which now seems to be attributed to a design flaw, for example, highlights the relationship of technical skill and social responsibility in the education of engineering students. Normative questions for engineers originate in their quest to understand the ways in which any structure they design facilitates human interaction (movement, habitat, all the questions about the well-being of a community).

So the challenge of educating a student as a future doctor, lawyer, or engineer raises a whole series of questions that have to do with identity, formation, ethics, etc. In fact, next week I am participating in a conference at the University of St. Thomas that is looking at the formation of an ethical professional identity. I am representing obviously the theological/clergy world, but lawyers, engineers, doctors, etc., also will be present and speaking to that question of formation of the professional person in the midst of their professional education. So in a very real way, the Carnegie Foundation is challenging not the strengths of the research university, but its limitations.

**MS:** That's very interesting. It is almost as though what you have in the cognitive apprenticeship within clergy education is (among other things) the appropriation of the tradition having to do with what makes for the Christian life, what makes for the devout Jew, whatever, which can be drawn upon to inform the narrower question, what does it mean to be a good rabbi, priest, etc. By contrast, although the cognitive bases of the other professions may once have had built into them some of that kind of discourse, when those professions migrated from apprenticeship practices into the university, that got lost. Eventually you have (as I think Bill Sullivan observes) Talcott Parsons's description and analysis of the professions in the 1960s, such that it would be dubious by his standards that clergy should even count as a profession, because their knowledge base isn't strictly scientific and empirical.

**CF:** What Bill Sullivan as a social philosopher brings to the study is a kind of grassroots awareness that Talcott Parsons's argument, while having been embraced by the academic community, has not been embraced by the general public. So that one of the issues is how do you deal with the disconnect between expectations that exist within the public realm around the function of the university on the one hand and the role of the professions on the other.

**MS:** It seems to me that if we come to a point where our professions, partly as a consequence of all of your good work and the Carnegie Foundation's good work, come around to retrieving, recovering, and renewing a sense of their own professional formation that engages deeper questions about what makes for the good life—what makes for health, what makes for human flourishing, what makes for the good life for human kind—it will be progressively more and more difficult, if not even impossible, to distinguish between liberal and professional education.

**CF:** That would be my assumption.

**MS:** Which would really lead, I think, to some drastic reorganization of the university, not just the professional schools, of the way in which we



educate young people. All of these hallowed distinctions that go way back: distinctions between knowledge for its own sake and knowledge for the sake of something else, distinctions between useful and...

**CF:** But don't you think that transformation is occurring? Consider "service learning," which is now everywhere embedded within university curricula even though it did not exist thirty years ago. Service learning is alien to the kind of cognitive, rational approach that characterizes most classrooms. When I was serving on the Deans Council at Emory, one of the most fascinating curricular innovations taking place in the university at that time was in the undergraduate business school. Every student had to be involved in some kind of a practice-oriented learning project that had to be within a corporation and that had to have some sense of human wellbeing and the public good as a focus. That's really interesting—merging public good and profit motivations in the same thing. And every student in the program had to be a part of it. That is so far from where this business school was ten years before that.

**MS:** Yes, that's fascinating. So now talk a little bit more about this term which has come up already several times in our conversation. I want to understand a little more deeply the whole matter of formation. Sometimes people would say, if they, for example, are loosely speaking Aristotelian, that it would seem odd ever to distinguish the practical from the formative, in that the way you get to be a certain kind of human being for Aristotle is precisely practice. It is only by acting, not by study and abstract cognitive knowledge bases, that you become the kind of human being that is virtuous. So you may know all you want about virtue or

about what God requires (or whatever knowledge base you are talking about); such knowledge is not going to get you from here to the door when it comes to actually being virtuous. I say this by way of suggesting that in order to keep the practical and the formative discreet, or identity and practice discreet, in two different apprenticeships, there must be something more going on here than simply what Aristotle talks about (in effect, habituation through action). I don't know quite what you have in mind, but I'm just explaining the source of my puzzlement, in what's meant by formation.

*The challenge of educating a student as a future doctor, lawyer, or engineer raises a whole series of questions that have to do with identity, formation, and ethics. So in a very real way, the Carnegie Foundation is challenging not the strengths of the research university but its limitations.*

**CF:** To be candid, I would say that in that conversation (I mean, between the Platonists on one side and the Aristotelians on the other) the project simply finesses those issues by doing what good social science would do. It moves to ethnography. We clearly finesse the argument in the book because some programs of clergy formation in the spectrum of schools we visited would fall much more closely in line with the Aristotelian notion and other programs would be much more in tune with a

kind of Platonic notion of formation. In fact, one of the real struggles that we brought as theological educators to the conversation at the foundation was an awareness of the ambiguity surrounding the very notion of formation that you described, which for some was a new conversation. Still, they liked the category and rather precipitously appropriated it. So some of the kinds of issues that you're talking about simply have not been addressed up front and will have to be probably at some point. That will have to be the subject of a future conversation.

**MS:** This is all very interesting to me, especially its implications for liberal education. Bill Sullivan writes in the preface to *Educating Clergy*,



The recognition of the formative dimension of education is profoundly important for liberal arts and liberal education. In the face of the ubiquitous demands that education pay off in career and economic terms (that is, above all, it should be useful), advocates of the venerable traditions of liberal education have usually been torn between incompatible approaches. One is the idea of liberal education as the importing of some basic cultural literacy based on content thought indispensable to being an educated person in our time. The other rallying point has been the notion of inquiry, especially resident among those in scientific fields who have paid attention to these matters or the notion of critical thinking. Here the emphasis has been on form rather than content. Advocates of this direction have seized on the observable effects of liberal education. For many of its graduates it seems clear that it inculcates versatility of mind and intellectual strength. These qualities are useful, indeed, but they rarely come in neutral generic form.

When you come at the same idea of formation from the liberal education side—if you start to immerse yourself in Bruce Kimball’s work, for example—you attribute new significance to what he sees as a persistent tension within liberal education between two traditions. One is the philosophical and the other is the oratorical. What he means by the philosophical is, in effect, Athens and critical thinking, one of the two things that Bill Sullivan mentions. But what Kimball means by the oratorical is not the other thing Bill mentions, cultural literacy, but precisely formation, character, preparation for citizenship—which starts out in Cicero. So he thinks liberal education, from the beginning, has been concerned with formation. What Kimball’s history says, in effect, is that sometimes the philosophers have been dominant, and at other times, the oratorical tradition has been dominant. Most of the time, these two traditions have been held in a kind of productive

tension, as they still are today, readily observed in any college or university catalogue in the description of the College of Arts and Sciences. What’s almost completely disappeared from the academy, remaining here and there as a kind of quaint leftover, is the business about cultural literacy. The commotion in the aftermath of E. D. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy* and the growing emphasis upon multiculturalism have rendered any notion of some definitive content that would render everyone culturally literate completely untenable in the mind of most academics. So what the liberal arts are still left with (and I think will be indefinitely) is this kind of tension between the philosophical and oratorical traditions. I think furthermore that the growing conversation about formation is going to be the vocabulary that helps to forge new linkages between liberal education and professional study. However, the historical account of how this renewed emphasis upon formation came to be is going to look different coming at it from the professional side as distinct from the liberal arts side.

**CF:** I would say that your description of Kimball’s categories resonates with my own experience, resonates with my own commitment in many ways. Your own analysis provides a very clear picture of the situation in which both liberal and professional education find themselves. The challenge, it seems to me, is to specify how the values, norms and practices of each can continue to exist productively within the dominance of the contemporary research university. The drive to see knowledge as an objective reality in and of itself is very intense, despite the fact that we have also been deeply chastened when the practice of pure knowledge has led to serious negative social and political consequences. So it’s a time for creative energy on the part of both liberal and professional education.

Charles Foster is Emeritus Professor of Religious Education at Emory.



**T**HE CONVICTION THAT THERE ARE NEW AND EDUCATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT points of convergence between liberal learning and professional studies, a view shared by both Bruce Kimball and Chuck Foster among others, was also made manifest in “College Learning for the New Global Century,” a report from the National Leadership Council for a decade-long initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), called “Liberal Education and America’s Promise” (LEAP). That initiative, extending from 2005 through at least 2015, involves both public advocacy and campus action designed to engage students and the public with what really matters in a college education for the twenty-first century. Carol Geary Schneider who as the president of AAC&U led the LEAP initiative, visited the faculty seminar on 7 December 2007 and led a conversation about the recommendations in “College Learning for the New Global Century.” In response to a question from one of the seminar participants, she quoted from the council’s report in order to clarify what liberal education had come to mean for the LEAP initiative.



**Seminar Participant:** I noticed in the course of the conversation as well as in some of the exhibits within the report, such as the one entitled “Essential Learning Outcomes” [see page 24] that we haven’t used the words “liberal education” very much. We’ve sometimes used “general education.” Do you think liberal education is not a useful piece of nomenclature and that we ought to refer only to general education because it seems to be more easily understood by the general public and even among ourselves?

**Carol Geary Schneider:** I think that the academy should use the term “liberal education.” I think that we should take a deep breath and say that this is what we are providing. We are providing our students with a liberal and liberating education. The academy should claim, rather than abandon, its signature educational tradition and promote it as the best possible preparation for twenty-first century realities. If it had been left to me and my own views, the “Essential Learning Outcomes” would have been called “The Aims and Outcomes of Liberal Education.” The LEAP report was framed by a National Leadership Council which included many non-academics. They in particular advised AAC&U to use the phrase “essential learning outcomes” because—on seeing what the LEAP report recommends—people will agree that these outcomes are essential. They’ll be put off by the term “liberal,” council members insisted.

Do notice, however, that the body of the LEAP report does not eschew mention of “liberal education.” On the contrary, the report defines it in a bold, expansive way, reflecting accurately, we believe, what liberal education has come to be in the twenty-first century:

Reflecting the traditions of American higher education since the founding, the term “liberal education” headlines the kinds of learning needed for a free society and for the full development of human talent. Liberal education has always been this nation’s signature educational tradition, and this report builds on its core values: expanding horizons, building understanding of the wider world, honing analytical and communication skills, and fostering responsibilities beyond the self. However, in a deliberate break with the academic categories developed in the twentieth century, the LEAP National Leadership Council disputes the idea that liberal education is achieved only through studies in the arts and sciences disciplines. It also challenges the conventional view that liberal education is, by definition, “non-vocational.” The council defines liberal education for the twenty-first century as a comprehensive set of aims and outcomes that are essential for all students because they are important to



## THE ESSENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

### KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN CULTURES AND THE PHYSICAL AND NATURAL WORLD

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

**Focused** by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

### INTELLECTUAL AND PRACTICAL SKILLS, INCLUDING

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

### PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, INCLUDING

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

**Anchored** through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

### INTEGRATIVE LEARNING, INCLUDING

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

**Demonstrated** through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

Excerpted with permission from “College Learning for the New Global Century.”

© 2007 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

all fields of endeavor... The LEAP National Leadership Council recommends, therefore, that the essential aims and outcomes be emphasized across every field of study, whether the field is conventionally considered one of the arts and sciences disciplines or whether it is one of the professional and technical fields.

**SP:** Multiple aims and outcomes are fine, but what should a university most effectively do? I'm not

sure we are very good at some of these things. I have doubts about civic engagement or moral discernment. These are incredibly important human qualities. The question is what does the university effectively do? How effectively can it teach these things compared to emphasis on knowledge, critical thinking, and communication skills?

**CS:** I've had people from very elite institutions look at this list of outcomes and say our responsibility is the first half of this page. The knowledge, the skills—



that's it. Values, ethics, civic responsibility: these are good things, but they are not our things. But I think that is the question before us. Do we want to settle for a tradition in which we are teaching some version of intellectual, analytical, and communication skills, but not asking students to think through the ethical quandaries that come along with the uses of knowledge *in their own fields*. This is where I think even a good "general education" is not enough. I think you can go a lot further with probing the ethical problems for an engineer, e.g. tearing up a neighborhood to build a bridge, or someone in the health field, e.g. having to struggle with the way we ration health in our society, or for teachers, e.g. struggling with all the equity/ethics questions that are designed into our educational system funding and practices. Those questions are integral to the respective fields.

**SP:** Taking what you just said, if the university comes to the table and finds what you say are essential learning outcomes and a good teacher focuses only on the top of the list, implicitly you are saying that they are totally wrong. Because knowledge is never neutral and you cannot separate knowledge from value. If you assume that you can separate the first part of the list from the second part, you aren't doing your job at all, not only part of the job, but not at all. I think this is the challenge of the liberal arts institutions, to pass this on to the research universities. If faculty say they cannot afford the luxury of ethical reflection, they are not teaching their subjects properly.

**CS:** And this is where Bruce Kimball is going to enter your dialogue. Bruce basically is arguing that the philosophical or analytical tradition has dominated our concept of a good liberal arts education throughout the twentieth century, and now there is an effort to reclaim parts of the tradition that were very important up until the twentieth century because, of course, in the nineteenth and eighteenth century colleges all education included central attention to virtue and ethics. The culminating capstone course in the nineteenth century college was a course on moral theology that put in front of young Christian men the problems they would face as Christians in a troubled world. Not that I'm arguing we should go back to that particular version of the

tradition, but the point is that ethics and values were absolutely fundamental to the liberal arts tradition through most of its history. It is only in the twentieth century that we taught ourselves to privilege the analytical, to adopt the model of science and some of its assumptions about neutrality and to prize detached inquiry over values inquiry. Now, recognizing the limitations of that posture, we're struggling to figure out how to address civic and ethical questions in ways that are appropriate to our own time, and without moralizing or proselytizing.

**SP:** This is slightly from a different angle, and I want you to understand there's a little of devil's advocate in my comment. I'm not necessarily endorsing it. I recently had the painful duty to read the Spellings Commission Report, and it just struck me as good old-fashioned American anti-intellectualism right down to the core, just distilled straight without dilution. I just wonder how viable it is to say that we're going to really deliver a liberal education in terms of the multiple outcomes the LEAP report suggests to great masses of young Americans. Your other problem is that by definition faculties are elites and so, to the extent that you are trying to get them to think in these terms, vast numbers of them will resist. They will say, "I'm trained as a philosopher or an engineer, so why in the world would you spend so much on my education, and then have me become involved in taking kids into my classes that don't care about any of these things? I'll deal with those who already have committed to become engineers and I'll train them in that field. That's what I'm trained to be." You get this in liberal arts faculties too, and if anything they are even more resistant because they'll say, "Well, I'm trained as a literary critic and I'm fascinated by seventeenth-century versification, what does this have to do with me?"

**CS:** Where to begin? First of all let me say, whenever I do any of this, I say to myself, "You used to teach seventeenth-century religious history; where are you in all of this?" And I can answer that question. I want you to be aware that I loved my discipline—as most faculty do—and that's the issue you have to keep at the center of this. We need to discover the civic and ethical questions that are intrinsic in our disciplines; they certainly are there to be found. To go back to your question about how to



make the case for liberal education outcomes to a broader public, seven years ago I would have said, as you imply, that neither the public nor employers really value liberal education. I had gone through most of my career with the notion that there was the faculty side of things, which I had shared, and the employer view of things, about which I had (to say the least) a great deal of skepticism. When we released the AAC&U report *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (2002) which is the predecessor to LEAP, we got presidents around the country to invite trustees, business leaders, civic leaders (non-academics) to discussions on that report. There were about twenty-five discussions held around the country with about 2,500 people who came, and I went to about ten or twelve of them and listened. I was quite struck. Nobody was talking about liberal education, but I was hearing employers stand up and say exactly the opposite of what I thought they thought. Somebody said in the first one I went to, "What I don't want is a graduate of the Microsoft Certification Program because those people only know how to do things one way. Our company is innovating, we are changing the way we do things every day, and I need people who can run with us, who can anticipate the next question, who can solve problems, who can think outside the box."

And I heard that again and again and again at these dialogues, that we are in a fast race to change both our products and our processes, and we cannot have people who are locked into mental prisons, people who have one way to do things and that therefore get sidelined in our company. We need people with broad skills who will go on learning. I heard about how important diversity is for the workplace. This was right after Enron, so I heard a lot about how important ethics should be in the workplace. I got the insight that maybe, at least at the leadership level, there is more friendliness to the outcomes of a liberal education than I had thought.

When AAC&U formed the National Leadership Council for LEAP, we found people who were willing to think with us about the kind of college learning that is important to our society. And people on that council have said to me, as recently as yesterday, employers are getting desperate. They need to find educated talent, people who can

think and work at high levels, and they can't find (in graduates of American colleges and universities) the level of preparation they are looking for. And that is why they are going abroad. And they don't mean just technical skills; they're looking for global knowledge. They're looking for cross-cultural skills. Above all, the language that keeps coming out of the council is that they want people to work in cross-functional teams (interdisciplinary teams; cross-functional is their term, interdisciplinary would be our term), and they can't work with people who have only one mental model.

So, although non-academic vocabulary is different from ours when it comes to college learning, I think the changes in the economy are moving much faster than we realize in the academy and that has made an environment that is more interested in finding broad-based capital talent than used to be the case. The LEAP campaign is trying to capitalize on that. I gave you a summary of the LEAP-commissioned survey research on what employers seek in a college graduate. We asked employers whether or not they thought college graduates were well prepared for the economy. This is not a liberal arts question; this is an economy question. And the answer by 63 percent was no. Then respondents were asked what aspects of learning they wanted to see emphasized. The question was same emphasis, less emphasis, or more emphasis on each of these outcomes on this page I've given you. It shows you that by pretty high numbers (very high in some cases) employers would like to see colleges and universities sending them graduates with much broader knowledge, much higher levels of intellectual and practical skills (critical thinking, communication skills, problem-solving, etc), and better ability to work with diversity, global and ethical issues. They also want graduates to be able to apply their learning to real-world problems. In other words, although employers rarely use the term "liberal education," they do want us to send them graduates who have achieved the defining characteristics of a contemporary liberal education. ♣

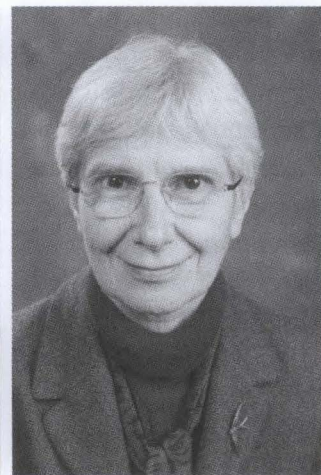
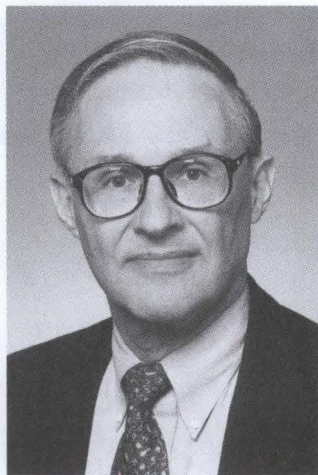
Carol Geary Schneider is president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.



# Athens, Jerusalem, and Modern Science

## *An interview with Leon Kass, Amy Apfel Kass, and Francis Oakley*

**T**HOSE WHO, LIKE ANDREW DELBANCO, ADVOCATE renewed efforts to bridge the gap between the “two cultures” of the sciences and the humanities as part of a larger endeavor to renew liberal education in our time, or those who, like Bruce Kimball, Chuck Foster, and Carol Schneider, note critical points of convergence and affiliation between professional study, liberal education, and religion, need sooner or later to reckon with certain fundamental questions. If we think of liberal education as a kind of quest for wisdom, can we or should we assume that the kind of wisdom sought through liberal learning is compatible with the kind



of wisdom sought in the great religious traditions of the world? And what about the relationship between the humanities and the sciences with respect to wisdom? Do we have simply a plurality of ideas and methods, or do we have ways of thinking and living and understanding that are deeply antithetical to one another, leading to an education that would be incoherent at best, destructively corrosive at worst?

Few contemporary thinkers have explored these questions more persistently and more deeply than Professor Leon Kass, the Addie Clark Harding Professor in the College and the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. In the introduction to his careful and deeply thoughtful *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (University of Chicago, 2006), he examines the relationship between the wisdom of Athens and the wisdom of Jerusalem as both of those traditions are related in turn to the project of modern science. Professor Kass earned his Bachelor of Science degree in biology with honors from the University of Chicago in 1958, his MD from the School of Medicine at the University of Chicago in 1962, and his PhD in biochemistry from Harvard University in 1967. After some years of research in molecular biology at the National Institutes of Health, Professor Kass served as Executive Secretary of the Committee on the Life Sciences and Social Policy of the National Research Council/National Academy of Sciences, whose report *Assessing Biomedical Technologies* provided one of the first overviews of the emerging moral and social questions posed by biomedical advance. On the basis of this early work, his extensive publications, and his outstanding teaching, he was named in 2002 as the Chair of the President’s Council on Bioethics. I talked with Professor Kass on 26 October 2007. His wife, Amy Apfel Kass who also teaches at the University of Chicago and who has written about both the ancient Greeks and about American higher education, was also part of the conversation.

**MS:** Let me begin by exploring a question that is near and dear to the hearts of many of those who live and teach at Valparaiso University where we sing in our campus hymn that we have “here on one fair campus Athens and Jerusalem.” You have in your writing sharply contrasted the wisdom of Athens and Jerusalem. Are they finally antitheti-

cal? Was Tertullian right that Athens and Jerusalem have nothing to say to one another, or are they in some deep sense compatible?

**Leon Kass:** I think they are ultimately not compatible, if you rightly distinguish the two points of departure: wonder seeking its replacement by knowledge,



which makes the perplexities go away, on the side of Athens, versus, on the side of Jerusalem, the fear or reverence for the Lord, which is only the beginning of wisdom but which is never superseded by a kind of full understanding or by comfort in the sufficiency of one's own powers. The spirit of these two points of departure is very different. Moreover, the wisdom of Jerusalem makes extraordinary demands on how you are to live. What begins with the fear and reverence of the Lord soon issues in a long list of commandments about how to live your life. By contrast, the pursuit of wisdom in the manner of Plato and Aristotle, following the model of Socrates, produces no obligations to community or family, and it seems that the highest kind of life is a private life of self-fulfillment through the pursuit of wisdom and reflection. That is a very different view of the good life from the one that is held up by the bible, i.e. the life in community in pursuit of justice, holiness, and love of the neighbor. There are famous examples of people who try to marry their own scriptures with philosophical wisdom (the writings of Thomas Aquinas, for example), but the assimilation goes only so far in those cases. Finally, these two wisdoms are at odds with one another; the demands they make upon us are not easily harmonized.

**Amy Apfel Kass:** Why would you say that the two are not compatible? Why not say that one leads to or supplements the other, especially given the way you formulate the differences. I have objections to the way you formulate the difference, but why wouldn't you use the language of supplementation?

**LK:** The statement "The unexamined life is not worth living" (the Socratic model, if you will) is very different from "it has been shown to you, o man, what the Lord doth require of you." Take another passage

in the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle dialectically approaches the question of what actually is the end for human life. He makes a plausible case that it is a real question, because there are lots of different ways in which people live their lives, and all of them aim at some good. What then might be *the* good for human beings? He poses the questions of what this good is and *of which of the sciences it is the object*. Now we comfortable, liberally educated, basically rationalist people said "that's right," but from a biblical point of view the answer to the question of what is the human good is not an

object of one of the human sciences, to be found by our own lights. In fact the bible in part begins by holding up a mirror in which we see the insufficiency of our intellect and the muteness of that upon which we exercise our mind (mainly the natural world and the world of our experience) for giving the proper instruction with respect to the human good. For years and years and years, I read that passage in Aristotle and used to say, "of course, it's an object of inquiry," but the way of the bible does not say that how to live your life is an object of inquiry.

It's true that you could deepen your understanding of what it is you were taught. Aristotle argues that once people have been well brought up, they can come to understand more deeply what virtue means. By analogy, people reared in a biblical way can come to understand what they've been taught much more deeply through the use of reason. Even so, there is something radically different between a view of life in which nothing is immune to critical examination and a view of life that makes demands in both truth and practice, which you don't regard as the fruits of an inquiry.

**MS:** I'm with Amy on this one. Let me just try to suggest some reasons why I think your account here

*The wisdom of Jerusalem makes extraordinary demands on how you are to live. What begins with the fear and reverence of the Lord soon issues in a long list of commandments about how to live your life. By contrast, the pursuit of wisdom in the manner of Plato and Aristotle, following the model of Socrates, produces no obligations to community or family.*



needs some further thought. For one thing, sometimes when you speak of Athens you speak of a certain spirit or manner of inquiry. Sometimes you act as though there is a single teaching. You just quoted “the unexamined life is not worth living.” When you treat Jerusalem you are perfectly willing to say that when we look at these texts there are a variety of teachings. How, for example, do we harmonize the first two creation narratives in *Genesis*? What do we make of the fact that the Noahic permission to eat meat departs from the vegetarian diet God prescribes in *Genesis* 1? I am inviting you to reflect upon the fact that just as sacred scriptures have a variety of teachings, so what we are calling the tradition of Athens has quite a range of teachings about how we are to live and who we are. There is no single motto or teaching within the tradition of Athens; moreover, there have been quarrels among the orators and the philosophers and many others from the beginning. Therefore, one can’t compare Athens and Jerusalem by suggesting that either one of the two traditions has one central teaching about these matters, as you’ve just done. That’s the first observation.

The second one is that I don’t know whether, for Athens, the removal of all perplexities is really the aim of inquiry. You are careful to say in your “Aims of Education” lecture that, unlike the technical disciplines that work on problems and want to solve them, those who are friends of liberal education see that they might be led through inquiry to a deeper appreciation for certain ambiguities and contradictions and learn to live with them rather than remove them. So in a sense I think that both Athens and Jerusalem arrive at and sometimes bow before ineffability or mystery and leave them there with some deeper sense of the mystery, or the ineffability, or the perplexity to be sure.

Finally, I think your contrast is a little too sharply drawn in this whole matter of a way of life. Pierre Hadot’s work on *Philosophy as a Way of Life* suggests that many ancient philosophers lived together in community and were very concerned about living out a certain way of life that had to do very much with a certain righteousness or a certain virtue.

**LK:** That is all welcome. You are right in pointing out that there is not a single philosophical teaching that I would call Athens. I would have to say that when I am thinking about Athens, I am really

thinking about Greek philosophy at its peak, not Homer or Sophocles, for example, where certain greater kinships might be found to biblical traditions. And I am not thinking of the Greek atomists. I am trying to think of those Greek philosophers in which some notions of God and good play a role and in which human life has teleological purpose, so one can at least put these two things in greater alignment with the biblical tradition. When I am thinking of Athens, I am mostly thinking of Plato and Aristotle. Even there, I am not sure I would say what is important about them is a finished teaching. I do not think either of them are systematic philosophers in a way in which Kant and Hegel are systematic philosophers. Philosophy seems to be a pursuit, a particular way of life, but a way of life that is also suggested as the best life that a human being can live. Insofar as human beings are capable of being happy, it is somehow in pursuit of wisdom as exemplified by Plato in the dialogues and explicitly argued for by Aristotle in the *Ethics*. So in addition to the substantive differences (and the differences are considerable), it does seem to me that the spirit of the pursuits are different from the spirit of those pursuits undertaken under the biblical dispensation. I am not suggesting that believing Christians and Jews have to have a lobotomy to think like this. That’s absurd.

**AK:** Why is it absurd given what you’re saying?

**LK:** Let me finish the thought then get back to your question. Take for example in Aristotle’s *Ethics* the treatment of the ethical virtues of courage and moderation in Book III, justice in Book V, and, in Book IV, the virtues of nobility beginning in liberality, finishing in wit. Then Aristotle has a wonderful little chapter on *aidos*. We can call it shame or awe. And Aristotle says that *aidos* is not a virtue; it is a useful passion, but no grown man should ever feel it, because he should never do anything to be ashamed of. When Aristotle says *aidos* is not a virtue, he is basically saying that piety is not a virtue, that there aren’t things before which we should stand in awe. That’s a very deep difference, though it is true that for Plato and Aristotle there is some kind of power in the world not of human making toward which we are oriented, which draws us away as the lover draws



the lover to imitate and come fully into being. But that highest thing in the world says not a peep about how you are supposed to live your life. The compatibility would be something like this: produce sound Christians and Jews and then let them adorn their lives with liberal education, but don't somehow expect liberal education and the spirit of Socrates or of Aristotle to somehow get us to what it is we get by being informed by biblical teachings.

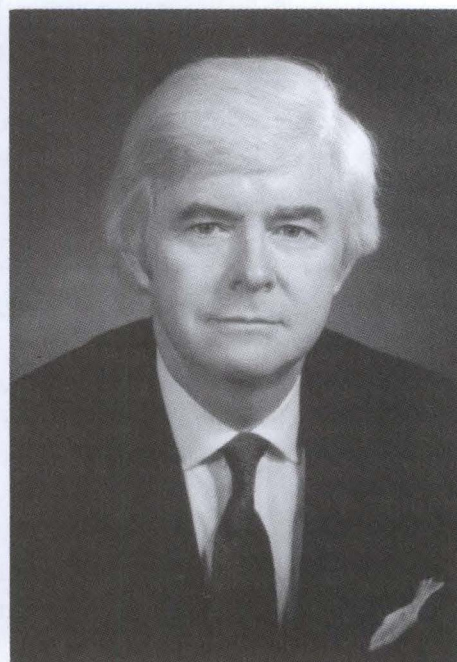
**MS:** Do you think that there is within Jerusalem (as you appropriate that tradition) a kind of argumentative spirit akin to the Athenian with respect to its own sacred texts.

**LK:** If you look really deeply into some of the sources, there is virtually no limit as to what can be raised for discussion, including various stories in which in one famous tale God says exultantly, "my people have defeated me." God is, in other words, taking pleasure not in rebellion but in the growth of human understanding. So there is that kind of spirit. I should say that I haven't by any means jumped ship on the subject of liberal education. Certainly in a secular university, given the purely utilitarian, vocationalist tendencies even in the universities that claim to be interested in liberal education, bringing people to awareness of their

ignorance and letting them see the deeper issues beneath opinions that they complacently hold and turning the soul around with good questions are marvelous aspirations in collegiate education. My reservations have to do with whether or not that kind of activity *by itself* can produce guidance for a good life. How does it contribute to good character, good citizenship? As a father who has sent daughters to college, I have acquired growing sympathy with Anytus in Plato's *Meno* who speaks in the name of something like the Athenian equivalent of the American Legion. He rightly worries over what people like the Sophists are doing to the younger generation. There is considerable difference between Socrates' kind of inquiry and the merely antinomian corrosiveness of the Sophists. Nevertheless, from the point of view of those ruling opinions without which no society is possible, both forms of inquiry are equally dangerous. In that sense, there is a certain subversive element in allowing the mind to ask questions about everything.

Leon R. Kass is the Hertog Fellow in Social Thought at the American Enterprise Institute. Amy Apfel Kass is a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute.

**A**FTER ELABORATING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ATHENS AND Jerusalem in *The Beginnings of Wisdom*, Professor Kass proceeded to suggest that though these differences were substantial, even irreconcilable, they were not as substantial as the differences between both of those traditions and the tradition of modern science since the seventeenth century. In September 2007, I asked Professor Frank Oakley, the Edward Dorr Griffin Professor of the History of Ideas Emeritus at Williams College and the President Emeritus of Williams College, to explore these same matters from his vantage point as a historian of the late Middle Ages. Professor Oakley is one of the few educators in America who has both exemplified the practice of the liberal arts in his chosen field of study and written about liberal education based upon his learning as an historian and his experience as a leader of one of our very best liberal arts colleges. While serving as President of Williams College, Oakley completed a book on liberal education and the liberal arts college in this country, *Community of Learning: The American College and the Liberal Arts Tradition* (Oxford University, 1992).





**MS:** Let me start by inviting you to reflect on a very broad subject that you've written about quite extensively both in your work as a historian and then a bit in your book on liberal education, namely the whole place of science in the liberal arts. As you may know, Leon Kass has written a book called *The Beginnings of Wisdom* in which he argues that really the Athens/Jerusalem tension/relationship has, in a way, been superseded since the seventeenth century by a three-cornered conversation (that is, Athens, Jerusalem, modern science). He also draws rather sharp contrasts between science as understood not only in Greece but also for most of the Middle Ages, and science as it developed in the wake of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. By contrast, your work, as I read it, goes to some lengths to show that there was a four-centuries-long period of preparation and incubation prior to 1700, so that there is not quite as radical a disruption when we come to the seventeenth century as other scholars think. Professor Kass has in mind, for instance, that after the seventeenth century, the thought that science is inquiring into the nature of things, or into the essences of things, or is able to give an account out of its own resources of the meaning of the cosmos drops out. This may help to explain why it seems progressively harder to bring together scientific inquiry and the humanities. I think many institutions have had experiences that would, in some loose kind of way, bear him out. Thus, though we speak of liberal education as including scientific learning, that has been harder to maintain since the modern period. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are both on the broader question of this notion of a three-cornered conversation and on the narrower one of its implications for liberal education.

**Frank Oakley:** Well, regarding the first part of your question, I'd want to link Jerusalem with modern science instead of placing them in opposition to one another. I do agree that after Newton the claims being made for science, using the term now in the modern way, were much more limited than they would have been earlier on. The link I see is with one tradition in the Middle Ages (one philosophical tradition), which also was much more limited in its reach and more empirically driven. The connection I see there is between the

rise of a particular tradition in scholastic philosophy, nominalism, and the theology emphasizing divine omnipotence, and the logical interconnection between the two. If you drop out that connection (because it was dropped out later) then what you are left with is a science that is beginning to stand on its results and to gain its credibility from predictive power in an empirical way.

But I am not really a historian of science. I got into these issues through a preoccupation with scholastic thinkers in general and with William of Ockham and his followers in particular and through a rather naïve, stunned realization as a graduate student when I read Perry Miller. I thought, "My golly, these puritans really are carrying forward part of that late medieval tradition," which seems obvious now, but it was all news to me. And then, following that, the person among the scientists whom I spent the most time on was Robert Boyle, the chemist, because his natural theology is very clear and all embracing. I'm so pleased to find that that view of things is catching on a bit among historians of science. I found when I first wrote about it (which was in 1961) that it was viewed as being slightly suspect or something. I had great difficulty placing an article on the topic. It ended up in *Church History*, which was not the best location for it. The article has been anthologized since and is still alive, basically. I think the field (or at least a part of the field) has come closer to where I was. So I see a complex balance between the Greek philosophical tradition concerned with essences and all the rest of it and what came later. The impact of the biblical intuition (I don't know quite what else to call the impact of biblical views in reshaping the philosophical tradition) was really quite profound. So much of the attention in the past was placed on the impact of Greek philosophical modes of thought on the shaping of Christian thinking/theology. But I am more interested in the other story, the impact of fundamentally biblical conceptions on the tradition that came from the Greeks. It works out very slowly across time.

The other issue I'm less clear about. I don't have anything very profound to say. When I talk about liberal arts, I mean arts and sciences. I don't like the distinctions. I prize the habits of mind that are tightly shaped to tease out empirically based results, though it is sometimes hard for people who spend



all of their time doing that to reach out and hold hands with those with humanistic dispositions. I don't think there's anything necessary about that separation. I think it is just that life is short and we learn what we are good at, and we pursue it, and that shapes our patterns of thinking. I was looking recently at that essay by Bruce Kimball, the piece on pragmatism, and he was quoting Dewey's sense that at all levels of education there is something similar going on. That appeals to me. That's not a very satisfactory take on the second part of your question. That's probably the best I can do.

**MS:** Another thing, I think, that convinces Professor Kass that the scientific revolution really complicates ideas of liberal learning and liberal education has to do with a move toward a purely instrumental rationality. According to Bacon, for example, one inquires for the sake of the relief of man's estate, thereby linking scientific knowledge to something beyond itself, which is more practical, instrumental, etc. This teaching about science, once unleashed, soon alters the discourse of liberal learning. Instead of knowledge for its own sake or inquiry that seeks simply a deeper understanding of nature, liberal learning (or at least the scientific part of it) threatens to be instead a project of mastery for ends extrinsic to the inquiry. If you slice all of this through Bacon and instrumental rationality, you can see Kass's point made in a different way.

**FO:** That helps me understand. I think that that account diminishes the contribution of science, which is broader and richer. But if you're pursuing the line that's pointed to the direction of the development (and very refined development) of instrumental, functional, means/ends rationality, then clearly there is a tension with humanistic concerns. That I see. I suppose it would make sense to go back to Bacon for that. I think, however, if you looked at the sixteenth/seventeenth century, and the Baconian bit was all that you had, then there wouldn't have been a scientific revolution.

**MS:** Let me ask you about some of your own bedrock convictions. It's interesting the way you end the book, *Community of Learning*, by noting that Alfred North Whitehead had shown, for reasons that are quite compelling, a certain suspicion of

some of the more ornate schemes that have been proposed to unify all of human knowledge. You nonetheless approve of Whitehead's saying that we may hope for a deeper harmonics between the world and the knower, that there's a sense in which the universe may well be congenial to powers that we possess. There is also some suggestion at the very end of your book that there may be some kind of deeper harmonics among the various domains of learning and the things that are the subjects of those inquiries. Is that a kind of Johannine "in the beginning was the Word" kind of conviction, or did it come from others among the Christian thinkers that you take up who had that kind of sense about the universe? What are the sources of that hope?

**FO:** Lord, I'm not sure I can answer the question. It reflects a sort of a hunger for that kind of coherence. That hunger is somewhat Catholic in its roots, and that means, in my case, that it stems probably from high school. By the time I went to the Pontifical Institute, I was a graduate student interested in the history of philosophy and in learning paleography and that sort of thing. By then, I probably had been formed in some sort of way. I feel very indebted to the Jesuits, even though they beat the Hell out of us at school. But there was a breadth in their teaching. We were all working for state examinations, which imposed certain limits, but the teaching went beyond that into a greater and more philosophical informing of history, a reaching out to more universal history, not confined to national synthesis. I read modern history at Oxford. It was very confining. It provided probably a terrific discipline, very empirically based. I had cold water poured on me for three years and that was probably very healthy, but I had been taught more generously at my school days to think more broadly and synthetically, and my mind tends to go that way. But I can't give you a theoretical reason for that. Although I think now you can combine history and philosophy at Oxford in some kind of joint degree, you couldn't then. I really wanted to be doing philosophy as well as history, so I was reading a lot on the side. Basically, I realized I wouldn't have been any good at philosophy in itself. It was the history of ideas that really got my juices flowing. This is all retrospective. You know Isaiah Berlin was at Oxford, but I never had any contact with



him. But I think I began to realize that there's a sort of ecology to human thinking, leading not just to affinities among various ideas in different domains but sometimes to logical interconnections among them. Thus, the positions one adopts on natural theology will have consequences for one's theory of knowledge, which will have consequences for one's ethics, which will in turn have consequences for one's political philosophy. And I have scratched that intellectual itch probably ever since.

And Whitehead certainly had that itch. I don't understand his system. I've never really attempted to come to terms with it. But he wrote wonderful essays that are really intellectual history at the very abstract end of the field. Reading them left me with a real admiration for him. He's one of the people who influenced me. The other was a fellow—Michael Foster—who was teaching at Oxford when I was there and who did mainly Plato stuff, but unlike most of the English crowd, had also studied in Germany, so he had a big dose of Hegel in him. And I found his writings fantastic. I owe a lot just to reading him about the impact of biblical stuff, notions of creation, again involving those complex interconnections among different realms of human thought. I get very excited when I see these interconnections. That disposition I clearly owe to my school. But I developed it and stuck with it, even beyond the time in the 1970s when that sort of history of ideas really went out of fashion. That, I'm afraid, is a long and rambling response to your question.

**MS:** I think it's basically to say that the hope for deeper harmonics among the various domains of learning is more an autobiographically grounded hope than a deep theological or philosophical conviction that you'd wish to defend. Really a matter of formation and temperament.

**FO:** Yes, I had and still have the disposition to look for that sort of thing, for whatever reason. But those connections really do exist, too. On the other

hand, they are profoundly mysterious. And, as I get older, I really have an intense consciousness of understanding less and less!

**MS:** Just to say something about my own background and my own take on this thorny matter, I find the whole vocabulary of seeking the truth or of discovering the truth much more credible within a framework where one believes there is truth really there to be found, rather than what some colleagues in some of our more notorious departments prefer to speak of as pure constructivism (a pure making of truth). I find my intellectual energy increases the more convicted I am at some level of faith or hope that there really is a truth to be found rather than only a truth to be made.

**FO:** I fully agree that that is almost certainly religiously based. I am very conscious of that. I decided sometime in the 1970s that I had to try to come to terms with post-structuralism, so I started reading up on it. I was singularly unimpressed by much of it. As in any position, there's an element of truth in the constructivist position. But when pushed too far, it becomes absurd. Being in administration stiffened my resolve to challenge some of the more extremely deconstructive claims that were being made a few years ago. Even the most deconstructed members of the English department read their salary letters very much in terms of authorial intent. I've often wondered, every time I fly, what would happen to us all if airline mechanics who have these huge technical manuals were to start talking about them in terms of reader-reception theory or something. I love academe, but I hate the impact of fashion on people. ♣

*Francis C. Oakley is President Emeritus and Edward Dorr Griffin Professor of the History of Ideas at Williams College.*



# The Beginnings of Christ College

*Richard Baepler*

**T**HE ORIGINS OF VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY'S Christ College lay in the honors movement that swept across American campuses in the wake of the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957. A national "Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student" was formed the following year, and by 1960, 171 institutions offered active honors programs for undergraduates.

Valparaiso University initiated departmental honors work involving an honors thesis and comprehensive examinations in 1958. A year later, noted VU Theology Professor Ernest Koenker developed a Senior Honors Colloquium in which selected students examined "the idea of progress."

Pleased with these new directions, the university in the fall of 1961 invited about forty incoming freshman to become the first members of a newly established Directed Studies Program, modeled after a similar program at Yale University. Under the overall direction of Allen Tuttle, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Directed Studies students took enhanced versions of required freshman Western Civilization, English, and theology courses.

In 1963, Koenker was named Director of the Program, which by then had been extended to four years. Emphasizing "challenge and flexibility," Koenker also created a co-curriculum that took students to Chicago for cultural events, brought in distinguished visiting speakers and scholars, and offered simple social gatherings.

The program found a physical home with a seminar/lecture room, a lounge, and a director's office in a remodeled floor of a small building on Valparaiso's old West Campus. When Koenker left for the University of Southern California in 1965, Chemistry Professor John Deters replaced him as Director of Directed Studies.

The sound, if fairly conventional, honors work represented by Directed Studies was not

enough for Valparaiso University President Otto Paul Kretzmann. After moving to Chicago in the mid-1930s, Kretzmann had become thoroughly familiar with the heated educational debates sparked by University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins.

Taking on John Dewey, the reigning educational theorist of the time, Hutchins promoted classical learning and the great works of the Western tradition as an antidote to the scientism, skepticism, presentism, and anti-intellectualism that he saw pervading American culture and, unfortunately, much of higher education

Echoes of Hutchins and his disciples clearly appeared in "The Idea of a Christian University," the inaugural address that O. P. Kretzmann delivered upon taking office as Valparaiso's president in 1940. Education, Kretzmann asserted, is not primarily about usefulness but about the discovery and transmission of truth. And at its heart is "our view of God, of the Church, of the State, of man, of the human mind and spirit, its origin, nature, function and destiny, of the nature of truth." He called these "the lights by which all men live between the eternities."

In 1960, Kretzmann still stood firmly by the vision expressed in that inaugural address. By then he had developed a set of shorthand phrase—"Athens and Jerusalem," "high intellect and high religion," "the magnificent alliance"—to express the central theme of his educational philosophy: the fruitful relationship between the liberal arts and the Christian understanding of life and history. Athens meant breadth of learning, critical reason, and thoughtful analysis. Jerusalem stood for faith, hope, and love. Combining these elements created an explosive mix that could sometimes take the form of tension and struggles for justice, but also offered hope for reconciliation and healing in church and society.





Dean Richard Baepler examines plans for the Christ College building with two Christ College scholars, 1967.

Based on this vision, Kretzmann intended to create in the final years of his presidency an unusual and original academic unit that would embody the best of what he wanted for the whole university: a new and different kind of honors college. He would call it Christ College.

### **The Blueprint for a New College**

Kretzmann did not speak publicly about his plans for some time, but in the early 1960s he composed a "Blueprint for Christ College," and began inviting several senior administrators to discuss his plans. Finally, on 29 October 1964, he convened a Committee on Christ College under the chairmanship of Dean Tuttle, gave them his "Blueprint," and conveyed the results of the administrative discussions, which had settled on four concepts to guide the Kretzmann vision: honors, experimentation, integration, and involvement.

Christ College would not be simply an honors program but an autonomous honors college. It would have a dean and a small faculty of its own, though it would chiefly draw on faculty from the rest of the university. Students would be enrolled jointly in the honors college and in one of the

university's other undergraduate colleges. As in the Directed Studies Program, academic achievement would be very important, but Christ College would especially look for students with a passion for learning and the pursuit of excellence generally, embodying not just the standard "IQ" (Intelligence Quotient) but also what Kretzmann called "QQ" (Quest Quotient).

Christ College would be experimental, radically so. Kretzmann joined Robert Hutchins in his scorn for the quantification of academic achievement in such forms as credit hours and grades. Christ College should eliminate these conventional markers as soon as possible, he declared. Christ College should also take heed of the emerging national student protests against the bureaucratization of learning by shaking off curricular strait-jackets and discovering new, personal methods of learning.

Central to Christ College would be the integration of knowledge. For more than a century knowledge had been split into smaller and smaller segments that were known only by narrower and narrower specialists, so that no one could see the larger whole anymore. Specialization had been



necessary, and it had exponentially increased the sum of human knowledge. But now the greater problem was how to find connections among areas of learning and how to address the great common problems of human meaning, justice, peace, health, and the economy that transcended disciplinary boundaries. Christian faith had once provided a vision of the unity of knowledge. Might it do so again, and if so how? Christ College would seek to find out.

Finally, Christ College would stress involvement in the problems of the world. The theology taught in Christ College would have a large ethical component, seeking to make the historic Christian faith highly relevant to the modern human condition, both personally and socially. If “Athens” favors critical analysis and reflection, Kretzmann believed, Jerusalem ignites passionate thinking and action. The Christian university, and Christ College, ought to go further than the secular university in promoting not only justice but also hope and love as the fruits of knowledge.

### Laying the Foundation

The need for hope and love in American society at large seldom seemed more evident than in 1965. The plans for Christ College were being developed just as the optimism and idealism of the early 1960s were being replaced by angry confrontations over race, poverty, and the violent and divisive Vietnam War. Against this stormy background, which was increasingly being felt on all college campuses, the Committee on Christ College labored mightily to give constitutional and curricular form to President Kretzmann’s visionary ideas. Impatient with the committee’s slow pace, the president decided to appoint a dean for the college, hoping that this might be the catalyst for jump starting Christ College. In the fall of 1965, he offered the deanship to theologian Richard Luecke, the Director of Studies at the experimental Chicago Urban Studies Center and author of a brilliant new book, *New Meanings for New Beings* (Fortress, 1964).

Luecke, however, preferred to remain with the Chicago project, so the president turned to Allen Tuttle and asked him to undertake the task. Tuttle declined the permanent appointment, but did agree to serve temporarily as Acting Dean. Finally, Kretzmann asked Richard Baepler, recently appointed

Head of the Department of Theology and a member of the CC Committee, to undertake the assignment. With some reluctance, given the work he had just undertaken, Baepler accepted the task.

Comparatively young and inexperienced, Baepler nevertheless had broad academic interests. He had begun his doctoral work at the University of Chicago in the mid-1950s when the pros and cons of Hutchins’s educational vision and reforms were very much part of campus discussion. Valparaiso’s Theology Department also had focused on the close reading of texts and on enhancing students’ ability to write cogent critiques and arguments, which were as much exercises in the liberal arts—understood as intellectual habits—as they were in theological thinking, and intentionally so.

In his letter of response to Kretzmann on 30 March 1966, Baepler stated his uneasiness about the work still to be done to define the task of the college, especially in light of limited resources, the fragile nature of some key departments that would be reluctant to assign star professors to work in Christ College, and other unresolved issues.

Indeed, on that very day, another student-faculty committee had written the Committee on Christ College expressing its concern about the critical rigor and depth of the proposed Christ College courses and also about the possible “skimming off” of the best students.

Baepler saw this friendly criticism as providing an excellent diagnosis. But he believed that the only adequate response would be to begin actually carrying out the college’s mission and plans in a convincing way. Developing a superb faculty would be the key. The dean’s first move was therefore to attempt to recruit Warren G. Rubel, an English professor at Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, Indiana, a school that prepared students for seminary work through a strong liberal arts curriculum. An excellent teacher with a strong interest in both the fine arts and literature, Rubel declined the immediate offer but left the door open for a future approach. Several years later, he did agree to come, settling in to anchor the Christ College faculty. Rubel had an instant and enduring impact on the college and became responsible for much of the enterprise’s academic success.

With no specifically appointed Christ College faculty yet in place, Kretzmann designated



1966–1967 as a “year of transition” from Directed Studies to Christ College.

The initial curriculum created by the committee still resembled Directed Studies, though with some significant tweaking. English Professor Walter Sanders taught an individualized Writing Tutorial. Government Professor Victor Hoffman taught a freshly designed seminar, “Man in His Social Context,” where contemporary empirical political theory and classical texts such as Plato’s *Republic* were brought to bear on issues of power and ethics. Wi Jo Kang, a Korean graduate of Concordia Seminary with a PhD in Asian Studies from Columbia University, offered a course on “Selected Topics in Asian Literature”—beginning Christ College’s long and fruitful engagement with the study of Asian culture. In response to student requests, a course on “Contemporary German Literature” was offered by Professor Henning Falkenstein. Courses in biblical literature, Christian ethics, and “Readings in the Christian Tradition”—the latter taught by the dean—were regular, prescribed components of the Christ College curriculum.

The college took over the facilities of the Directed Studies Program, adding a second classroom and a third room to serve as a lounge. The dean’s office was in nearby Heritage Hall, which also housed *The Cresset*, the university’s journal. *The Cresset’s* managing editor, John Strietelmeier, was a key member of the Committee on Christ College, and he and Baeppler spent many hours in fruitful conversation about how to shape the college in distinctive ways. A thoroughgoing Anglophile who had spent the 1965–1966 academic year studying at Cambridge University in Britain, Strietelmeier sketched out an imaginative constitution for the college based on the kind of education offered at Cambridge’s and Oxford’s ancient colleges, which he strongly admired. Though never fully adopted, Strietelmeier’s plan did leave a considerable mark on Christ College, including the idea of different levels of affiliation that he called Christ College Associates and Scholars.

As in the Directed Studies Program, the emergent college regularly took advantage of Chicago for cultural events. Several non-credit courses drew on Chicago’s resources, including “Contemporary Man and Media,” featuring lectures and discussions of modern film. The dean and his wife,

Simone, who lived near Valparaiso University’s campus, often threw open their large apartment for social events.

### A New Home for a Growing College

Drawing on the growing literature on honors and experimental colleges, the dean believed that the College should establish some kind of “living/learning” arrangement. In the fall of 1967, the university-owned “Elliot House” on LaPorte Avenue became home to six Christ College students who lived in the second story rooms, while the lower floor was given over to college educational and social events as well as common meals. Elliott House served this valuable purpose for two years, becoming the site of classes and special lectures as well as purely social events.

Even before Elliot House had been occupied, however, a surprising development occurred that would decisively shape the future of Christ College. In the spring of 1967 President Kretzmann informed the dean and the university board that anonymous donors wanted to build a home for the college. The donors were later revealed to be Rev. Ewald Mueller of Ridgewood, New Jersey, and his wife Joan Mueller, both highly active in supporting the causes of Lutheran education and music. Although Baeppler initially questioned whether the million-dollar gift might be better spent endowing four Christ College faculty positions, the donors had concluded that it was in the best interest of the college to have a building that would make the honors college publicly visible and embody its purposes in brick and mortar.

The dean was invited to New Jersey to meet with the architect, Herman Bouman. Aided by John Strietelmeier, Richard Lee, and later by art professor Richard Brauer, Baeppler and the architect worked to develop a design for a college whose size, faculty, curriculum, and character were as yet still largely unknown. The result was an initial plan incorporating a residential arrangement for about fifty men and fifty women, quarters for visiting tutors or lecturers, offices for the dean and a half dozen faculty members, a common gathering space, seminar rooms, and a dining hall, which was playfully named the “refectory” in the tradition of the old monasteries—a name that stuck. Space for a chapel and a chaplain was contemplated, but since



the initial proposed location for the building was just northeast of the Valparaiso University Chapel, this seemed awkward and the idea was dropped.

Toward the end of 1967, some fifteen designs later—and after the prospective building had been relocated to a site just west of the Union—the university board approved the building. The galloping inflation of the Vietnam era, however, eventually required that the plans for a residential component of the college be abandoned. The plans were redrawn, replacing the residences with a substory housing more than a dozen classrooms.

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1967 the dean had made the first two appointments to the Christ College faculty. Richard Lee, who was completing his doctorate at Claremont College in California, was a Valparaiso alumnus with wide interests in the relationship between theology and other disciplines, including the social sciences, drama, film, and the personality sciences. Lee's broad educational background and writing/editorial skills would prove especially valuable in building an interdisciplinary academic community such as Christ College. Strachan Donnelley, a young Yale graduate who had studied at Oxford, came to Christ College on the recommendation of University of Chicago Dean Jerald Brauer. For three years, Donnelley brought sophistication and panache to the study of the humanities, establishing excellent rapport with students and attracting them to the life of the mind. He later became a noted environmental scholar and activist, and supported the Donnelley Prize for environmental study in Christ College.

During the summer of 1967, Baepler, Strietelmeier, and philosopher Marcus Riedel—later a member of the Christ College faculty—used a small grant to give sustained attention to curricular issues. Strietelmeier proposed among other things requiring a major senior thesis as a capstone of Christ College studies, while Riedel

developed a comprehensive plan, based on University of Chicago models, in which all courses would reach across conventional fields of knowledge to address problems in new and fruitful ways. Valparaiso had neither the resources nor the faculty to launch this kind of ambitious curriculum, which in fact had stirred much controversy at Chicago, but something of its interdisciplinary spirit could serve as a leaven. Baepler concentrated on developing distinctive, interdisciplinary upper-division programs that Christ College students could take alongside their conventional majors. Originally, four such programs of study



Breaking ground for the Christ College building. From left: VU President Albert Huegeli, Dean Richard Baepler, and former president O. P. Kretzmann.

were proposed: humanities, social sciences, religion and culture, and comparative civilizations. Of these, only the humanities program was fully developed and implemented, while the other three evolved into a proposed Public Affairs program that yielded some courses but never became a full-fledged program.

Except for Lee and Donnelley, Christ College courses from 1967 to 1969 were still taught by borrowing very good members of regular Arts and Sciences departments, who found themselves invigorated by probing and exploring new areas of work beyond the bounds of a single discipline.



Dean Alfred W. Meyer of the Law School taught an undergraduate course on law, professors from the Department of Art team-taught a course on "Unity of the Arts," and a visiting professor from historically black Miles College in Alabama taught a course on "Black Humanities," including black literature and music.

Several fresh curricular threads were developed in this period, each of which became for a time part of the fabric of Christ College. The first was Urban Studies. Professor Walter Reiner, a Kierkegaard-quoting former football coach with a passion for social justice, had over many years established an incredible network of contacts in Chicago. On weekends during the year, Reiner and Lee took over sixty Christ College students into the city, where they became immersed in a variety of intense experiences—staying overnight in ghetto housing, attending black churches, and meeting many of the movers and shakers on the Chicago scene. Eventually these programs evolved into the Chicago Urban Studies Program, a fully residential semester sponsored by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest and Valparaiso University.

The second thread was cinema, which began as part of the co-curriculum and then evolved into a Christ College mainstay course taught by Lee under the title "America at the Movies." A third thread involved science and technology. In the spring of 1968, Riedel and Baepler collaborated on a course entitled "Technology and Culture" that addressed issues of cybernetics and the emerging computer. A philosophy professor offered courses on "Human Nature and Evolution" and "Scientific Explanation." Later several Valparaiso science faculty members taught Christ College courses on the history of science and its intellectual and religious significance.

During this period Baepler spent considerable time studying the University of Chicago's divisional structure, particularly its New Collegiate Division, a special unit created by Hutchins's followers as a place where rich, venerable educational ideas rooted in the classical liberal arts could be revived and renewed. Prominent in this effort was Chicago's Joseph J. Schwab, a friend of Baepler's who was writing a book on *College Curriculum and Student Protest* (University of Chicago, 1969).

Schwab supplied the dean with studies and reports on the New Collegiate Division's experience and introduced him to two of his top graduate students and collaborators, Michael Denneney and Michael Doliner. In 1969 Baepler appointed Doliner to the Christ College faculty, to which he brought his New Collegiate Division experience.

The appointments of Doliner and Warren Rubel to the full-time Christ College faculty made possible the full launching of the ambitious new Program in the Humanities, designed for juniors and seniors in Christ College. This sequence began with a course on "Methods and Materials in the Humanities," continued with a set of special seminars organized around "themes, periods, or problems," and concluded with a capstone course on "Value and Judgment," which became a staple of the Christ College curriculum. The future of the humanities program was fully secured when William Olmsted, a young scholar with a PhD from Chicago's Committee on Social Thought, joined the Christ College faculty. The Committee on Social Thought, one of the few remaining original creations of the Hutchins regime, was a place where Hutchins often parked the most original thinkers in the university, people who would fit nowhere else. Olmsted had written his own dissertation under novelist Saul Bellow. Witty and even-tempered, Olmsted knew the limits of the Chicago approach as well as its strengths and became a highly valued colleague.

After several delays, the dedication of the Christ College building took place in April 1970. A week was given over to this event, beginning with a Chapel service at which former Valparaiso University faculty member and *Cresset* editor Jaroslav Pelikan, now a renowned church historian at Yale University, preached on "Continuity with Christ." This was followed with lectures by Walter Sorell, a New York author, theater critic, and regular *Cresset* contributor; Richard Luecke; Lewis Spitz, a noted Reformation scholar from Stanford University; and Martin Marty of the University of Chicago. Following a festival worship service on 26 April at which the Rev. Ewald Mueller preached, a solemn procession moved from the chapel to the Christ College building (later renamed Mueller Hall) for the formal dedicatory ceremony.





The dedication ceremony for Mueller Hall (1970). From left: O. P. Kretzmann, former VU president; Norman Nagel, dean of the Chapel; Albert Huegli, VU president; Daniel Brockopp, chapel pastoral staff; Richard Baepler, dean of Christ College; and a VU student server.

### The Kinsey Hall Fire and a New Direction

Less than a week after the dedication of the Christ College building, American troops in Vietnam marched into Cambodia, setting off a new wave of protests on American campuses. At Kent State University members of the National Guard incautiously fired at students, killing several. Campuses erupted with anger and protest. This time Valparaiso University did not escape the violence that transpired on so many campuses. On one night of protest, an unknown student threw a lit match into the basement of Kinsey Hall, which housed the administration and music department, setting off a fire that rendered the building useless.

In the aftermath of the Kinsey fire, the president of the university and the vice president for academic affairs moved into Christ College, taking over the dean's office and several seminar rooms. The dean and his secretary moved to another seminar room. President Albert Huegli spent his remaining presidency in the Christ College building, and his successor, Robert Schnabel,

spent most of his time there as well. For Christ College this had the great advantage of having the presidents witness first hand the vitality of the college's life.

In the wake of both general student unrest and the traumatic Kinsey fire, Valparaiso engaged in a good deal of searching institutional self-evaluation and self-criticism. One significant component of this effort was that Baepler and Arts and Sciences Dean Louis Foster were given release time to study and recommend reforms in Valparaiso's fairly stodgy curriculum. This leave also afforded the dean an opportunity to consolidate his own thinking about the Christ College curriculum. In the middle of that year, he presented the Christ College faculty his proposal for a radical departure in the education of beginning college students.

Based essentially on the "Liberal Arts" core course of Chicago's New Collegiate Division, with significant adaptations to the distinctive mission and needs of Christ College, the program



was designed, first, to teach students—through the close reading of classical texts and practice of the Socratic Method—that they did not know what they thought they knew. After this process was complete, the course aimed to enable students gradually to build up their own constructive powers of reason and imagination.

The faculty agreed to adopt and implement this dramatic new departure. The entire effort would not have been possible but for the welcome addition of several other gifted faculty. University of Wisconsin-trained philosopher Don Affeldt joined the Christ College faculty and regularly team-taught “Value and Judgment” with Warren Rubel. Richard Luecke now also joined the faculty, making an unforgettable and witty contribution during his years of teaching. Also joining the college faculty was Sue Wienhorst. Wienhorst had been a philosophy major as a Valparaiso undergraduate. When her husband, noted composer Richard Wienhorst, was studying at the University of Freiburg, Germany, Sue studied with famed philosopher Martin Heidegger, and joined a group of Heidegger’s students who practiced the kind of intense, late-night discussion that shaped her subsequent intellectual life. After returning to the United States, Wienhorst studied religion and the arts, including literary theory, at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Wienhorst soon became a mainstay of the Christ College faculty, demonstrating that reasoned argument and passionate intellectual debate are high virtues, and she remained deeply devoted to her students’ total development.

The new Freshman Program, consisting of a single course carrying sixteen hours of credit over two semesters, was entitled “Problems of Inquiry: The Humanities and Social Sciences.” The texts included Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Aristophanes, St. Mark, St. John, Shakespeare, Freud, Luther, Darwin, de Tocqueville, Durkheim, Dostoyevsky, Arnold, Kierkegaard, Eliot, and Greene. Works by contemporary social scientists also

addressed the questions of power in the United States. Taught to about forty students by six faculty members, the course incorporated a variety of seminar discussions, lectures, and writing tutorials.

In the second semester, the class studied Plato’s, Aristotle’s and Freud’s theories of the soul and of art. This was followed by the study of five or so selected masterpieces, drawn largely from the nineteenth century, and then by the writing of a “freshman thesis.” The course was deemed a significant success in initiating students into membership in a serious community of inquiry and into the “great conversation” of the Western tradition, including the significant role of Christian thought.

To relieve some of the intensity of this experience, faculty and students met Wednesday evenings for group activities of a different, less cerebral sort. These events ranged from reading performances of plays to simulation games—for example, one on decision-making in the city—to a mime workshop. In the second semester, Wednesday evenings were devoted to small group projects, including the production of a film,

the writing of imaginative literature, and discussions about matters of strong personal interest. Purely social events at the dean’s home found their place as well.

A further significant innovation occurred when Speech and Drama Professor Van Kussrow, who had just returned from four years’ work with Valparaiso students at England’s Coventry Cathedral, offered in 1973 to take over the Wednesday night activities and apply some of the experimental ideas he had learned from “Theater in Education” programs in Britain. Christ College’s initial venture in this direction was devoted to the figure of Joan of Arc. For several weeks students read and discussed primary historical documents and plays based on Joan’s life, and then wrote their own play on the subject using multi-media effects. The students’ critical twist was that the audience itself would represent Joan.

*Excellence in the various  
intellectual fields of  
endeavor is necessary  
but not sufficient. What  
is further required is a  
maturing of wisdom and  
theological understanding.*



On the night of the performance, the audience found itself sitting on cushions on the floor of the Commons surrounded by five stages on which the action of the play took place. After Joan's trial and condemnation, pike-carrying soldiers rounded up the audience and herded it into the nearby refectory, with a single drum beating a muffled cadence. The audience was forced around the stake, surrounded by soldiers, red lights, undulating dancers, and screaming townsfolk, with gargoyles and laughing faces projected on the ceiling. At the critical moment a gong sounded, the lights went out, a white cross was thrown on the ceiling, and an ecclesiastical voice read out the canonization statement proclaiming Joan a saint.

"Crossfire: A Joan of Arc Collage" was a memorable play and performance, and set a standard that came to be met each year by a new, original production created and performed by the students. The Freshman Production thus became a permanent part of the Freshman Program of Christ College. When Kussrow retired from teaching, a Christ College graduate and member of the Speech and Drama faculty, John Steven Paul, assumed the challenge of continuing the tradition with inventiveness and fidelity. In this and numerous other ways, Christ College attended to the arts of drama, poetry, and music as significant elements in students' educational and personal development.

The sense of community and intellectual inquiry developed in the freshman year easily carried into the sophomore year, with several common literature and theology courses that were taught with the same spirit of inquiry. But it became evident that apart from the students who continued in the humanities program, even the set of well-designed and provocative upper-division seminars from which students chose were not enough to sustain richly the spirit acquired earlier. The dean therefore proposed a required non-credit Thursday evening "Symposium" for which students would register throughout their last two years. The symposium met six times each semester.

Building on the Wednesday evening activities, the symposium focused more on current problems and themes, punctuated now and then by a guest lecturer. It was initially of uneven quality and appeal, because it had to be carried out at the margins of the faculty's energies and resources.

**D**ESPITE CONTINUING CHALLENGES, CHRIST College at the end of its first decade seemed well-established, graduating Scholars and Associates who had experienced a unique and exceptionally rich undergraduate education.

At the very beginning of Christ College, the distinguished church historian Jaroslav Pelikan had suggested to the dean that every student and faculty member should be required to read and discuss Etienne Gilson's essay entitled "The Intelligence in the Service of Christ the King." Two main propositions stand out in this piece, which helped lay the firm groundwork of Christ College. The first was that such service, aimed at co-operating with the royal Redeemer in the redemption and reclamation of the world, must necessarily be bound to excellence in the various intellectual fields of endeavor. Such excellence is necessary but not sufficient. What is further required is a maturing of wisdom and theological understanding. One must be at home in each of the two cities, Athens and Jerusalem. That is probably what O. P. Kretzmann meant as well when he said he wanted Christ College to be "more than an honors college." Such a vision certainly provided a rich and ongoing challenge for Christ College. †

*Richard Baepler, Emeritus Professor of Theology and Law at Valparaiso University, was the first dean of Christ College. He is the author of Flame of Faith, Lamp of Learning: A History of Valparaiso University (Concordia, 2001).*



# rereading old books

## The Real Deal?

Barack Obama. *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. New York: Times Books, 1995.

Barack Obama. *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. New York, Crown, 2006.

AS PARTICIPANTS IN A CULTURE STILL BENT ON self-discovery and self-definition, American citizens are intrigued by those personalities and public moments that draw upon the tropes of the American Dream and the so-called “myth of America.” The American tradition of “somethingness” is perhaps best highlighted by the likes of Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman in the nineteenth century, and John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Ronald Reagan in the twentieth, and as such is generally non-partisan in cultural memory. This tradition is also highlighted every four years in the presidential campaigns. Serious political wannabes all must try their hand at mimicking such rhetorical profusions. A successful candidate must reflect and become attuned to popular conceptions of America’s “imagined community.”

As James Hunter has put it, such a campaign is to a large extent a “struggle to define America.” Much research indicates that there continues to be a surprising amount of consensus regarding the content of the “American Creed.” Thus, poets, priests, and politicians all have consistently drawn upon this rich mother lode of myths and symbols that has offered hope and meaning to generations of American citizens, past and present.

And now, we have a brand new voice in the ongoing drama of the American creed: Barack Obama, who shamelessly identifies himself as a participant in a national culture still obsessed with self-discovery and self-definition. He is a gifted writer, part poet, part priest, and part politician. I

### *Harold K. Bush Jr.*

say shamelessly, because it is now almost a commonplace among many educators and cultural elites that the idea of Nationalism in general, and “American Exceptionalism” in particular, are troublesome and outdated relics of a violent modern age, categories of thought fit only for the oppressors and colonizers of human thought and action, and thus destined for the scrap heap of history.

Presidential candidates and the typical American middle-class taxpayer think otherwise: they find comfort and hope in eloquent accounts of the meaning and destiny of the American nation. There is still the power of the mythic expressions of “E Pluribus Unum” themselves. Obama is alert to the subtle ways that American culture insists on a core set of values and beliefs about itself, beliefs that can bring us all together as one great community. Nowhere is this insistence more obvious than in Obama’s two volumes, though the work each does is quite evidently different from the other. The first volume, *Dreams from My Father*, narrates the events of his early youth, his experiences growing up in Hawaii and Indonesia, his very white, Kansas grandparents, and his black, African father from Kenya. The effects of growing up a person of mixed race and without the attentions of a father are candidly discussed. We see honest confessions about drinking, drug experimentation, and running the streets, along with somewhat more subdued allusions to loose sexual relations with women and forms of black rage. “Scoop the poop, you bastards!” his roommate would shout out the window of their Harlem apartment at the “white people from the better neighborhoods” walking their dogs on the sidewalks below.

Perhaps this candor and humor are among the book’s best features. Obama starts with a steady account of his origins, particularly the phone call announcing the death of his wayward father, with whom he has spent almost no time for many years.



By page eleven, we are already confronted with the word “miscegenation,” and Obama reminds us that in 1960, the year of his birth, miscegenation was still illegal in half the states. Obama is forthright in making the mixing of races and his own multicultural roots the main theme of the first long section of the story. One forebear was a decorated soldier for the Union during the Civil War; another was a distant cousin to Jefferson Davis of the Confederacy. There’s some Cherokee blood in there as well, along with some good old-fashioned Baptist and Methodist church-goers. His own childhood was split between Hawaii, our most exotic and multicultural state, “the one true melting pot, an experiment in racial harmony,” and several years in Indonesia, which he sketches superbly as a locale even more exotic than Hawaii. He is truly our first multicultural candidate, it seems. And by foregrounding these elements, Obama is signaling a major shift in our twenty-first century conception of the American creed: our embrace of diversity and inclusion allows us to imagine the election of the first truly multicultural president.

Particularly endearing is the material about his white Kansan grandfather, a true American Dreamer, “something of a freethinker—bohemian, even.” Obama writes,

[He] has dreams, he has plans; he will infect my grandmother with the great peripatetic itch that had brought both their forebears across the Atlantic.... [he] sloshes around in the mud of France, part of Patton’s army.... His was an American character, one typical of men of his generation, men who embraced the option of freedom and individualism and the open road without always knowing its price, and whose enthusiasms could as easily lead to the cowardice of McCarthyism as to the heroics of World War II.

This is typical of Obama’s clever and winning tone and style. The man can write, and in phrases like “the great peripatetic itch,” we hear a writer who is able to take it to the next level. It’s Tom Brokaw meets Jack Kerouac in this loving description of Gramps.

Obama depicts his college years in the rather predictable fashion of a coming-of-age story. The

truest surprise comes when he shies away from corporate America and decides, in 1983, to give his time to community organizing on the South Side of Chicago. This story comprises the vast majority of the volume’s mid-section, what Obama evidently wishes to see as the heart of his tale. It is a long and drawn-out episode, perhaps at times a bit tedious, but the tone displays the sort of tedium and near-despair that actually might accompany such organizing. How does one motivate people? How does one create alliances or get churches to work together effectively? Where can we find enough funding? These are the nuts and bolts of community work, and Obama shows himself steeped in these questions for almost half the book.

This material includes gestures of black nationalism: the near hero worship of Mayor Harold Washington upon his arrival in Chicago; Obama’s experience with the black churches, many of which are entirely segregated by choice; and his reading list and intellectual mentors: “Baldwin, Ellison, Hughes, Wright, DuBois.... in Bigger Thomas and invisible men, I kept finding the same anguish.... Only Malcolm X’s autobiography seemed to offer something different. His repeated acts of self-creation spoke to me.” Slowly, Obama begins to identify closely with the people he engages on the South Side: “laid-off steelworkers, secretaries, and truck drivers, men and women who smoked a lot and didn’t watch their weight, shopped at Sears or Kmart, drove late-model cars from Detroit and ate at Red Lobster on special occasions.” Obama wants to be clear about his self-identification with African Americans, despite the introductory material’s keen emphasis on his diverse biological make-up and childhood experience.

What motivates his vigorous service, he claims, is a “promise of redemption.” Regarding his own redemption, the book offers a few brief glimpses and one lengthy, though somewhat vague, passage narrating a particular moment of grace. Though it seems that Obama is holding back a bit in his description, the spiritual encounter does occur, one Sunday in the Rev. Jeremiah Wright’s packed-to-the-rafters morning service at the Trinity United Church of Christ. His description of Wright is admiring and cagy: Wright knows Greek and Hebrew and is steeped in Niebuhr and Tillich, along with the black liberation theologians. He is



well-educated, urbane, funny, and highly effective in bringing real change into the lives of all kinds of people in his neighborhood.

The occasion of Obama's "conversion," if we dare to call it that, is after Wright's sermon, "The Audacity of Hope," by now made famous as the title of his second book. Obama resonates with Wright's transcendent account of hope. As the preacher rises in eloquence and adds layer upon layer to his depiction of hope, something begins to happen inside of Obama:

I also felt for the first time how that spirit carried within it, nascent, incomplete, the possibility of moving beyond our narrow dreams.... I felt a light touch on the top of my hand. [The young boy sitting next to me] handed me a pocket tissue. Beside him, his mother glanced at me with a faint smile before turning back toward the altar. It was only as I thanked the boy that I felt the tears running down my cheeks.

"Oh, Jesus," I heard the older woman beside me whisper softly. "Thank you for carrying us this far."

That is the very last passage of the entire Chicago section, this crucial moment of Obama's conversion, but there is much about it that is either left out or is neatly tucked away from public eyes. It is not even Obama who speaks the name of Jesus, of course, and the elusiveness of the incident's details and meaning are left up to the reader's imagination. The imprecision makes it a bit of a religious Rorschach test for readers: conservative evangelicals will dislike its shallowness, while liberal humanists will ooh and ahh over its emotion and depth.

Without getting too mushy or doctrinal, though, something seems to have happened to Obama on that morning back in Trinity—it's just not exactly clear what. Prior to the episode, there have been several moments in the book where Obama expresses deep concern about church dogma, and confesses his doubts about Christianity and its historical claims. And yet the

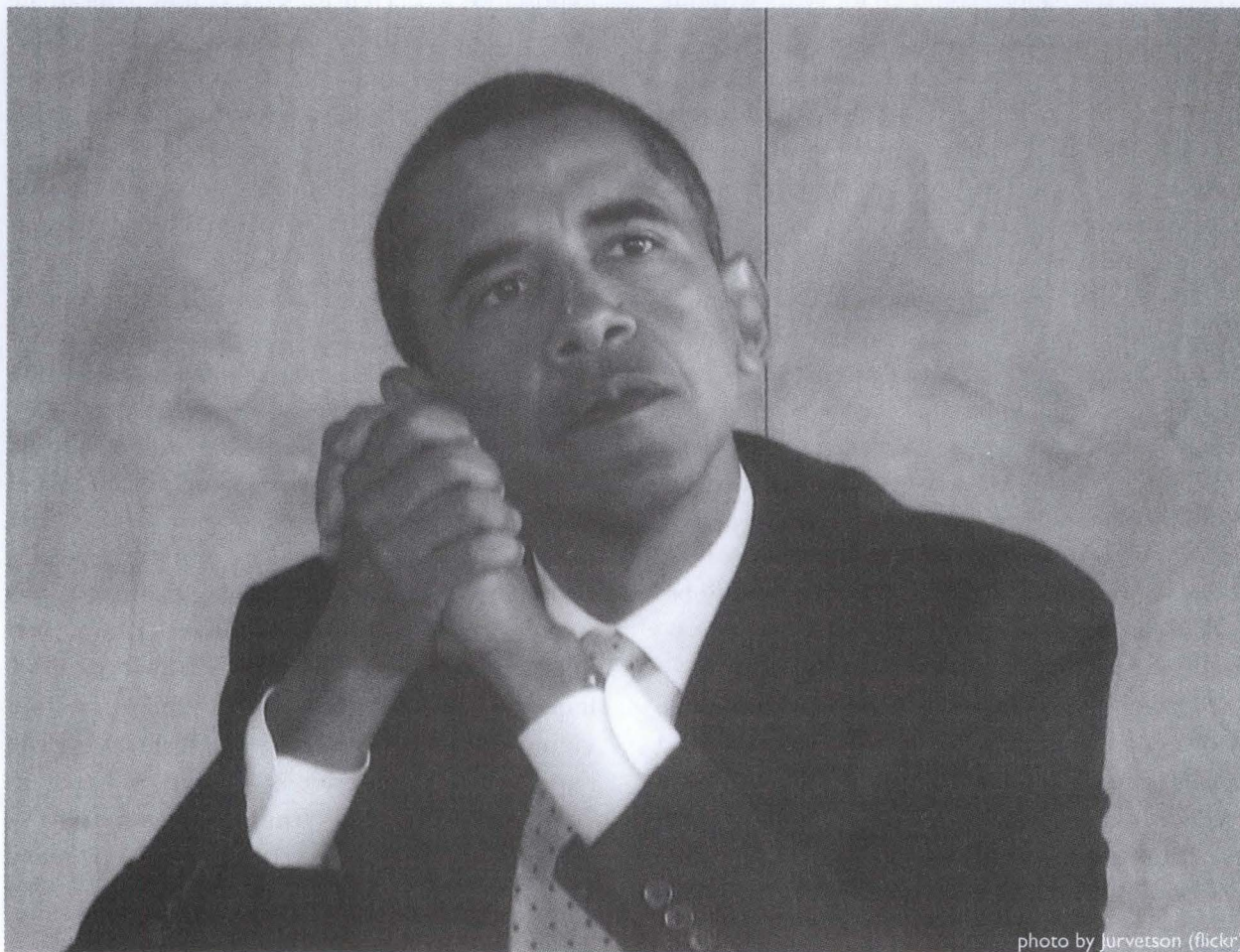


photo by Jurvetson (flickr)



author is attempting to capture something real and sincere, without getting too specific. It exemplifies why skepticism has marked Obama's confessions of Christian faith throughout the campaign. Many readers will want to file this episode under "spiritual but not religious."

But the story does not end there (although any discussion of Christianity or the church certainly does). The shape of the narrative is highly dependent on the quest for his missing father, and by the volume's ending, Obama has returned to Kenya, the homeland of his father, in search of his African roots. This close identification with Africa, and specific tribes back in Kenya, is certainly an astonishing wonder in a book written by the front-runner for the presidency. The acceptance of this element by millions who are still willing to vote for him must be reckoned as one of the signal achievements in recent American cultural history. Just as the Chicago section ends with a gesture toward Christian communion, the Kenya section ends with a vision of the baobab tree as a living, mythic presence. "I remembered reading somewhere that the baobab could go for years without flowering, surviving on the sparsest of rainfall... I understood why men believed they possessed a special power—that they housed ancestral spirits and demons, that humankind first appeared under such a tree." Again, he is moved by an image of audacious hope—a tree that sustains itself, despite draught and heat.

It is this sort of emotion and candor, presented by a writer of true talent and imagination, that is on full display in Obama's memoir. *Dreams from My Father* is actually the superior book of the two. It was written years before the young Obama ever conceived of running for president, and its journey of awakening and identity formation come across as genuine and richly layered, in such a way as to invite serious literary analysis. It could easily be used in an upper-level or graduate course covering American autobiography or memoir.

Obama has followed up this earlier narrative with a decisive expression of American values and beliefs. Unlike *Dreams from My Father*, the more recent book has the ring of a campaign tract, with excellent and clear discussions of major policy issues. One might not like Obama's view of the Constitution, or of various issues of church and

state, but his style is quite engaging, and he is a credible and convincing advocate for his positions. Its title, *The Audacity of Hope*, describes precisely the burden of Obama's message. His hope for America is truly audacious, in its goals and cosmic elements, and the term invokes once more his erstwhile pastor, again the Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

It is debatable whether Obama has actually grasped the true nature of a cosmic (or Christian) hope, which is never for America alone, or for the individual alone; but is rather for an all-encompassing and never-ending community, centered in God. As Glenn Tinder puts it in *The Fabric of Hope* (43): "By 'community' I mean perfect unity among personal beings.... a love transcending justice and fully expressed in the absolute affirmation of the other which occurs in self-sacrifice. Accordingly, if hope is for God, it is for a triumphal community—for a final and eternal reunion of God and his human creatures." But Obama's account of hope centers on the pragmatics of such a concept. He wishes to "reach across the aisle" and evade the "Manichean struggle" of today's partisan politics, for instance, a concrete example of how to incarnate such an ideal as Tinder presents. A moment of real insight happens right at the beginning of the book, when Obama describes entering Congress "through the basement" and finding a lone speaker droning on and on. "In the world's greatest deliberative body," he says, "no one is listening." His picture of the current state of ugly Star Wars politics, with its "litmus tests, checklists of orthodoxy," and its rhetoric of being "with us or against us," is certainly familiar to most listeners, who already know without being told that Washington is a broken culture.

Obama's rhetoric addresses this gridlock, prominently, in the volume's opening section. Tellingly, he recruits a familiar figure in describing the appeal of this cosmic view of American community: Ronald Reagan. Obama writes, "Reagan spoke to America's longing for order, our need to believe that we are not simply subject to blind, impersonal forces but that we can shape our individual and collective destinies." Obama wishes to tap into this longing for "collective destiny"—in Tinder's apt phrase, a "triumphal community"—but it is a concept that has been spurned by many today, largely as a result of the tyrannies and abuses of the twentieth century.



If much of this sounds familiar, it may be due to the continuing influence of Obama's great rhetorical mentor: Dr. King, with his enchanting and often thrilling accounts of the "beloved community." Obama describes the skepticism many Americans have toward such metanarrative these days, which he admits might seem "hopelessly naïve, if not downright dangerous." But he insists that we need such a vision, and this motif continues throughout Obama's account of American hope: it is "the core of the American experience," the "running thread of hope" in our national story, our "notion of a common good," "that kernel of truth, that singular voice within each of us that reminds us of our deepest commitments."

*The Audacity of Hope* begins and ends with effusive accounts of America as the land of hope and vision. What comes in between are chapters on a wide variety of important policy and ideological issues. I find the book excellent even on those issues about which Obama and I disagree, and this is the mark of very fine argument. *The Audacity of Hope* provides the meat of Obama's positions on a plethora of crucial issues, and if any citizen wants a clear, well-written, and generally convincing account of those views, here it is. Additionally, *The Audacity of Hope* contains more songs about America. It is a paean, especially at the end, to the mighty tradition of America's dream about herself: standing at the Lincoln Memorial in the book's final scene, Obama imagines "the crowd stilled by Dr. King's mighty cadence... [I think of] those like Lincoln and King, who ultimately laid down their lives in the service of perfecting an imperfect union.... My heart is filled with love for this country."

Thus does Barack Obama assert, in these two excellent and complementary volumes, that our attempts to locate a definition of "America," a consensus about central American values, and a common passion for the reawakening of the American Dream, can and must go forward. Obama both champions the desire to articulate the nature of the American ideology, and also embodies, both in his personal narrative and in his rhetorical dream, the central premises of that ideology. This combination helps explain why Obama is today, for many Americans and particularly for the young, as close to a living incarnation of what America is supposed to mean and be, as they have seen in a long time—

perhaps, as far back as 1960s icons such as Dr. King. And like King, Obama wields a nifty pen and has the voice, delivery, and personal presence to exploit his fine writing gifts as gifted orator and charismatic icon. In short, Obama ranks right up there with any rhetorician of recent years. As Andrew Delbanco put it in his piece a few months ago in *The New Republic*, he looks to be the real deal.

Obama's sense of a direct connection with King was a centerpiece of his rhetorical performance on the final day of the Democratic convention in Denver on 28 August 2008. It was, auspiciously enough, the forty-fifth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s oration during the March on Washington in 1963. Obama's nomination speech was filled with reminders as well, such as his insistence on the Promise of America:

What is that promise? It's a promise that says each of us has the freedom to make of our own lives what we will, but that we also have the obligation to treat each other with dignity and respect... That's the promise of America—the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation; the fundamental belief that I am my brother's keeper; I am my sister's keeper.

Interestingly, the speech also includes Obama's characteristic critique of the abuses of mythic accounts of America. But this is standard fare in jeremiads: even in King's "I Have a Dream" speech—though we often forget that aspect of it. Obama reminds us that the old story about the poor being solely responsible for their sorry state is not adequate: "Out of work? Tough luck. No health care? The market will fix it. Born into poverty? Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps—even if you don't have boots. You're on your own." King and Obama are not satisfied by pie-in-the-sky visions unless they find their way concretely into the lives of regular American folks. Both call unapologetically for fulfillment of the promise, for the incarnation of the American spirit. As such, both are latter-day Transcendentalists, with a capital T—but also Christian realists, in a manner heavily informed by Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr.

But as in his books, the most memorable aspects of Obama's rhetoric are not critiques of the



American system but affirmations of the American promise. Thus can we see his rhetorical project as largely transcendental: founded in something beyond the material world, a gesture toward the way things ought to be, a “passion for the possible,” as Kierkegaard once defined human hope. Obama’s acceptance speech reminds us of the fundamental unity of our nation: “So let us agree that patriotism has no party. I love this country, and so do you, and so does John McCain. The men and women who serve in our battlefields may be Democrats and Republicans and independents, but they have fought together and bled together and some died together under the same proud flag. They have not served a Red America or a Blue America—they have served the United States of America.” These lines echo the last words of *The Audacity of Hope*: “My heart is filled with love for this country.” And like King, he reminded the millions of listeners of the concept of American spirit—something sublime and unnamable holding us all together, and making us unique in human history: “Instead, it is that American

spirit — that American promise—that pushes us forward even when the path is uncertain; that binds us together in spite of our differences; that makes us fix our eye not on what is seen, but what is unseen, that better place around the bend.”

Thus does Obama’s convention speech end with a powerful peroration of his heavy debt to the likes of King.

And it is that promise that forty-five years ago today, brought Americans from every corner of this land to stand together on a mall in Washington, before Lincoln’s Memorial, and hear a young preacher

from Georgia speak of his dream.... They could’ve been told to succumb to the fear and frustration of so many dreams deferred. But what the people heard instead—people of every creed and color, from every walk of life—is that in America, our destiny is inextricably linked. That together, our dreams can be one. “We cannot walk alone,” the preacher cried. “And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back.”

*The emergence of a new kind of politician, in the form of Barack Obama, who unashamedly endorses an all-encompassing, mysterious, and sublime object of American hope, and is able to articulate it in convincing fashion to a vast number of American citizens, may be the most significant political phenomenon of recent American history, at least since the rise of the Reagan era.*

This image of King on the Mall in 1963 is the same one that ended *The Audacity of Hope*.

The speech ends with the endorsement of heavenly hope “At this moment, in this election, we must pledge once more to march into the future. Let us keep that promise—that American promise—and in the words of Scripture hold firmly, without wavering, to the hope that we confess.” It is a reference to Hebrews 10:23, slightly altered in tone and content, but a clear statement nonetheless that his

vision is steeped in a biblical frame, as was King’s. Of course, the writer of the book of Hebrews is most interested in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the power of his blood sacrifice, and the hope of God’s everlasting Kingdom, but such details do not make for good convention speeches, and thus are conveniently left out. It is in the best (or most dangerous) traditions of American rhetoric to blur the Kingdom of God with the Kingdom of America, and here Obama, like King, Lincoln, and countless others before him, does likewise.

In short, Obama’s meteoric rise bespeaks the clear fact that we Americans are proud of our transcendental legacy, and that we still respond pow-



erfully to King's words on that humid August day back in 1963, one of the most memorable accounts of that legacy. Obama's speechifying, like his books, is not jingoistic, or simple-minded. He is comfortable expressing moments of serious doubt, critique, and skepticism, just as King was. Indeed, Obama insists, we need *both* dreams and anxieties, vision and suspicion. In this way, Obama mirrors the modern theorists of culture, who have certainly mastered the suspicion part.

But as the philosopher William James insisted, certain truths will be hidden from us unless we go at least halfway toward them. As James wrote in *The Will to Believe*: "Here are, then, cases, where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming. And where faith in a fact can help create the fact, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the 'lowest kind of immorality' into which a thinking being can fall." Belief, sometimes, begins in the imagination.

It may turn out that people of faith who are intellectually conversant and theoretically savvy, but who also have the additional advantage of being willing, in the words of William James, to go "at least halfway toward" the sublime objects of the sacred, will have far more to say about what a new model of political work can look like in the twenty-first century. The emergence of a new kind of politician, in the form of Barack Obama, who unashamedly endorses an all-encompassing,

mysterious, and sublime object of American hope, and is able to articulate it in convincing fashion to a vast number of American citizens, may be the most significant political phenomenon of recent American history, at least since the rise of the Reagan era. His evident gifts have begun to encourage a much-needed renewal of the idea that achieving our country is still historically possible after all.

The real deal, indeed—at least rhetorically speaking. He's so good with words that the Republicans have been making light of this skill, openly ridiculing it in television ads, as if it was all smoke and mirrors. The rhetoric, of course, does not prove that he will be an effective president, and the proof, as they say, will be in the pudding. But as did other great American leaders of the past, such as Lincoln, Obama understands we are living in a time when the "mystic chords of memory" need mending. For without a vision, the people really do perish (Prov. 29:18). And such mending begins, as always, with words—and with the power of the human imagination, and the steadfastness of hope. ♣

Hal Bush teaches American literature and culture at Saint Louis University and is the author of two books and numerous articles on topics ranging from American literary figures to the pragmatics of teaching and reading. He recently was a short term Fulbright Senior Scholar at the University of Freiburg, Germany.



# nation

## My Favorite Illusions

Neil Elliott

*Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, and broke it. And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: This is how I will break the yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years." At this, the prophet Jeremiah went away . . .*

*(Jeremiah 28:10-11; Proper 7, Year A)*

I'M NO MAGICIAN, BUT I LOVE A GOOD ILLUSION. And the Bible is one of the most effective optical and auditory illusions I know.

Everyone knows the Bible contains the words of the prophets. *Look, there they are:* Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Want to know what the LORD said to Amos? You'll find it around page 1,300, I think, but don't take my word for it: look it up in the table of contents. It's just that easy.

But we know, if we think about it, that it was never just that easy in ancient Israel. In the time of the prophet Amos, if you wanted to know the Word of the LORD, you wouldn't ask some hick farmer from the hill country: you'd go to the professionals, the priests at the kingdom's greatest shrine, where God—the LORD who had brought Israel out of Egypt, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—was worshipped. *Those* priests were faithful men of God. They were trained exegetes and theologians. And they knew that to speak against the king or against the nation meant that the land could not stand your voice. And precisely because the king was a man of faith, he listened to the wise priests of Bethel, and Amos, who prophesied that the Kingdom of Israel would be destroyed, was expelled as a traitor (Amos 7:10–13).

The shrine at Bethel exercised what bible scholar Norman Gottwald has called an asserted monopoly on the voice of the LORD (*The Hebrew Bible*. Fortress, 1985, 306). Amos admitted it: he was no prophet; he was a simple herdsman from Tekoa (7:14–15).

Jeremiah served for decades as a priest in the temple of Jerusalem. But in his day there were *hundreds* of faithful prophets in Israel. Hananiah was only the best known, the most respected of the prophets, chaplain to the powerful, the Billy Graham of his day. Jeremiah was the dissident, the unpatriotic, Daniel Berrigan-like trouble-maker of his day, with the prison record to prove it.

Babylon's armies loomed dangerously on the horizon; Babylon had attacked Judah on Judah's soil, had killed Judeans, had carried off hostages, had humbled the nation, and now threatened to humiliate the nation even further. In panic, the king had invited delegates from surrounding nations, hoping to organize them into a "coalition of the willing" to resist Babylon.

And Jeremiah—a *priest*, whose job was to sing songs and offer sacrifices—this mere priest had dared to send his own communiqués to those diplomatic delegations, conducting foreign policy in the king's stead. Babylon, he said, was irresistible. His treacherous words were a direct affront to any true patriot.

Then Jeremiah went before the royal court and repeated his message to the king. He had come before the previous king and declared, "You must change your ways, and the Lord might change his mind" about the coming disaster. Judah's chickens, in so many words, were coming home to roost. It was a dangerous message. The last prophet who had spoken like this, the only other prophet who



had taken Jeremiah's side, had been a man named Uriah, who had fled for Egypt when he learned the king wanted him dead. Uriah's body only recently had been fished from the Nile.

But here stood Jeremiah before this same king, with a wooden yoke strapped across his shoulders. Stooped beneath its weight, he told his king that the way to survive was to accept humiliation. The prophets of Judah, the prophets of Moab, the prophets of Ammon, of Tyre, and of Sidon were all liars of expedience, he said.

Without reading around a bit, one would hardly know this Jeremiah's words in *Jer.* 28 were the climax of the decisive public showdown between Jeremiah and the court's favorite prophet. The king and the people of Judah turned, as they customarily did, to Hananiah, who was swift to offer reassurance as *he* customarily did. Hananiah took the wooden yoke from the dissident's shoulders and smashed it on the floor of the royal court. The LORD would never abandon his holy nation, his chosen people.

It is almost impossible to hear the intensity of the irony in which Jeremiah's words were steeped. "Amen, may it be so!" the prophet declares; and then, far more politely than he has spoken before—after all, he is addressing the Billy Graham of his generation—Jeremiah suggests that the long lineage of assassinated prophets is on his side, not Hananiah's (28:7–8), and that Hananiah should be regarded as a true prophet only if the Babylonians actually retreat and peace breaks forth across the earth (28:9).

The next day Jeremiah returned to court with another yoke strapped to his shoulders, this one made of iron.

**T**HE BIBLE, I SAY, IS AN OPTICAL AND AUDITORY illusion because it makes it appear so easy to consult the words of the prophets. But first we have to *want* to hear the words of the prophets; and in this nation we are effectively immunized against them.

When a pastor in a Chicago church speaks of *American* chickens coming home to roost—of God's chosen nation being held responsible for its crimes, of God condemning the nation for its murderous injustice, its imperialist wars, its racism—our national body politic reacts the way our immune systems respond to a toxin.

I am talking about the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the ancient prophet's namesake. Don't worry. I am not interested in endorsing this or that comment that Wright has made, nor do I intend to conduct a theological post-mortem to examine every one of those sound-bites in its original context, let alone to trace the sources that he quoted to the floor of the US Senate, or anywhere else. Those are important exercises if we want to understand his words, but this is not the occasion for that analysis.

Neither do I want to debate the character or merits of the black church tradition or the weight of slavery's legacy. Again: those are important, urgent concerns; but I do not accept the premise of so much commentary, on our airwaves and on the Internet, that speaking of God judging the nation is a black thing that white people just can't understand.

Senator Barack Obama may be the next president of the United States. Whatever you think of him, whatever you think of the political maneuvering any of the presidential candidates have had to do to "move to the center" to seek those elusive "swing voters," my point is simply to observe how quickly *all* the candidates moved to distance themselves from Jeremiah Wright's comments. Earlier in this campaign season Senator Obama gave a moving and intelligent speech trying to address the nation rationally, morally, on the complex legacy of race, but he quickly realized that a rational, moral conversation would be impossible in this media environment; and so he renounced his pastor and left his church.

Jeremiah Wright has said outlandish things. But he's also said things that were accurate, though uncomfortable. Wright has said that the US is "run by rich white people." Now, I read that myself, in that subversive newspaper the *Wall Street Journal*, which reported the average income of US Senators and gave the names of the handful of Senators who aren't millionaires. And *The Nation* (which, all right, *is* occasionally subversive) had the audacity to compare Senators' incomes with the average income of CEOs and hedge fund operators. It turns out, if I may make a sweeping but accurate generalization, that the US *is* run by rich white people.

But Jeremiah Wright's greatest offense to our national self-image was his implication that decades of carpet-bombing, counterinsurgency



warfare, covert wars, torture and extraordinary rendition, the exploitation of peoples, and the subversion of democracies around the world were somehow connected to the attacks on 9/11. But surely that cannot be true. Quick: change the channel. The *right* answer is readily available. “They hate us because of our freedom.” “They hate us because we are good and they are evil.” *That* is the only truth we can abide.

There is another quotation about God judging the United States. “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, and that his justice does not sleep forever.” If that had come from a black preacher we might be hearing calls for the candidates to denounce it, but those were the words of Thomas Jefferson.

We live in a nation where there is an operative monopoly on the voice of the Lord, as much as in Amos’s day, or Jeremiah’s. The great challenge facing the American church, I believe, is not coming to terms with the “Black Church” tradition; it is coming to terms with the far more powerful religion that exercises that monopoly in our culture. I mean the civil religion, the cult of national excep-

tionalism, the unquestionable presumption that policing the world is our nation’s sacred duty, that our nation’s wars are holy obligations. These are some of what American church historian Richard Hughes calls the “myths America lives by” (University of Illinois, 2004).

I believe we Christians have a different obligation and that distinguishing what we owe the nation from what we owe our God is the most important challenge before us. Jesus’ words in Matthew are straightforward: the cup of water given to the “little people”—I think he means the people of no account—is the measure of justice. He takes up the same theme in the last words he speaks before his arrest, in Matthew 25: God judges by how the poor and needy are treated. It is that simple, and it is that uncomfortable. ✝

*The Rev. Neil Elliott is an Episcopal priest assisting at St. Paul’s on the Hill, St. Paul, Minnesota and Acquiring Editor at Fortress Press.*

## FOLLOWING

That ant, thinking itself  
on the trail of an unknown  
comrade who has left traces  
of an end inexpressibly  
good, will die finally  
following the small circle  
of its own unspeakable longing.

Steven Schroeder



## Precedent and Uncertainty The Problem of Small Problems

*James Brand*

THE RETIREMENT OF A SUPREME COURT JUSTICE routinely causes much hand-wringing among interest groups and commentators who are worried that a newly-composed court might be less receptive to their points of view. The most troubling prospect is that the court will change direction entirely by overturning a previous decision. At such times, a bedrock principle of legal reasoning becomes a pressing question on Fox News and NPR: What role does precedent play? An equivocal answer from a nominee to this question injects uncertainty into the legal system.

Uncertainty also results when there is no precedent, a situation that the lower courts, where trials and hearings actually occur, face all the time. This can happen as the result of an ambiguous statutory phrase, a peculiar set of facts, or perhaps a novel argument. The slippery question of when to overturn precedent is much simpler for these trial courts. The answer is never. When faced with a legal question, a trial court is required to follow the decisions of the appellate courts in its "chain of command," which, in the federal system, is the Court of Appeals for the circuit in which it sits and the Supreme Court. When neither the Supreme Court nor the relevant Court of Appeals have addressed the question at hand, a trial court interprets the law on its own. Decisions of courts outside their chain of command are persuasive but not binding. Every district court judge in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana can reach different conclusions about a question until their Court of Appeals, which is the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, or the Supreme Court has addressed a particular legal question. This creates uncertainty for litigants and the possibility for increased litigation. If an issue has not been determined one way or the other by a binding court, an attorney has an obligation to attempt to persuade the trial court that the issue should be decided in favor of her client.

Our pyramid system of precedent only functions correctly when new legal questions make it up past the bottom level. But appeals are expensive. Our civil legal system is a "put your money where your mouth is" system. It only pays attention to problems that people with a stake in the matter are willing to expend resources to litigate. This creates a problem when a specific case is not worth the cost to appeal but involves a situation that is likely to happen again. Although the system would benefit from an appellate court's ruling—this would actually reduce litigation costs for future parties because the question already would have been decided—no one is willing to bear that cost for the system's benefit.

In bankruptcy courts, this problem is exacerbated because the process of appealing a bankruptcy court's decision involves an extra layer, one that does not create precedent. Generally, before a decision of a bankruptcy court can be heard by an appeals court, it must first be heard by a district court. (Some circuits have an intermediary panel of bankruptcy judges that, at the parties' option, can hear appeals in lieu of the district court.) This extra layer creates greater uncertainty because district court decisions are not binding on bankruptcy courts, even though district courts are "above" bankruptcy courts in the chain of command. A party would have to appeal twice in order to create precedent for future cases.

In commercial bankruptcy cases, this might not pose a problem, because the amounts at stake in a given case often outweigh the cost and risk of appeal. Bankruptcy cases that involve individuals, on the other hand, often involve questions worth just a few thousand dollars, making an appeal economically irrational. Special interest groups may jump into the fray out of ideological motivation—impact litigation is often aimed at creating precedent—but this is relatively rare in bankruptcy court.



The situation is so bad that Congress passed a special provision allowing a question to jump right up to the Court of Appeals when the bankruptcy court certifies that there is no binding precedent on point and the Court of Appeals agrees to take the case (28 U.S.C. § 158(d)(2)(A)). Last summer in the case of *In re Wright* (492 F.3d 829), the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals exercised this option to address a “small problem” of bankruptcy law that had been unable to rise out of the lower courts.

Even the most charitable view of the provision of the Bankruptcy Code at issue in *Wright* has to acknowledge that Congress made a mistake. Statutes are, as a rule, hard to read, in part because every paragraph is numbered or lettered. But this makes them easy to talk about. “About a third of the way down the page . . .” may work for a literature class, but it is a cumbersome way to refer to a specific provision of law. The convention in legal circles is much more precise. But when Congress amended 11 U.S.C. § 1325 to insert a paragraph after § 1325(a)(9), but before § 1325(b), it failed to provide a section number. The provision simply floats on the page. In need of a label, practitioners eventually settled on “the hanging paragraph.”

The substance of the hanging paragraph, not its curious label, required the Seventh Circuit’s attention. The lower courts could not agree on its meaning. Try making sense of this:

For purposes of paragraph (5), section 506 shall not apply to a claim described in that paragraph if the creditor has a purchase money security interest securing the debt that is the subject of the claim, the debt was incurred within the 910-day [*sic*] preceding the date of the filing of the petition, and the collateral for that debt consists of a motor vehicle (as defined in section 30102 of title 49) acquired for the personal use of the debtor, or if collateral for that debt consists of any other thing of value, if the debt was incurred during the 1-year period preceding that filing. (11 U.S.C. § 1325(a), last paragraph)

Don’t bother to read it again. The facts of the case that made it up to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals will help illustrate the issues.

The debtors in the case, Craig Wright and LaChone P. Giles-Wright, filed for bankruptcy under Chapter 13. Under Chapter 13, the “debt adjustment” chapter, the debtor proposes a repayment plan spanning three to five years during which his income is channeled through the repayment plan and his debts are paid according to a priority scheme.

Under this system, secured debts pose a tricky problem. If the collateral securing a loan is worth less than the loan amount, “under-secured” in the industry language, the debtor may keep the collateral and make payments calibrated to the collateral’s value, not the amount he actually owes the lender. In the context of a car loan, this means that a debtor may keep the car and make lower payments than he had been making. Or rather than keeping the car, he can give it to the lender. The deficiency—the amount that either of these choices makes the lender worse off—is treated as a separate, unsecured debt. Like other unsecured debts, only a portion is usually repaid.

The hanging paragraph provides that this general rule no longer applies to certain loans, including recent car loans, but the paragraph is not clear about what rule applies now. In the *Wright* case, the debtors decided to let the lender take the car, but of course they disagreed with their lender about what should happen next. In past cases, debtors had argued that lenders no longer receive a separate unsecured claim. They have a single claim, which is secured by the car. Give back the car, debtors argued, and the claim is fully satisfied. In contrast, lenders tended to argue that, with the general rule gone, the courts should look to the original contract between the parties, which entitled the lender to an unsecured deficiency judgment if the surrendered car was worth less than the loan amount. The bankruptcy courts were coming down on both sides, with a majority agreeing with the debtors. But because the amount of money at stake usually was less than the cost of an appeal, the issue was not reaching the appeals courts where it could be settled. Precedent was not being created. With the question unsettled, it had to be relitigated each and every time the situation arose.

In the Wrights’ case, the bankruptcy court ruled in favor of the lender. Utilizing the new “direct appeal” provision, the bankruptcy court



certified the question for the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, which took the case and affirmed the bankruptcy court's decision on the basis that the parties' original contract provides the baseline from which to determine the parties' rights—unless the Bankruptcy Code alters those rights. The hanging paragraph “knocked out” the general rule and left the parties to their contractual entitlements. Precedent finally was created.

Of course, this problem of the “hanging paragraph” seems to present a very small, rather unimportant problem in the grand scheme of things. But that's the point. Last year, 28,058 people filed under Chapter 13 in the Seventh Circuit alone, and this year's numbers are likely to be significantly higher. The issue also affects everyone who provided loans to those people in the first place. These “small, rather unimportant” problems are precisely

the ones where individual incentives are often insufficient to advance the public interest. We are left with recurring legal uncertainty, which adds to the cost of litigation for those very people who can least afford it. Although several measures, such as the direct appeal provision utilized in *Wright* and some circuits' use of Bankruptcy Appellate Panels, reduce this problem in bankruptcy, they don't solve it. The problem is, literally, systemic. Although our precedent-based system has many virtues, we would do well to remember its cost. Those with small problems still pay a high price. ♣

James Brand *studied law at the University of Chicago. He currently practices in Minneapolis.*

## IN SOCRATES' COUNTRY

I heard a radiator knocking  
in a philosopher's office,  
reported it, and left a note on his door:  
“This is the radiator that's making all the noise.”  
Later I found a note on my desk:  
“Dear Miss Fixit,  
I'll have you know that I radiate  
neither heat nor noise, but pure light.”

Dorothea Kewley



*film*

## Law, Grace, and Guns: *In Bruges*

Charles Andrews

IT MAY SEEM WILLFULLY PERVERSE TO FIND A Pauline exploration of justification in Martin McDonagh's bloody, black comedy *In Bruges*. But McDonagh is no stranger to crafting complex faith narratives for the selfish, profane, and violent characters of his imaginary Ireland. *In Bruges* is McDonagh's first feature film, and it admirably translates into cinema his preoccupations with intimacy among brutal people and spirituality among the godless. More than his previous works, *In Bruges* investigates the problem of the law and its devastating effects upon lawless men yearning for grace.

The law-grace combine so crucial to Christianity, and especially to Lutheran thought, takes on a pointed character in McDonagh's world of Irish hitmen on the lam. Ray (Colin Farrell) and Ken (Brendan Gleeson) are mismatched criminal partners, the former young and cocky, the latter aging and paunchy. They know little of their assignment, only that Harry their boss (Ralph Fiennes) has sent them to Belgium to the medieval town of Bruges where they are encouraged to sight-see and relax and await his phonecall for further instructions. Ken finds himself at peace absorbing the paintings and architecture away from the bustle of the London underworld and its unpleasant duties. Ray finds himself going stir crazy, desperate for a nightlife of booze and girls, hungry for the action of his bloody job, and annoyed at the vagueness of their assignment and his partner's passivity.

We soon discover that Ray's edginess and boredom have less to do with his thrill-seeking desires than with an aching conscience that throbs whenever his mind starts to rest. Bruges offers little distraction for Ray's uneasy soul, and visions of one particularly horrible assignment that he botched becomes the insistent subtext in all of his complaints. Though these characters live outside the civic legal system—at least until they are caught—

their internal sense of the Law nearly cripples them. Bruges becomes Ray's purgatory and a place of torment like that depicted in *The Last Judgment* triptych by Hieronymus Bosch which they view in Bruges's Groeninge Museum.

One subplot of *In Bruges* involves a film crew making what one character describes as a "trumped up Euro-trash" art film where Bosch's creepy creatures and tortured souls come alive. An American little person named Jimmy (Jordan Prentice) who has a starring role in the Bosch film befriends the two hitmen and provides Ray an entry point into the *Last Judgment*-style fantasia of the final sequence. Ray's own body receives wounds that mimic the injured bodies in the Bosch triptych—a clever touch that emphasizes the spiritual dimension of McDonagh's crime narrative. The name of the town itself—Bruges—comes from an old Scandinavian word "bryggia" meaning "port" or "landing." Most obviously this refers to the many waterways through the town and its importance for medieval Europeans, but it also suggests a passageway for Ray who finds himself caught in a state of judgment and uncertain of his ultimate destination.

Ray is wracked with guilt not for his countless crimes but for one grim bit of excessive violence that I will refrain from describing here. Surprisingly, his own moral code, which ought by all accounts to be nil, is violated, and he is without a means for atoning. Ken attempts to pronounce forgiveness upon him, but this attempt is pointedly futile. The standard rationalizations—that everyone makes mistakes, that they are men of a rough life bound to incur casualties, even that there is no heaven or hell and thus no ultimate consequences for any action—all prove unfit solutions for the problem of Ray's conscience. His sin is inescapable and he is painfully aware of his imprisonment.

This dilemma perfectly exemplifies the problem that concerned St. Paul. As Krister Stendahl



has observed in his famous essay *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Fortress, 1976), Paul investigated “justification rather than forgiveness.” Rather than the psychological problem of guilt and the human-centered activity of being forgiven, Paul describes the God-centered notion of justification which is cosmic in scope. As Stendahl puts it,

Paul’s thoughts about justification were triggered by the issues of divisions and identities in a pluralistic and torn world, not primarily by the inner tensions of individual souls and consciences. His searching eyes focused on the unity and the God-willed diversity of humankind, yes, of the whole creation.

Ray cannot be released from his guilt simply by being forgiven. He requires instead a realignment of his whole being with the law that judges him.

McDonagh is preoccupied with Ray’s inability to be forgiven, and the problem of his individual soul is complicated by the phonecall that reveals Harry’s plan for his men in Bruges. When the true nature of their assignment in Bruges is unveiled, the moral onus shifts to Ken who finds himself unable to be the strict arbiter of the Law required by Harry. Fiennes plays Harry in a delicious turn as a lower-class English tough who has clawed his way into middle-class success with a wife, kids, and a vicious don’t-ask-don’t-tell policy about his business. His viciousness is balanced by unswerving perfectionism and a legalism which asserts that the death of innocent bystanders necessitates suicide for the killer. Harry is a pharisaical executor, a condition that precipitates the explosive finale.

These explorations of law and grace emerged from McDonagh’s initial visit to Bruges on holiday. He says that he was “stunned by how beautiful” the city is and also found himself “a little bit bored.” These two sides of his experience produced Ken and Ray and later the reasons for their being in Bruges together in the first place. The simple plotline of *In Bruges* seems calculated to sell at a Hollywood pitch meeting: a pair of squabbling hitmen hide out in a foreign city and eventually fight their boss. It’s the buddy comedy mixed with the crime thriller and a dash of European class. This simplistic recipe was pushed in the trailer which

featured exasperated quick takes by Colin Farrell and ended in gunshots which gave the film a clichéd appearance further hindered by the awkward title. It is telling that the trailer is not even included on the American version of the DVD.

But McDonagh invests these clichés with liveliness that makes them seem fresh and an undercurrent of moral seriousness drawn from his previous work in the theater. McDonagh’s meteoric rise to literary prominence is itself the stuff of movies. Raised in London by his Anglo-Irish family, McDonagh worked a dead-end job and lived with his parents in the bedroom he had since childhood. From this inauspicious position, he dreamed of doing something more valuable. Then, in a week and a half while his parents were away on holiday, McDonagh sat at a child’s writing desk that was in his room and scribbled out *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* which would go on to win critical acclaim (including a Critics Circle Award and a Tony nomination) and initiate his literary stardom.

This play was the first of a trilogy about desperate, humorous, violent people in Galway on the west coast of Ireland. The other two plays in the trilogy—*A Skull in Connemara* and *The Lonesome West*—along with another trilogy (*The Cripple of Inishmaan*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, and *The Banshees of Inisheer*) and a seventh play called *The Pillowman* were composed hurriedly in the mid-1990s during the same period as his first work. Then, the inspiration seemingly dried up, and for nearly ten years McDonagh reaped the benefits of that one outburst of creativity.

McDonagh admitted to feeling afraid that his one unexpected year of creation was a fluke never again to be attained. His playwriting aspirations were put on hold, and in 2006 he turned his attention to filmmaking. This shift is not surprising; all of his writing has been informed by cinema. He has said that the theater was not an important part of his cultural education and cites instead the films of Quentin Tarantino and Terrence Malick and punk bands like the Pogues as his primary influences. Many of his plays call for special effects like blood squibs and prosthetic body parts, devices more common to violent pop cinema than to serious stageplays. But few filmmakers who trade in the darkly humorous violence of the Tarantino variety manage more than lip service about the moral



core of their works. Eli Roth's claims that his *Hostel* movies investigate serious issues like American hedonism and the banality of evil are undercut by his obvious glee in constructing gut-churning shockers.

McDonagh is by no means averse to gleeful bloodletting, as evident in his Oscar winning short film *Six-Shooter* (2006) that features an exploding cow. *Six-Shooter* also stars Brendan Gleeson and functioned as a remarkable calling card for future movie work like *In Bruges*. But both of these films focus as much on the conflicted consciences of the protagonists as they do on gory special effects.

Of course, McDonagh's dismissal of theatrical influences may be part of a cultivated posture that emphasizes his *sui generis* creativity rather than a typical artistic lineage. The titles of his plays allude to other Irish classics. *A Skull in Connemara* comes from Lucky's monologue in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *The Lonesome West* is Christy Mahon's description of rural Ireland in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. McDonagh's self-conscious connection to the high art of Ireland fused with a violent pop sensibility enriches his film and elevates it above the post-Tarantino, European peers like Matthew Vaughn (*Layer Cake* [2004]) and Guy Ritchie (*Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* [1998]; *Snatch* [2000]). These British crime thrillers display a formal exuberance with their clever camera movements, cheeky dialogue, and giddy violence, but they lack the spirituality of McDonagh's film. Though McDonagh clearly delights in images of gunplay, his attention to law and grace infuses his work with a seriousness worthy of St. Paul.

But the question remains: does Ray's dilemma ever find resolution? Is there justification that over-

comes the problematic insufficiency of forgiveness? In the final shoot-out, Harry, Ken, and Ray continually create rules for each other. Harry won't shoot at Ray when a pregnant woman is nearby, and Ken won't shoot Harry when they are standing face to face. (Harry does shoot Ken in the leg, but only because he made him come all the way to Bruges and a flesh wound seems only fair.) This rule-making functions as their submission to the law, and at every turn Ken tries to offer grace, Harry tries to exact punishment, and Ray tries to escape.

The final volley of gunshots puts Ray in position to be a means of grace to Harry, to offer more than simple forgiveness, which would be obviously futile. Harry, through an unlikely chain of events, finds himself in the same moral dilemma that sent Ray to Bruges, and his strict obedience to his gangsters' law forces a swift and cruel response for killing an innocent person. In a blood-choked whisper, Ray tells Harry that he is mistaken, that what appeared to be the death of an innocent was merely a *trompe l'oeil* produced by the Bosch-inspired movie set nearby. This whisper creates Ray's escape from judgment and shows unity with his enemy rather than their cycle of guilt and punishment. No sense is given that Ray's conscience will be wholly appeased, but in the midst of guns and blood, McDonagh finds grace for lawless men. ♣

Charles Andrews is Assistant Professor of English at Whitworth University.



## WATCHER

What if she ran screaming from her house?—  
the girl at the end of the street,  
the one with no mother,  
the one you watched at school

as she passed solitary in the hall  
with her back straight, books clutched to her chest,  
face composed as if determined  
to make the best of it—

or two rows over in the classroom  
with her dark hair draped over her notebook,  
unaware of your vigil.

And when you saw her at lunch, alone,  
with her pitiful paper sack,  
what then?

Did you go and lean  
casually on the table  
and speak to her, use small talk  
even though you knew  
small talk wouldn't interest her.

Or did you sit down beside her  
and extend half a sandwich  
and wait?

Would you rush down the street  
to her now, ask her what's wrong,  
put your arms around her,  
tell her she's safe with you?

Vincent Wixon



# fiction

## When “Just the Facts” is Not Enough

Ron Hansen. *Exiles: A Novel*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

WHAT IS A NOVEL? THE GENRE IS NOTORIOUSLY difficult to define. It encompasses everything from Tolstoy’s “loose baggy monsters” to Hemingway’s spare icebergs with “nine-tenths under the surface.” When I teach the development of the novel, I start with Terry Eagleton’s claim that novels are essentially cannibalistic—they consume and are nourished by other genres. They’ve successfully devoured tragedies, epics, poems, letters and, perhaps most prominently, historical accounts and biography. Novels borrow from, adapt, and transform other genres and, in some cases, drive them to virtual extinction. Who wrote or read epic poems after the eighteenth century? In the array of genres to borrow from, though, history must be the most popular. Few things are as tempting to a novelist as a historical character. Setting one’s brush to paint a well-known person’s life can result in portraits with surprising and illuminating perspectives. When a character has a literary dimension, moreover, there’s the added challenge and possibility of the play of language—the intersection of contemporary writing with the language of the past.

Ron Hansen’s new novel, *Exiles*, is an object lesson in the possibilities, limits, and pitfalls of historical fiction. It’s based on the life of the Jesuit priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins and the shipwreck that inspired one of his best poems. In December 1875, five German nuns, fleeing the religious persecution of Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, drowned when their ship foundered in the icy waters of the North Sea. Hansen makes this tragedy and Hopkins’s response to it both the central events and the motivating idea of his novel.

Hopkins’s life is full of the subtle tensions and drama that make for wonderful fiction—it is not

### Susan Bruxvoort Lipscomb

difficult to see why Hansen was attracted to him as a subject. A product of his time and place—an England in a crisis of faith and an Oxford marked by decadent aestheticism—Hopkins was sensitive, eccentric, and both sexually and spiritually anxious. In response to his own inner turmoil and the currents of the age, he went against his Anglican family’s wishes and joined not just the Roman Catholic church, but one of the most controversial religious orders of the time: the Society of Jesus. Literary scholars love to comb Hopkins’s poetry for oblique suggestions of repressed homoerotic desire; biographers have puzzled over a man who named his desires in his adolescent confessional journal but never acted them out. Unhealthy repression or sublimated passion? Hopkins’s psyche is a mystery.

Hopkins as a literary figure is no less intriguing. As a young man, he already had started experimenting with the distinctive poetic style that would secure his position as one of the most important poets of the nineteenth century. He developed a unique metrical technique (sprung rhythm) and a theology and ontology to explain his overall poetic approach (coining terms such as “inscape” and “instress”). In his early years in the priesthood, however, he relinquished poetry, feeling that it was an unhealthy attachment. He started writing again with occasional poems on religious subjects during an idyllic sojourn in rural Wales. His poem, “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” responding to the death of the German nuns, launched him decisively back into the creative stream. Hopkins’s response to this shipwreck is likewise the impetus for Hansen’s novel.

Conceptually, this makes sense. The composition of “The Wreck of the Deutschland” began a period of striking creativity for Hopkins in which he wrote his most celebrated and frequently anthologized poems. Representative poems from this period such as “God’s Grandeur” and “Pied



Beauty” celebrate the beauty of Jesus incarnate in the world and demonstrate Hopkins’s idiosyncratic and brilliant style. Hopkins’s complete life and poetic career, however, were more tragic than triumphant. This is what makes him such a fascinating subject. The Jesuits soon transferred him from Wales to a number of other appointments concluding with a teaching position in damp and pestilent Dublin, where he was overwhelmed with grading and physically miserable from various ailments. His poems from this period, later labeled the “Terrible Sonnets,” reflect a lonely and desperate man, calling out to a God he’s not sure will answer. He likewise despaired of anything ever coming of his poetry. When he died at age forty-five, of typhoid fever, only a few of his minor and less characteristic poems had been published.

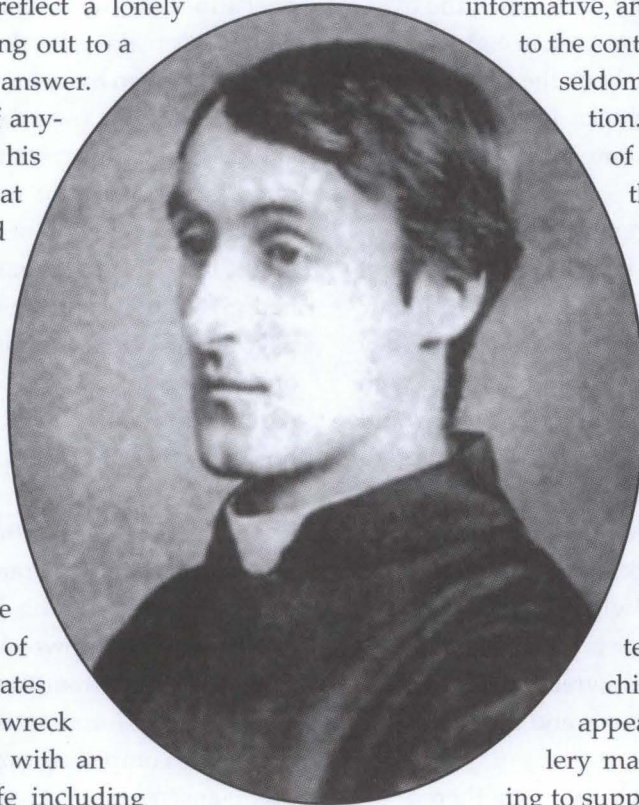
Hansen’s novel begins with Hopkins learning of the *Deutschland* calamity and starting his composition. It then gives the backgrounds of each of the five nuns and narrates the shipwreck. The shipwreck narration is interspersed with an account of Hopkins’s life including the backstory behind his decision to become a Jesuit priest. The interspersed narrative extends to Hopkins’s death. All in a little over two hundred pages.

It’s not difficult to see Hansen’s aim: to tell parallel tragedies, both illuminated by religious hope and faith. If you are looking for biographical details about Hopkins’s life and a good shipwreck story, this book will suit you. As a single, compelling novel, however, it is unsuccessful.

Here I come back to my original question: what is a novel? What separates a novel from an embellished historical account, I would argue, is compelling narrative perspective. Whether it’s Jane Austen’s ironic social commentary, Ann Rice’s lat-

est attempt to think God’s thoughts, or the shifting perspectives of postmodern novels, the crucial element is voice. They can be intimate and confiding or distant and knowing, helpful guides or unreliable rogues, but successful novels have interesting narrators.

As I mentioned, *Exiles* narrates most of Hopkins’s life as well as the early lives of each of five nuns, and tells the tale of a shipwreck. To contain all this in a slim volume, Hansen resorts to a voice that sounds much like that of a biographer—distant, informative, and full of the facts available to the contemporary researcher—but seldom realized in vivid narration. When Hopkins first reads of the *Deutschland* tragedy, the narrator informs the reader that the front page of *The London Times* “was filled with three- and four-line advertisements for Newcastle, Silkstone, or Wall’s-End coal, Bailey’s elastic stockings, ladies’ abdominal belts, Pulvermacher’s Patent Galvanic Chain Bands, Antakos corn plasters, Iceland Liniment for chilblains, and ‘Want Places’ appeals from wet nurses, scullery maids, and cooks, each willing to supply testimonials about their skills and finer qualities.”



Gerard Manley Hopkins, 28 July 1844 – 8 June 1889.

This sort of detail, offered at many turns, is moderately interesting. It has little to do, however, with the action or themes of the work and serves only to make one feel as if one is reading a history of Victorian popular culture rather than a novel. What do “Pulvermacher’s Patent Galvanic Chain Bands” have to do with Gerard Manley Hopkins?

Hansen also quotes extensively from Hopkins’s journal and letters. This too lends the novel the feeling of biography rather than of fiction. Instead of using the liberty granted by his chosen genre to imagine Hopkins’s thoughts and feelings or to elaborate on events, connecting them more deeply to the novel’s themes, the narrator gives us



Hopkins's actual words. These are often interesting, but don't necessarily knit the novel together in a compelling way.

It is not only when giving local color that the novel's narrator adopts the voice of a biographer or historian; he even takes this stance toward characters and their contributions to the plot. In an early scene, Hopkins has a brief conversation with a fellow novice. The narrator proceeds to tell us that "Thirty-three years later, Frederick would become the Bishop of Honduras, and he would drown in 1923, at age eighty-nine, when the overloaded paddleboat he was on sank in eighteen feet of water." What knowing about the death of this man, decades later (in eighteen feet of water, no less), is supposed to contribute to the novel never becomes clear.

Details about future events are not only superfluous—they occasionally give away crucial plot information that could have heightened dramatic interest. When the nuns first board the ship, they meet, "Babette Binder, who would die along with her child; and... Mrs. Anna Gmolch, who would survive the shipwreck, and her little daughter Paulina, who died in her mother's arms on board the rescue boat *Liverpool*." More than once, before narrating the actual shipwreck, the narrator informs the reader of who will and will not survive.

It's not that this narrator is incapable of vivid, novel-worthy prose. The shipwreck scenes and the deaths of the nuns are dramatic and moving:

[Sister Henrica]'s black veil smothered her face, her black cloak furred around her like the strips of burial cloths binding Lazarus in his tomb, and she could not help it, she gasped, and seawater filled her. She coughed and convulsed and took in more. Weakening and in pain, she slashed out with her hands and kicked her feet in the finality of a wild rage. But she

was burdened and yoked by her habit, and demanded by the sea. She remembered as she sank: Jesus wept.

Passages like this remind us that Hansen is a gifted writer, fully capable of beautiful and effecting prose.

He seems flummoxed, however, by the life of Gerard Manley Hopkins. The chapters narrating the shipwreck are the strongest of the novel; those passages about Hopkins, the weakest. The poet's meeting with John Henry Newman, when Hopkins is making his decision to join the Catholic church, is given a scant two pages of workmanlike prose. Hopkins's own death, admittedly a quieter and less dramatic event than the drowning of the nuns, is narrated in a sparse style that does little to convey the tragedy of the man's life. The details might have been poignant if the rest of the novel had given the reader an inside view of Hopkins's psyche: "The house minister carried in sliced lemons and a porcelain tea service to help [Hopkins's parents] in their watch." At the end of this novel, however, these are merely random details, a dry account of events.

Is this a novel worth reading? For those who know little about Gerard Manley Hopkins and want a glimpse into his life, it should be of interest. Parts of the shipwreck narration, moreover, are masterful. Those familiar with Hopkins, however, are apt to be disappointed. They will have to wait for a truly compelling novel about this elusive figure. Hansen's novel gives us a taste of what non-fiction prose can tell us about Hopkins's life. Those who want more may appreciate Paul Mariani's new biography, due out this fall. ♣

Susan Bruxvoort Lipscomb is Assistant Professor of English at Houghton College in western New York.



## music

# Knowing Diddley

**M**Y EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS HAD THIS TEST question last year:

What is Bo Diddley's real name?

- a. McKinley Morganfield
- b. Chester Burnett
- c. Ellas McDaniel
- d. Rice Miller.

If I didn't teach Bo Diddley, my students would know him only as that funny looking dude in Nike commercials. The whole "Bo, you don't know diddley" joke would be lost on them.

I was lucky. Thanks mainly to a booking agent-turned-promoter named Richard Nader, the late 1960s and early 1970s was a great time to come into rock 'n' roll. While the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, and Crosby, Stills, and Nash (and for some of us in Des Moines, Iowa, Grand Funk's *Survival*) were defining a music that came to be known simply as "rock," Nader was presenting "rock 'n' roll" revival concerts across the country. "Old" artists like Bill Haley and His Comets, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, the Coasters, Dion, and Jerry Lee Lewis were returning to popularity both on and off Nader's stages. It became not only hip but righteous to revere and enjoy these older acts. They were the originators, the influences upon the rock gods that graced our bedroom walls. They were welcomed onto the rock television shows. NBC's *The Midnight Special* in particular made a place for them alongside Slade and Wet Willie.

My favorite was Chuck Berry. His nursery-rhyme return to the charts, "My Ding-a-Ling" (No. 1 in 1972), was merely an annoyance compared with the rest of his catalog from his days at Chess Records. I also dug Bo Diddley for how he talked through the radio on singles like

*J. D. Buhl*

"Road Runner" and "You Can't Judge a Book by its Cover." His commands to "come in closer" or "turn it up!" were surrounded with the frequent query, "How'm I doin', baby?"

Music critic Dave Marsh wrote that Bo countered Chuck Berry's "vision of America as a comic book paradise" with "a view of all of life, but particularly sex, as a profound cosmic joke, played out at the expense of everyone, but particularly the solemn and pompous." On myriad singles and albums, Diddley "wisecracked and cackled his way through songs with themes that bordered on the absurd... and a series of crazed, sometimes demonic, love affairs."

In 1971, these rock 'n' roll performers seemed larger than life and yet somehow vulnerable. They had been messed around with pretty good in the early days of the record business, and we felt protective of them. But that didn't make them any less scary. Bo in particular, a large, sweaty black man with lust and danger in his eyes, was intimidating. For all the supposed darkness of the Stones, Bo Diddley performed from a place of real menace. He exuded traces of an earlier, uglier time that we, in our whiteness, could never understand, a truly nasty world that would not intrude upon our comic book paradise until years later, when the rock 'n' roll exposé and glamour-stripping biography came into vogue. In exchange for the protective devotion of the young, historically savvy audience that made the rock 'n' roll revival possible, guardians like Bo Diddley kept us from the worst of that world.

The man who wrote the infectious "Love is Strange" (under his wife's maiden name) for the R&B duo Mickey & Sylvia didn't earn much money for his compositions. Bo's one entry on the pop charts, the trash-talking "Say Man" in 1959, was another work he'd sold the publishing rights to. In his history of Chess Records, *Machers*



and *Rockers* (2004), Rich Cohen writes that “life at the label has been compared to sharecropping.” Methods there, “though manipulative and tricky, were never illegal.” In the rush to get a song onto plastic and into the market, artists would notice only later that they had signed away *everything*. Having a record meant more money on the road; however, and that is how so many rock legends made their living. The vicissitudes of such a life—unintended pregnancies, divorce, arrests, gambling debts, and car wrecks—were often covered by the label but then deducted from an artist’s earnings.

For us kids, there was a sadness to such artists, and it wasn’t just about money. It had to do with the question of ownership. What started as an art form of revolt that exalted the individual without raising him above his context had become by the 1970s a struggle to maintain a unique persona against imitators who absorbed your influence—especially if they were more successful. Having gone from copycats to copyrights, everyone was out to claim something as exclusively *theirs*. Diddley contended that his persona had been ripped off, that Elvis, in particular, had received credit for his style. “He copied me, with his legs moving and all that.” By 1970, such bitterness had been with him for a while. We young fans never knew the fun-loving, cosmic prankster of Marsh’s record collection. For us, men like Diddley and Berry *always* had been angry.

In *When Rock Was Young* (1981), Bruce Pollock reports running into Bo in New York in the mid-seventies. He was “incomprehensible much of the time, the rest incensed.” The loss of royalties due him compelled Diddley to, at least historically, set the record straight. “I was the originator,” he told Pollock. “I don’t hate Elvis Presley. I never have disliked him. But at one point I thought he could have gotten his own act and left mine alone.”

It became an old saw to blame everything on Elvis, as if the boy never had an original thought in his life. But when it came to continued abuse at the hands of the music business, Bo was counting on kids like me to stick up for him. “I don’t think the public likes that I was ripped off,” he appealed through Pollock. “I just want to get what I deserve from my product. Just give me mine and I’ll be

happy.” One obituary had Diddley estimating that record companies owed him as much as \$10 million dollars. When he left Chess, he was told he owed *them* \$125,000. So when I read of his death in June and reached for my Twentieth Century Masters version of *The Best of Bo Diddley*, I couldn’t help but feel I’d let the man down. I’m just one more suburban white guy who paid \$18.99 for a CD that Bo never saw a cent from.

Whatever they earned on a Richard Nader gig, at least these revived acts had their dignity. They were folded into the rock present and played before enthusiastic crowds. Nader told *Rolling Stone* in 1969,

I felt Woodstock showed that underground music had reached a critical plateau.... In their search for a new form, everyone is re-examining what went before. A re-evolution of basic rock is underway and it will last until a new form comes along.

This “re-evolution” of the insinuating rhythm of the 1950s informed an entire generation and gave us a comprehensive understanding of the music we loved. This is so different from the shortsightedness we find so many years later. While my students seem born with an appreciation for Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin, that’s as far back as they want to go. Nobody wants to know that the latest hip-hop fusillade is really the Bo Diddley beat inverted.

So I carry on my own little rock ‘n’ roll revival in the classroom. Otherwise, the kids won’t understand why the musical question “Who Do You Love?” can pierce the mystery of faith, or know what it means when I pause in a particularly intense lesson and ask, “Ahh, how’m I doin’, baby?”

(Oh, and the answer is c.) ♣

J. D. Buhl is an English and literature teacher in Concord, California. He still listens to Grand Funk.



# pulpit and pew Cubits and Begats

*Paul Koch*

**I**N A RECENT SESSION OF PREMARITAL COUNSELING, A bride-to-be told me that she had tried reading the Bible numerous times but always got stuck in the early parts of the Old Testament. The genealogies in Genesis presented the first challenge, but not an insurmountable one, interspersed as they were with the grand stories of Noah and Abraham. Nor did the complex laws from Sinai do her in. Laws about oxen goring people to death are actually interesting to read.

What she found impenetrable were the long descriptions of how Moses was to construct the Ark of Covenant and build and furnish the tabernacle. Beginning in Exodus 25, the reader encounters chapter after chapter of acacia wood and crimson linen, all measured in handbreadths, cubits, and spans. Four rings of gold go here, fifty clasps of bronze go there. Twenty wooden frames will stand on forty frames of silver on the south side of the tabernacle, and likewise on the north side. The Golden Calf makes for a few chapters of lively interlude, as the Israelites swallow their own idolatry (literally) and Moses pleads with God to spare them, but then it's back to the building project. Instructions about the tabernacle resume in chapter 35 and continue until the end of the book.

My parishioner is not the only one to stumble over these lengthy descriptions of building projects. I have been tempted to highlight them in my own Bible, along with the genealogies, so that I might be more efficient in my devotional life and skip them. Couldn't I cover more important ground by spending less time on cubits and begats? Indeed, are not such descriptions the very sort of thing that makes the Bible seem out of date, obsessed with details that matter little to modern readers?

For a while now I have wondered what the Holy Spirit had in mind when he inspired the biblical writers to include these descriptions, but I have been sitting in church council meetings as a pas-

tor for a few years now and it has begun making sense. What are the most boring parts of the Bible for many readers? Building projects and genealogies. What do I hear more than anything at council meetings? Building projects and genealogies.

Some recent council agendas illustrate the point. I serve three rural congregations, and at one congregation's most recent council meeting, the only items under old business were as follows: "Roofing Job... Drain Tile... Other." At another of my congregations, the most recent minutes indicate that the only items of old business were lights over the altar, new oil candles, and cleaning the janitor's room. The first items under new business were a sump pump and the lawn mowing budget.

Genealogies do not feature as prominently in our meetings, but at the end of every year, each of the three church councils spends time updating its membership lists, removing the names of people we have not seen for a while. Probably few church councils are as regular and efficient with updating the roster as mine. Each congregation contributes to the parish fund—which pays, among other things, my salary—according to its percentage of the overall parish membership, so there is motivation for keeping the rolls as slim as possible.

Recent centennial celebrations at one of my congregations demonstrated the same thing. Much time went into writing and revising the centennial booklet, the largest part of which told the congregation's history. The history reads like a catalogue of building projects: "In 1973, the church was rewired and the interior redecorated.... The church ladies were excited in 1976 when Bob Snow drilled a well and piped water into the kitchen.... In the early 1980s, the interior and exterior were painted and storm windows installed." At the end of the book, the editors fill several pages with the names of every confirmand listed by year. Building projects and genealogies.



On one hand, such observations show that we are at least as boring as the parts of the Bible that bore us. No surprise, since we are at least as sinful as the motley band of fratricides, prostitutes, and idolaters who fill the Bible. On the other hand, those of us who find such things boring should question our own distaste for the earthy details of life. Building projects and genealogies bore me, and perhaps that is only because I prefer the telling of a good story to the recitation of a list. But it seems there is something of the proud, old sinful self in my boredom: Aren't matters like the sump pump and janitorial closet beneath me? Don't lists of confirmands distract me from the more transcendent aspects of my job?

It is, however, the dead skin falling off the bodies of the worshiping assembly, turning into dust, that necessitates a janitorial closet. It is the generations before us, multiplying through the sweaty processes of procreation and praying around ordinary dinner tables, who have passed on the faith to the present day—you can find their names on the list of confirmands. The serpent convinced the first man and woman that they could transcend their status as creatures and be like God. After the fruit, perhaps his next suggestion would have been to discard building projects and genealogies.

As earthly creatures, we need buildings to shield our heads from the rain and keep us warm when we hear God's word. Lists of generations give praise to the Lord who used these people to carry the gospel to us. Jesus himself descended from such a list.

At the same time, there is something of the old sinner even in our obsession with buildings and generations. While such things bore us in the Bible, they consume our attention in our own congregations and provide occasions for stumbling. I called a woman whose family had stopped coming to church. She had had a falling out with another church member, and so she could not come to worship, but she did not want to join another church either. Our church was her home. Her family had been members there for generations. She could not imagine going to another church. Maybe someday she would be back.

A Samaritan woman once mentioned to Jesus an old disagreement between Jews and Samari-

tans: could worship happen on Mount Gerizim, or must it happen in Jerusalem? Jesus responded that his Father was seeking people who would worship in Spirit and truth. The location was inconsequential. On another occasion, he promised his presence where two or three are gathered in his name. We have no excuse for neglecting God's word when one building or group of people fails us.

The building projects and genealogies will not let us go, though, and the Lord seems to be at work here. We are earthly creatures. Our buildings and genealogies are important, and our connections to them manifest our love for God's word and our fellowship with one another. A funeral drove this point home for me. One of my oldest members died, and I was informed that his funeral would happen at the funeral home. Many of my parishioners were surprised at this, and one of them called the funeral home to complain. The deceased had been a lifelong member of the church. His widow had taught Sunday school there for many years. Why was the funeral not at our church? Why would the church women not be preparing lunch?

The funeral director explained to me that the widow was too distraught to help with the arrangements, and so the children had done all the planning. The children had moved away long ago, and so the building had ceased mattering to them. If the Lutheran Reformers were right, then the church exists wherever the gospel is preached and the sacraments rightly administered. For that reason, I can say that it was a church funeral; forgiveness and resurrection through Christ were preached that day. My parishioners were hurt, though, and I do think they had good reason. They are accustomed to consoling the bereaved by showing their hospitality. They comfort with casseroles. Buildings neither create nor sustain faith, but in this case a severing from Christian fellowship took concrete form.

But an interesting thing happened as I was leaving the cemetery following the interment. The funeral had been at the funeral home, but the man was buried in the cemetery next to the church. I was about to get into my car when one of the grandsons asked if the church was locked. No, I said, we don't lock it. Could he go inside? Sure,



I replied, do you need to use the bathroom? No, there were some pictures in there he wanted to look at. I assume he was referring to the pictures of the confirmands. They hang from the wall, year by year, starting in black and white and eventually turning to color. As I was driving off, the grandson and several of his cousins were walking toward the church. Their parents had been severed from the fellowship there so much that their father's funeral was held elsewhere, but the build-

ing had not lost its claim on those grandchildren. Nor had the genealogies. God's word, preached in that building and carried into hearts by the Holy Spirit, continued to echo there for them. ✠

*Paul Koch is pastor of the Wannaska Lutheran Parish in rural northwestern Minnesota.*

#### APOLLO AT THE LUTE

After all that effort he was still incapable  
of the cracked note that gave the song its charm.  
The song was a country of human markings on mud,  
of brilliant firemen saddened by the translation  
of swans' gestures into choreographic tropes,  
scrawny street kids spitting at each other,  
and an indeterminate number of things.  
One more time the god played flawlessly.  
*Well now....* said the trembling virgins. *Surely.... Well now....*

James Owens



# being lutheran

## Learning to Speak

WHEN I SIGNED UP WITH THE LUTHERAN Church Missouri Synod's Volunteer Youth Ministry, I thought I was the perfect poster boy for Valparaiso University. Valpo's mission statement declares that its students should be prepared to "to lead and serve in both church and society." After four years of learning how to write and speak clearly, four years in the honors college and in two demanding majors—Philosophy and English, it was now time to begin a life of service.

I knew of VYM from a couple of good friends, both Valpo grads, who had joined the program. They had committed to spending two-and-a-half years in Taiwan, part-time as English teachers and part-time as volunteers at a local Lutheran congregation. Like my friends, I saw this as an opportunity to travel and also a way to put off making a long-term career decision. I could learn to speak Mandarin Chinese, which even then was predicted to be *the* language of the twenty-first century, and I would be serving both church and society. It all sounded pretty good.

Part of the VYM application included an interview with the recruiter from St. Louis. Most of the interview went well enough. I vaguely remember a lot of discussion about whether I would be able to handle the stress of living in another culture, and I believed I could. After all, I already had spent a semester in Kenya as part of my college education. But I vividly remember the end of the interview, when he put the question to me about my faith. "Just one more question," he said. "Imagine that you're teaching bible study and afterwards, a young man asks 'Andrew, why do *you* believe in Jesus?' What would you say to him?"

I was speechless. "Hmm," I said, giving myself time. And then to break the awkward silence another, "Hmm. Tough question." Finally, I admitted, "I don't know what I'd say. I guess I could say that I believe because my parents do, because it was the way I was

### Andrew Fields

raised. But I don't think I'd actually say that to him. I don't know what I'd say. I don't know." And that was it. That was the best I could come up with. "Well," the recruiter gently admonished me, "you probably want to think about that question a little bit more and work on an answer, because you're almost sure to be asked." And then he opened the door into the program. "How'd you like to go to Taiwan?" he said. I felt like Peter. It was like Christ himself had absolved me and given me a second chance.

I WALKED OUT OF THE INTERVIEW THINKING LESS about why I believed in Jesus and more about why after four years of college I was unable to answer his question. What had happened? It wasn't that I'd struggled like a confirmation student to recall Luther's explanations to the Second and Third Articles of the Creed; it was that the catechism didn't even come to mind as a potential resource from which to draw in formulating an answer.

If the confirmation students I teach now are anything like I was, I don't think I really understood the confirmation faith I professed in the eighth grade. Like most junior high students, I put the catechism back on the shelf once confirmation was over. And then, four years later, I was off to college, and there I was, reading the Great Books and exposed to non-Christian worldviews, under the guidance of able teachers who rightly took it as their pedagogical responsibility to facilitate understanding of the authors on their own terms. This often meant defending them against immature students' assumptions, unfair criticisms and knee-jerk reactions.

One of my classmates did dust off his catechism in a memorable Christ College seminar. We came to class, most of us woefully underprepared, to discuss the text for the week, Aristotle's *Treatise on the Soul*. My classmate, I noticed, had prepared. He'd brought his blue *Small Catechism* and was displaying it prominently on the table in front of him instead of Aristo-



tle's text. Finally and rather reluctantly our professor gave him the floor. He went to the whiteboard and proceeded to give the class a catechetical review of theological anthropology and eschatology, including a discussion of body, soul, and spirit; the interim state; the general resurrection; the final judgment; eternal life and, of course, hell. I think he may even have opened the floor up for questions after he was done. It was, I think, part stunt, but mostly a sincere, presentation of biblical doctrine in the marketplace, like Paul in Athens. I don't remember exactly what the professor said when he'd finished, though I do remember her asking if he was indeed finished so that we could get back to Aristotle.

I admired my classmate's willingness to speak his faith, but I didn't think that he had found the best way to do it. Early in my college career, I attempted to synthesize my faith with whatever we were reading at the time. But the mix-and-match approach mostly just made for pious and heart-felt but poorly written papers. Eventually, I found myself tabling my faith as I read and wrote, listening sympathetically to the ideas and worldviews of other authors. And, by my own choosing, I somehow was able to avoid all of the classes in Lutheran doctrine. After four years of this, I graduated with an ability to speak articulately about almost everything except my own faith.

**A**T THE MISSIONARY ORIENTATION IN ST. LOUIS, I found myself growing impatient with some of my fellow missionaries who seemed so zealous, so confident that they were going into other cultures with all the answers. How about a little bit of honest agnosticism, I thought. How about a little bit of humility? But I still worried about the question I had not been able to answer, Why did I believe in Jesus? What would I say to the young Friday night Bible study seeker? I couldn't say. I felt like an infant, baptized and believing but unable to speak. And if I was unable to speak for myself, what business did I have speaking to others?

While there was nothing more important than learning again to speak the faith, learning to understand Mandarin quickly became the more urgent task. Actually, being unable to speak was the ideal way to start. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer begins his discussion of Christian ministry by recognizing the reality of one's sinful nature even after one has been converted. He instructs Christians to

learn first to hold their tongues, because so much of what we say is motivated by a will to power, a desire to gain an advantage over the other. Of course, this first step in ministry is made possible by faith that one stands before God justified by grace alone. But being unable to speak a word of the language sure helps you close your mouth. I sensed my pride chaffing against this imposed humiliation. I wanted to be independent and intelligent like I imagined I'd become in college. Instead, I was dependent and dumb.

If you can't speak you do lots of listening, first in class and then eavesdropping on conversations in the buses and trains, at the noodle stands and night markets, at the youth group meetings at church. Over time, with the help of patient friends and teachers, I was able to pick out distinct sounds, and then words, and then phrases, and then complete sentences, and by the end of two years or so I felt pretty comfortable both hearing and speaking the language of every day life.

At the same time I was not only learning Mandarin; I began learning again to speak the language of my Lutheran faith. I am sad to say that I didn't regularly hear the gospel preached in the Lutheran congregation I served, even after I could understand the language. The sermons were biblical, but if the cross was there, it often functioned as law. Many sermons I remember went something like this: "This is what Jesus has done for us. How come we're still so bad? We need to improve." A steady dose of that homiletical structure starts to bring you down. I asked my dad to send me tapes of his sermons and some of those sermons I remember still today, over ten years later. Perhaps it was because I listened to them over and over, perhaps because it was the sound of home or because it was the voice of family, but mainly, I think, it was because they were good evangelical sermons. The gospel was there, loud and clear, vivid and ringing true in every single sermon. As I listened I learned again to treasure what I had been taking for granted, and I became convinced that if the words I spoke were going to have spiritual power, they would have to speak of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for us and our salvation.

The prime opportunity for us to speak was Friday night, when all five of the volunteers in the city would get together to host students and young



professionals for an English language Bible study. It was always enjoyable to read the Bible with these Chinese friends, many of whom were not Christian. They read carefully, focusing on the English text, many having never read the stories before. They regularly came up with surprising questions and perspectives, ones that none of us would have considered, and occasionally, there would be real flashes of insight, “aha!” moments for all of us.

I was in Taiwan as a representative of the LCMS, and so doing my best to speak from a Lutheran perspective seemed like the right thing to do. Thank-

fully, the Taipei office housed the library of the China Evangelical Lutheran Church, a library made up mostly of English books donated from the libraries of retired missionaries. On Friday mornings, I would go digging around in the musty stacks hoping to find something that would give me some insight into the text for the Bible study, some words to speak. Occasionally, I'd find a gem. I remember finding a tattered copy of

Helmut Thielicke's *The Waiting Father* when I was preparing for a study of the parables. I'd never heard of Helmut Thielicke before, but the resources in the library were so limited that I'd give anything a try. It became a favorite along with *Our Heavenly Father*, a book of his sermons on the Lord's Prayer. Perhaps my favorite finds, however, were catechetical: a copy of Martin Marty's *The Hidden Discipline* and a Chinese/English edition of Edward Koehler's *Summary of Christian Doctrine*. I re-learned the language of my Christian faith in these words of clarity and grace, and I was given weekly opportunities to practice articulating that faith in the Bible studies.

“Why do you believe in Jesus?” The question had rendered me speechless, but Luther's answer

presented in Koehler in both English and Chinese was a gift that spoke tellingly to me— “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel... “I believe, it occurred to me, because people who loved me spoke the gospel to me, and through that gospel the Holy Spirit worked a grand miracle in me. That is why I believed. That is why I continued to believe. I believed because I had heard God speaking to me, in the words of Scripture, in the voice of my parents.

Now, on Sunday mornings, I try to do what oth-

ers did for me. I try to speak the gospel, clearly and with grace. I find that speaking best begins with careful, attentive, submissive listening—to the language of the text, in its immediate, canonical and confessional contexts, for the law and the gospel, with the people in mind, aware that I speak not only to them but also publicly on their behalf, giving voice to the faith that we share. As I prepare to speak, I am keenly aware that mine is not the only voice they

have heard or will hear in the marketplace of ideas, and that while some of these voices will confirm the revealed truth of Scripture, others will attempt to subvert it. I still believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus or bring anyone to believe, no matter how well I articulate the faith, and so I speak prayerfully, trusting that the Holy Spirit who brought me to faith will also be pleased to use my words to speak to others of Jesus, that they might believe, and believing themselves, learn to speak. †

Andrew Fields is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Atlanta, Georgia and teaches Chinese at Georgia Tech.

*I believe because people  
who loved me spoke the  
gospel to me, and through  
that gospel the Holy Spirit  
worked a grand miracle in  
me. That's why I believe.*



# books

Robert Jewett. *Mission and Menace: Four Centuries of American Religious Zeal*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

ROBERT JEWETT HAS WRITTEN a timely, thoughtful, and informative examination of the way American religion—and especially Protestant evangelicism—has shaped America’s political thought, domestic and foreign policies, and, perhaps most fundamentally, the way Americans and much of the world understand what America or being American means. This is a work intended for general readers; it is not an historical or theological monograph; neither does it intend to replace or challenge the best scholarly works of synthesis on this subject such as Mark Noll’s *America’s God*, Brooks Holifield’s *Theology in America*, or the essays in *God’s New Israel* edited by Conrad Cherry. Rather, this work, which emerged from three years of lectures and seminars at the Heidelberg Center for American Studies, offers an accessible analysis of ideas such as Robert Bellah’s “civil religion” and of the ways in which republican thought and Christian theology have been in dynamic tension throughout American history. Jewett, however, goes beyond

merely rehashing these ideas; he looks at the subject from a disciplinary background in Biblical Studies that offers a provocative vantage point for viewing these tensions as he stresses the way biblical interpretation has affected American intellectual trajectories. By the end of the work, Jewett waxes prophetic as he touches on what seems to be the real force driving the book: a biblically-based, theological denunciation of American foreign policy decisions since Vietnam that have culminated in the Iraq War.

Jewett’s analysis and narrative are organized around a single, focused question: why has America historically, and especially in the past fifty years, had a crusading mentality in its quest for domestic tranquility and international peace, or, put differently, why have America’s missions for peace at home and abroad been militarized figuratively or literally. For Jewett, the answer is found in the merger of religion and nationalism. This merger was inaugurated by the Puritans in New England, confirmed in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and extended to foreign policy after the Spanish-American war of 1898 and again in the World Wars, Cold War, and present war in Iraq. It provided a basis for a crusading moralism

in domestic policy and helped to forge an individualistic, vigilant, and militarized foreign policy that leads many Americans to oppose the United Nations and International Tribunals and to support military action in the name of peace and democracy.

In Jewett’s telling, this merger of religion and nationalism has exhibited two antagonistic outlooks, both of which are derived from reformation theology and especially reformation understandings of certain critical biblical passages. The first, which is currently in the ascendancy, he calls “zealous nationalism,” in which America is seen as God’s chosen nation and the key player in God’s plan to bring millennial peace to the world. Zealous nationalism, first found in John Winthrop’s reckoning of New England as a City on Hill and celebrated in the Battle Hymn of the Republic, divides people or nations into agents of absolute good and evil, and because it places felicity to absolute truth above the rule of law, advocates any means, including violence, to support the forces of good and vanquish those of evil. For Jewett, this stress on individual, vigilant adherence to truth provided the ethos and worldview that has prompted actions such as the Puritan war against the Pequots, the Revolutionary



War, John Brown's anti-slavery vigilance, the aims of both North and South in the Civil War, and, most convincingly, the string of military operations and foreign policy decisions from the Spanish American War to Iraq. In describing zealous nationalism, Jewett emphasizes its connection to biblically-derived millennialism in its many forms, though with special attention to the premillennial dispensationalism that has influenced evangelicalism since the late nineteenth century. Zealous nationalism's chief advocates have been the ministers of the First and Second Great Awakenings, militant idealists in the Civil War, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, twentieth-century Protestant Fundamentalists, Douglas MacArthur, Robert McNamara, and the present Bush administration.

In tension with "zealous nationalism" is "prophetic realism," which has been in decline especially since the middle of the 1960s. While many scholars have noted the millenarian tendencies Jewett identifies as "zealous nationalism," Jewett's concept of "prophetic realism" is novel and worth considering. Where zealous nationalism declares some humans good and others evil, prophetic realism emphasizes human imperfectability and therefore the necessary submission by these imperfect humans to the rule of law. Imperfect people, in other words, need each other to resolve issues of justice and to adjudicate the messy moral questions bound up in human communities. Prophetic realism therefore emphasizes the limits to centralized author-

ity found in democratic ideals, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Jewett finds prophetic realism displayed first in the Puritan ideal of covenant, then in the Declaration of Independence and especially the US Constitution in their elevation of natural rights, and more recently in the early stages of Cold War containment policy, which he reads as multilateral and aimed at tenuous and sustainable peace rather than the martial conquest of evil. Its champions have been John Witherspoon, James Madison, Abraham Lincoln (his second inaugural being perhaps its most vivid expression), George Kennan, Harry Truman, Martin Luther King Jr., and especially Reinhold Niebuhr.

There is much here to commend—especially for readers who want insight into the way many religious conservatives think about domestic and foreign policy and why they adhere to policies that seem opposed either to certain Christian tenets of faith or to larger aims of peace. But while Jewett's strength is identifying and elaborating this strain of thought, he is less successful in demonstrating its centrality to the story he tells or in explaining the complex relationship religious ideas have had with social, economic, and other intellectual factors shaping American identity. For example, like many histories of America—secular or sacred—Jewett's work starts with New England, a choice that makes sense if tracing American history means tracking its literary or imaginative output. Nevertheless, to do so assumes the motivations behind the English

settlements in Jamestown and the Caribbean, not to mention those of the Spanish, French, and Dutch, are cursory to the development of the American society or even the American mind. I would like to see how Jewett connects these other motivations to the intellectual and theological ideas that emerged from New England and more broadly how other social and economic issues—from Jamestown to Silicon Valley—shaped the intellectual narrative he proposes. In doing so, we could get a better sense of the relative importance theology has played in this connection between religion and national identity.

Moreover, central ideas like democracy or human rights were far more complex on their own terms or especially in relation to Christianity than Jewett elaborates here. Terms like "Democracy" or "Freedom" have been fluid concepts that have meant different things to slaves, slaveholders, Puritans, backwoods Scots-Irish or German settlers, or twentieth-century Fundamentalists. Certainly Jewett understands this, but the terms seem static in his narrative. Furthermore, as Mark Noll has shown in *America's God*, religion in America, even where it merged with nationalism, was often in conflict with those very ideals like freedom or democracy most central to the American worldview and ethos. All this is to say that, with Jewett's narrative, we observe the main ideas—packaged as formal theory, literature, or worldviews—as somehow floating above the grit and grime of history. We rarely understand



historical contingencies that complicate adhering to or transmitting these ideas. Such concerns, however, only moderately detract from Jewett's primary aim, which is to call our attention to and adroitly describe a strain of thought often ignored by mainstream commentators that has undoubtedly shaped our past and current American foreign and domestic policies.

Joe Creech  
Valparaiso University



David F. Ford. *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

DAVID FORD'S LATEST BOOK weaves together several themes which have dominated his thought in recent years. The first of these consists in working through the consequences of a postmodern or relational theological anthropology as developed in his *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge, 1999). The second explores the theory and practice of interpreting Scripture in both academic and interfaith contexts, as undertaken in, among others, his edited volume entitled *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Blackwell, 2006). The third seeks to recover the biblical wisdom tradition as a rich resource for systematic theology, thus continuing the work of his *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology* (Cambridge, 2003).

In the current volume Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, unites these distinctive themes under a title which alludes playfully yet meaningfully to Jean LeClerq's magisterial study of the readerly spirituality of medieval monastics, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (Fordham, 1982). Ford's evocation of LeClerq is most appropriate, for in this book he seeks to propose and model a readerly spirituality for our post-modern age. More particularly, *Christian Wisdom* aims to articulate and demonstrate a theologically faithful and yet genuinely open mode of scriptural engagement, and it generally succeeds in doing so.

*Christian Wisdom* may be divided into three large parts. The first offers an account and example of a wisdom approach to the interpretation of scripture. Chapters 1 and 2 announce and perform a revision of theology's primary task. Through an exegesis of *Luke-Acts*, Ford argues that we ought to hear God speak through scripture in more than just the indicative mood, listening also for the imperative (commanding), the interrogative (questioning), the subjunctive (hoping), and the optative (desiring). Listening to scripture in this way opens us to the cries of God and to those of God's world, its pain and its joy. At the same time, this diversity of divine speech acts refuses neat systematization and thereby forces us to listen carefully. Thus Christians should practice both a hermeneutic of reserve (in which we identify what is essential without overdetermining it) while also practicing

a hermeneutic of ramification (in which we remain open to unexpected surprises of meaning). Under such a model, theology's task becomes careful attending to and discerning of God's voice, a voice which, owing to divine freedom, cannot be domesticated by our systematizing labors. What is required instead is a response, the response in action of the whole person and community to God's voice. Chapters 3 and 4 apply this (anti)method to a reading of *Job*, in which Ford hears Job summoning us to love God for God's sake and to attend to the cries of suffering others.

The second major section of the book revisits classical Christian loci in light of Ford's emphasis on wisdom. Chapter 5 takes up Christology to focus on Christ's "God-centered wisdom of desire" (159) as constitutive of his holiness, a holiness which today is best glimpsed in the "lives, practices and communities" of faithful Christians (187). Chapter 6 rethinks tradition in light of Christian wisdom. On this account, tradition is necessarily both conservative and progressive, passing on the faith of our mothers and fathers while innovating in light of what God is currently doing in the world. Here his key example is the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, as the bishops of Nicaea went beyond the bare text of scripture in order to be faithful to scripture's God. Chapter 7 explores a wisdom ecclesiology in which the church becomes a school for the formation of desire and thus lives out the mandate to make disciples of all nations.



The final section of the book offers three “case studies” in theology-as-wisdom by exploring what such a theology might have to say to inter-faith dialogue, the contemporary academy, and people with disabilities. The chapter on inter-faith dialogue is easily the most controversial of the three. In it Ford describes and justifies the project of Scriptural Reasoning, a multi-year study group that has brought together Jews, Christians, and Muslims to discuss their common scriptures. Ford reports that these meetings seek to build friendships, not consensus, and these friendships are built upon the common desire for wisdom. Consequently, “each tradition allows itself to have its own wisdom questioned and transformed in engagement with others. This means recognizing them as analogous wisdoms with the potential of worthwhile interplay” (299; emphasis his). Chapter 9 argues that universities must become, among other things, more interdisciplinary and more collegial if they are to pursue wisdom and so retain a purpose that can propel them beyond current cultural and economic crises. Chapter 10 discusses the interpersonal wisdom embodied in the L’Arche communities founded by Jean Vanier, where able-bodied people live with, support, and learn from disabled people. A final chapter provides a meditative and poetic conclusion.

Ford is to be commended for his ambitious undertaking in this project. In recalling the church to its scripture and to a faithful listening for God’s voice, he helpfully (though implicitly) revives the spirit of Karl Barth for the church today. His success in retrieving a neglected tradition within scripture itself—the wisdom tradition (*Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*)—for the sake of rethinking scripture and theology is both brilliant and dutifully Protestant: *Scriptura sancta est sui ipsius interpretans* [Holy Scripture is self-interpreting]. Moreover, this tradition, with its eclectic and nonsystematic borrowing from other ancient near-eastern wisdom traditions, provides Ford with a robust alternative to a more heavily dogmatic approach to scripture and theology. (Ford even exemplifies this approach in the book by providing provocative lists of maxims, theses, and questions rather than dogmatic statements.) This much I find not only wise but salutary. As Solomon and the Queen of Sheba traded proverbs and sayings, weighing them for both aptness and truth, so modern Jews and Muslims can discuss wisdom with Christians.

But can they discuss Wisdom? The key weakness in Ford’s program is its hinge chapter on Christology. It purports to offer a Wisdom Christology, but

instead of locating that wisdom in the preincarnate Son through whom all things were made (as the tradition has heretofore), he locates it in the person of Jesus and in his “God-centered desire,” a minimal improvement upon the Christology of Schleiermacher and liberal Protestantism more generally. Jesus still is more exemplary than extraordinary, the perfection of human piety rather than the perfect God-man. While this move may make for easier conversation with Muslims and Jews, it does so by bringing Jesus down to the level of the prophets. As it happens, that is precisely the Christology held by Jews and Muslims, and it constitutes the ground of their rejection of our belief in the Holy Trinity. Ceding this point leaves Christians with little to bring to an inter-faith conversation that might not already be found in those other traditions. A more robust wisdom Christology, such as that of Sergius Bulgakov’s *The Lamb of God* (Eerdmans, 2008), would have saved Ford’s project from this unfortunate turn while retaining its exciting potential for renewing Christian theology and piety, the modern academy, and contemporary dialogue among the Abrahamic traditions.

Scott Huelin  
Valparaiso University



Visit *THE CRESSET* on the Web  
[www.valpo.edu/cresset](http://www.valpo.edu/cresset)



### **on the cover—**

Sergio Gomez is a Northwest Indiana artist who, in his vibrantly colored and expressive works, treats a variety of spiritual themes. He frequently explores his Mexican heritage in his art. The Brauer Museum has two pieces by Gomez in its permanent collection, both of which are popular with campus and community members. Gomez currently teaches art at South Suburban College in South Holland, Illinois and is co-owner of 33 Collective Gallery in Chicago, Illinois.

*The Nest of Freedom* is a Gomez painting that caught the eye of VU humanities professor and former Christ College dean Mark Schwehn at a Friends of Art silent auction in 2000. Schwehn purchased the painting for the Christ College Campus Art Collection, managed by the Brauer Museum of Art, so that it could be included in future exhibitions in the Mueller Hall Commons or in the museum.

Inscribed in felt pen on the painting's surface are words in Spanish that roughly translate as "To fly in empty space is to explore the universe, like flying in the void over indescribable worlds." Gomez's painting, with its pensive human figure, white bird, and poetic inscription, seems to speak to an idea of spiritual and intellectual exploration. This idea relates perfectly to the goals of Christ College as it celebrates its fortieth anniversary.

### **on reviewers—**

Joe Creech

is Assistant Director of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts. He also serves as Adjunct Assistant Professor of History and Humanities in Christ College at Valparaiso University where he specializes in American cultural, political, and religious history.

Scott Huelin

is Assistant Professor of Humanities in Christ College at Valparaiso University where his research and teaching interests include literary theory; biblical hermeneutics; the history of Christian theology, ethics, and spirituality; and classical, medieval, and Renaissance literature.

### **on poets—**

Dorothea Kewley

is a graduate of The University of Washington and has published in *Purpose* and *The Ladies Home Journal*.

James Owens

lives in La Porte, Indiana and teaches at Valparaiso University. Two collections of his poems were published in 2007.

Vincent Wixon

lives in Ashland, Oregon where he is co-producer of videos on Oregon poets William Stafford and Lawson Inada and co-editor of books by William Stafford.

Steven Schroeder

is a Valpo graduate who received his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1982. He is currently Visiting Professor of Literature at Shenzhen University in China.



# THE CRESSET

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

*Linda C. Ferguson*  
John Adams's Opera *Doctor Atomic*

*J. D. Buhl*  
The Freedom of Christ  
and Free Jazz

*Gary Fincke*  
Jungle Music

*Tom Willadsen*  
His Love Hate Relationship  
with Country Music

VALPARAISO®  
UNIVERSITY



STEPHANIE UMBACH  
CHRISTOPHER CENTER  
VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY

Periodicals  
Postage  
PAID