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Pamela Corpron Parker's article was originally given as a talk to students in Christ College's Symposium series. Sections of it will appear in a different form in an upcoming issue of Victorian Literature and Culture.

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Official Notice

We see them so often that we really don't notice. Not only in urban centers, but on the old streets of small towns, the streets that peter out into dirt and potholed gravel down near the tracks and grain elevators. Abandoned buildings mark the American fascination with newer and better, with the latest thing. We have enough space so that old things can be left to tumble down where they are. We have enough space so that new buildings will occupy our mind's eye too, and the old ones cease to register. “You know,” someone will say, “down where Smith's used to be.” In our mind's eye we have to work to imagine a building that is still literally there. And gradually it comes into focus. “Oh, yeah, Smith’s. I thought it was torn down a long time ago.” Not really, for it is still occupying the site. It just isn’t a place anymore. Only when the Official Notice goes up to mark its imminent demolition does the building become again, for a moment, visible. The painter David Tyndall gives us some time to consider this point in the painting reproduced on the cover of this issue. Are we an abandoned building?

Those of us working in Christian higher education have been aware for some time that our enterprise hardly seems to have much social weight these days. When the media talk about higher education, we don't appear to register in the consciousness. When muck-raking journalists shriek in outrage at what they consider problems of higher education today, they tend to mean those highly-paid professoriates collectively lounging in idleness while arcane French theory coils through the labyrinths of their brains. Journalists are not shrieking about us. When it is suggested by education reformers, as a radical departure from the norm, that professors should teach at least nine credits in a semester, most of us can figure that the analysis that has produced this revolution has left us out of the picture. When the call goes up that the culture is in desperate need of a process which will inculcate values of commitment and care for the community and that higher education has failed in this task, we can be excused for thinking that our schools are not being taken into account. At one level, the talk about higher education has ceased to see that we are here—working hard, teaching our twelve hour loads, seeing students a lot, worried all the time about inculcating values and fostering community. Aren't we?

Like abandoned buildings in the bad part of town, Christian colleges seem to be beside the point in the national discussions about education. Part of our unease is our sense that we could play a role in this discussion, if only someone would notice that we are here. Frequently, like a character in a novel by Henry James, we seem to overhear a conversation to which we could contribute something valuable, if only the speakers acknowledged our presence.

Yet, another part of the problem is our own misunderstanding or abandonment of ourselves, our fundamental structure. Tyndall's building is, or is meant to be, a simple one. But the elaborate false front, with its heavy corbels, a fascia badly decayed, has become a weight that threatens the whole with collapse. Can the building be saved? The sidewalk is in good shape. Someone has put a plant in a pot at the corner. At the left edge, what looks like a new railing suggests that next door, renovation has at least begun. Maybe the official notice is a building permit, signifying that a renovation is at hand.

We can hardly fail to notice that, if the larger, media-driven world has ignored us, we have had plenty of official notices lately from within our ranks. Burtchaell, Marsden, Schwehn, Gleason, O'Brien, Sloan—the notices have been posted for a good five years now in public places. The very existence of the Lilly Fellows Program, and its related programs elsewhere, testifies to an acknowledgement that Christian higher education has faced serious slippage lately, slippage in being Christian, at least. In our colleges, we will need to decide what is fundamental, and what is the accumulation of inauthentic facade that has been fastened on to make us look like something we are not.

No doubt there are many ways to address that decision, and colleges like those in the Lilly Network will have many different ways of doing so. The back cover, by Timothy Van Laar, suggests to me at any rate the principal component of any recovery program. Somehow or other, we will have to present the image of Christ in a world that does not see us well. In fact, it seems often not to see us at all, which would be all right, except that we have managed to hide not only ourselves, but...
Christ too from the world. Van Laar’s Christ is perfectly clear, if not specific to one race or one tradition. What is necessary is there—a body, stretched out, head bowed, available and vulnerable. The hands and feet? Ours of course. Earthy, human, placed on the stage of life, working in a glare that nonetheless hides us from view. Could it possibly be true that God would trust this ramshackle, jury-rigged operation to present the image of Christ? By all accounts, that about describes what the Gospels insist on.

Is such an image recoverable in our schools and colleges? And if we recover it, will anybody be there, or will the business of higher education have become an enterprise wholly unrecognizable from our present state? These questions, though worth pondering, are unanswerable. We are only answerable for what we do at the moment, for which direction our daily decisions, our votes in faculty meetings, our memos, our alliances tend. I choose to find it heartening that these artists—Tyndall and Van Laar—are graduates of Valparaiso University and Calvin College respectively. Such encouragement is, admittedly, a matter of my own interpretation, since what I have read in these paintings should in no way to be taken as representing the artists’ intentions.

This issue of The Cresset, supported by the funding of Lilly Endowment, focuses attention on the nurturing of souls as the task of the Christian college. An article by Pamela Corpron Parker, who recently ended her term as a Lilly Fellow, gives evidence both of the interests and quality of the work of young Christian scholars in our midst, scholars who are worthy of, and in need of, our support and encouragement in general terms and in the specific terms of employment. Charles Vandersee playfully considers crisis, James Kennedy gives us a glimpse of Holland’s version of religious pluralism and public education, and Robert Benne adds to the history of our current concerns with the decline of civil life. Poets, we are thankful, keep us grounded in reality and at the same time, give us space for it. May your reading be good for you.

Peace,

GME

---

When Rachel Left the Hills, the Hills Went With Her

Rachel plays in the lake all afternoon.  
A plump, vigorous child, she scarcely shivers.  
She enjoys having her long, dark braids  
Soaked with the sweet water.

She floats her inflatable raft out of the way  
Of smaller, shrieking children too roughly at play.  
She drifts out over her head and gazes down  
At minnows circling the lakeweeds:  
At silver darting untarnished through green and brown.

She daydreams and the forests and the hills  
Get all mixed up in those dreams  
Mixed up in Rachel.

She will come out of that water fresh and famished,  
Knowing that joy should be thorough like the water  
With its deep whole embrace at the first dip.  
And the green mountains, caught in her serious gaze,  
Hold fast with all their strength to her mind forever.

Barbara Bazyn
LED TO PLACES WE DID NOT PLAN TO GO....

Sharon Daloz Parks

We human beings seek places of equilibrium—a balance of the familiar and the unfamiliar, stability and motion, the predictable and the infinite variant. We become contemplatives at the seashore and the fireside because both places can arrest us in their perfect balance of constancy and novelty. If we human beings have too much stability we become bored; too much of the unfamiliar and we become stressed. Great liturgists and great educators know the art of crafting that balance between the yearning for preservation and the yearning for transformation—whether in a cathedral or a classroom.

As this is the initial presentation in this conference, it is fitting that the phrase I selected as our topic, "Led to places we did not plan to go" is half of my favorite invocation which in its entirety reads:

"How do we know that God is with us? We know, because we will be led to places we did not plan to go."

When we enter into the comfort and adventure of worship, or the work of contending with a new challenge, this invocation affirms that "God is with us"—evoking trustworthy presence; yet simultaneously it awakens us to the unknown, the Mystery that is beyond all that we can ask or think, continually inviting us toward more adequate seeing, being, knowing, becoming. That is, learning. This invocation reminds us that as people of confessing Christian faith, our hearts rest on the cusp of the familiar and the novel, tradition and surprise. The pattern is always changing; faith confesses that while God may be the same yesterday, today, and forever, this is a living, dynamic God that we worship. What we have learned to trust is the motion of God's activity—the activity of Spirit, Holy Spirit, Creator Spirit, who shapes and reshapes the pattern of our lives, creating and redeeming all things.

The flip side, however, was well expressed by a minister who observed in his reflection on the stories in the Gospels of Jesus and his disciples, "It appears that you can be reasonably sure you are following Jesus if you are disappointed about half the time."

This kind of faith stands us in very good stead in the time in which we have been asked to live. We live in "cusp time"—one of those break points in history that others after us will look back on and have a name for. Those who lived in the Renaissance didn't know as they lived through the break-down and break-up of the medieval world that centuries later we would tell the story as a time of rebirth. And like them, as we long for a manageable equilibrium, we are undergoing a great deal of disequilibrium. We are made keenly aware of this by the dramatic events of these days leading up to our gathering. A court verdict in Los Angeles is greeted with both triumph and stunned disbelief—the differentiation drawn on racial lines. Another great storm hits the Gulf and we are reminded that this is not simply "an act of God," but that human agency plays an increasingly significant role in the global disequilibrium in weather patterns. These events coincide with economic upheaval reflected in the words of Derrick Bell, quoted in Time, (October 9, 1995) which sought the comment of several cultural leaders on the Simpson trial. Bell responded:

Sharon Daloz Parks is senior research fellow in the Leadership Education Project at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and co-author of Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World. An earlier version of this address was given at the Lilly Fellows in Humanities and the Arts Conference "Nurturing Souls: Learning and the Sciences of Human Development" in October of 1995 at VU.
O.J.'s trial has served well the need for the society, and particularly the powerful corporate and government leaders, to have the public diverted during a period of great economic turmoil, when literally millions of people are being downsized out of their jobs, often by corporations that are showing respectable profits. Anxiety is great, and while much of it is shifted by politicians to affirmative action, welfare, crime and other race-related issues, the O.J. case has served to take up thousands of hours of media time with what amounts to entertainment. The Amos 'n' Andy show served a similar purpose during the Great Depression.

We have a bone deep awareness of the specter of ecumenical, ecological, and/or economic holocaust in the 21st century. The deep question of our time is: Can we all dwell together—even flourish—in the small planet home we share?

This is the large context in which we gather as faculty and administrators and ask what it means in this time and in our institutions to "Nurture Souls." How do we understand this work and vocation? Our conference planners have posed the question: "How do Christian accounts of human development—cognitive, moral, spiritual—differ from and/or parallel various secular models of development proposed by the sciences such as psychology or anthropology?" How might developmental models inform what we do in the classroom? Does it matter if learners are souls or psyches? My purpose here is not to answer these questions, but to help us begin to think into these kinds of questions together.

Once Upon a Time....

I did not grow up planning to do this kind of work or grapple with these kinds of questions. I have been led to places I did not plan to go, but I don't think that my story, in this respect, is distinctive. I suspect that if we devoted our time here—as we inevitably will in some measure—to telling our individual stories of how we came to do our present work, most would tell a story something like this. "Once upon a time I was...and then I learned...and then I planned...when unexpectedly.....But then it turned out that..."

If we listened attentively to each others' stories we would begin to notice patterns among them; we would wonder if they were unique to this group and if so, why or why not? We would draw on additional experience, reflect on our methodology and discipline, form hypotheses, and test them. We would be most strongly motivated to invest time in this kind of activity if we believed that it would be useful to us in the future. Depending on the focus of our attention, our emerging theories might be psychological, sociological, anthropological, or biological. If, among this group of professionals, we incorporated into our stories the sense that we had been "led by God," our theories would also be theological.

Since we here are people of confessing Christian faith, it is interesting to wonder what language or models we might use to speak of the ways in which we have changed. Would we speak of conversion, salvation, formation, or sanctification? Would we tell a story of moving from Egypt, through a wilderness, to a Promised Land? Would we say, "Once I was blind, now I see"? Would we speak of having tasted of the fruit of good and evil? Would we tell a story of a Pilgrim's progress, a spiritual journey, an intellectual journey, a story of moral development? Would we speak of discipline, grace, hard work, gifts—death and resurrection? Would our stories reflect an ongoing dialectic between trust and fear, alienation and belonging, power and powerlessness, despair and hope? Would our language be religious or secular? Spiritual or academic? How would we define knowledge? Would our stories and theories stand in contrast to, parallel to, or one with "faith"?

Religious or Secular?

In his book Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America, Mark Schwehn engages this kind of question. In doing so he refers, not without a certain charge, to "devotees of Perry." Indeed, it is appropriate that he and others reflect on the strength and limits of Perry's work which has considerable influence in American higher education, specifically in colleges such as those represented here, who are committed to teaching and attentive to the experience of students.

I suppose that I am vulnerable to the charge of being a Perry "devotee." When I published The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment in 1986, I hand delivered a copy to Bill Perry as a sign of appreciation for him and his work which has informed my thought in significant measure. As we exchanged a bit of chit chat, he was casually leafing through the index, doing a bit of counting. Shortly he reported with impish delight, "Good, you have cited Perry thirteen times; God—twelve!"

As I have reflected on the questions which Schwehn raises about Perry's work, particularly his positioning Perry's model as "secular" in contrast to "religious," specifically biblical models, I have become keenly aware that I learned the "Perry scheme" primarily from Perry directly, and secondarily from his book, Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme. Let me reflect with you upon two different stories from Perry's 25 years as a tutor-counselor-professor-administrator at Harvard.

Many years ago it was the policy of a president of
Radcliffe who will remain nameless, to immediately expel from the campus any student who was discovered to be pregnant. The Dean, however, perceived the policy to be harsh and inhumane, and at the risk of her job and in partnership with Bill Perry—a counselor at the Bureau of Study Counsel—she would protect a bit of time so that the young woman would have some opportunity to participate in the decision and shape the circumstances of her leave taking and be treated so as to affirm, to the degree possible, her own dignity, integrity, and sense of agency. In one particular instance, it was taking a little longer. The Dean was understandably uneasy. She called Bill, and he heard her anxiety speedily carrying her away from her best hopes for the student. Bill interrupted with a soft whistle like the one we use to call someone back. There was a pause. Then the Dean quietly said, “How much more time do you need?” Bill said, “Can you give me another twenty-four hours?” The Dean responded, “Okay, you’ve got it.”

In more recent years, there was a young man who during his time of being a student at Harvard suffered a serious automobile accident. In the end he recovered, except in one respect. His right leg was fully and permanently disabled. Over a period of many months, he met with Bill Perry, doing the hard work of coming to terms with this new reality. One day he came to the office, they settled into the space in customary fashion, and Bill waited for the young man to begin the conversation. They sat in silence for an entire hour while the young man seemed to be undergoing the deep reordering of soul within that can only be faced if we are not utterly alone. At the end of the hour, he simply said, “Thank you.” And the two parted.

Bill Perry has often said that to be a counselor is “to worship before great mysteries” and to be a part of a motion of life that is larger than the client and the counselor. My respect for Bill Perry’s work is rooted in my respect for his capacity to be with us in the reordering of our souls and to share with us what he has learned.

As we live in a time when all of our souls are being reordered in deep and pervasive ways, we do well to keep company and be informed by those who are able to sit, and wait, and dwell with that process, and to learn from them. Social science at its best is one way of doing that; when it works well, the boundary between secular and religious models becomes more permeable.

**Formation of Commitment to the Common Good**

We hope that it is in this spirit of reverence, care, and the search for truth in the service of compassionate and faithful living that my husband, Larry Daloz, and I, along with two other colleagues, Cheryl and Jim Keen, undertook a study several years ago which seeks to understand how commitment to the common good is formed and sustained. In a world that is becoming increasingly fragmented and where many are feeling overwhelmed in the face of complexity, diversity, and ambiguity, we are asking: “How do we become the people—the citizens—that are needed in the 21st century?”

Grounded in the disciplines of constructive-developmental psychology, community development, political science, education, and theology, we have studied over one hundred people who are able to sustain commitment to the common good when they are not naive about the global reality in which we now live. The people we studied recognize that we are living in a time when the technologies of travel and communications have spawned a global economy which relativizes nation states and serves as a catalyst by which cultures collide and old tribal wounds are re-awakened. They recognize that we are now living within an expansion and intensification of interdependence as we find ourselves dwelling on a new global commons.

The people we studied roughly represent the demographic make-up of our society, though ten percent grew up in other countries. They represent a broad range of professions and geographical-social locations. Because each of the authors is located in higher education and because we are ourselves religiously committed, we have, of course, been attentive to the influence of both higher education and religion in the formation of commitments to the common good. We believe that what we have found is important in a society in which it has been suggested that particularly the institutions of business, religion, and education are preparing our young people for a world that isn’t going to be there.

What we have found in the lives we studied will be published this Spring in a book entitled: *Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*. Of particular significance for our discussion here as we consider how we might “nurture souls,” are three broad patterns: The importance of environments which foster both trust and agency; the critical role of certain habits of mind; and the power of constructive encounters with otherness.

**Trust and Agency**

While much of human development has focused upon the journey of the individual, an increasing awareness of the power of context and the interdependent nature of all of life compels attention to the environments in which people are formed. As we listen to the accounts of the influential characteristics of the environments in which people now committed to the common good were nurtured, we have gained appreciation for the importance of people learning that the world is not “out to get them.”
This means that as people move from childhood, through adolescence, and into the college and university years, it is important that in the expansion of their world that occurs at each juncture, they can discover again and again that their world is "trustworthy enough," and thus they can be open to new truth, to discovery, to possibility, to doubt, to curiosity, and to the adventure of learning. In the absence of people and institutions that "hold well," the young person must necessarily become defended—even armored—in ways that preclude new learning.

This is particularly important during the college years. In these years, the assumptions of childhood—whether conservative or liberal, religious or secular—are brought to the test of a wider inquiry and a wider sociality. Yet term tests can be passed, papers written, grades received, and awards given—while a defended "faith" stays in place. Convictions about what is ultimately true and dependable—religiously, politically, economically—may remain untouched and unexamined if lines are rigidly drawn and defended between "what matters" and "school work," or between "the academic disciplines" and "spiritual-religious life." On the other hand, when there is a climate of trust and respect and a commitment to truth, there can be a powerful examination and reordering of meaning which engages not only the intellect narrowly understood but the intellect of the soul—the whole of being. In this kind of intellectual engagement, meaning is informed and reordered in ways that re-center identity and purpose in a reality that has become more spacious and tested—at once both more complex and more trustworthy.

But the formation of a more adequate ground of trust is insufficient if it does not lead to more confident action. People who are able to work on behalf of the common good have learned that they can make a difference. In a time when there is, in Walter Brueggemann's phrase, "a surplus of powerlessness," we need people who not only see clearly, but who can exercise moral courage. This implies a re-examination of our curriculum, assessing where, if at all, students learn that they can make a positive difference. Many of those whom we interviewed had during their young adult years participated in some kind of movement—e.g. the student Christian movement, or the civil-rights, anti-war, or feminist movements. But how is it that in "ordinary time" students learn that they can make a difference? There is a growing interest in student "volunteerism." This reflects an important awakening of social awareness and potential commitment. However, if there is little or no conversation between the experience of serving in a soup kitchen or refurbishing a community center for low income people and the academic disciplines, and if there are few occasions when one can explore and begin to understand the web of institutional assumptions, economic and religious ideologies, and political policies that give rise to economic disparity, the new global commons remains a cold and hungry place for millions. Further, volunteerism becomes a sop to the conscience of a young person who believes that in the end it is simply a cut-throat world in which the first task is to care of me and mine and volunteer in the time left over. In contrast, when volunteer activity and classroom reflection take place in tandem, and truthful connections are revealed in disciplined forms, young adults and their professors will be led to places they did not plan to go.

Habits of Mind

The quality of experience, conversation and learning that fosters commitment to the common good is dependent upon certain habits of mind, and the cultivation of these habits is presumed to stand at the heart of purposes of colleges and universities. Learning is dependent upon a challenging dialogue between self and world. The practice of dialogue that is transforming is grounded in perspective taking, the ability to see, as it were, through the eyes of another. Howard Thurman has spoken of this act as a miracle. He wrote:

It is a miracle...when one man, standing in his place, is able, while remaining there, to put himself in another man's place. To send his imagination forth to establish a beachhead in another man's spirit, and from that vantage point to so blend with the other's landscape that what he sees and feels is authentic—this is the great adventure in human relations. To experience this is to be rocked to one's foundations...We are not the other persons, we are ourselves. All that they are experiencing we can never know—but we can make accurate soundings.

The greater the care with which this form of perspective taking is exercised, and the more perspectives brought to bear, the more accurate our perceptions of life and truth may become—whether we are working in the science lab, a philosophy class, or wrestling through an issue in the dormitory. Such perspective taking is critical to citizenship in the new commons, and it is learned only in environments which call it forth and provide initiation into its disciplines and supporting structures.

But also vital to the flourishing of the new commons is a capacity for holistic-integrative thought. As schooled as we are in the cult of narrow, disciplinary expertise, there is an increasing need for people who can work on a part while cognizant of its relationship to the whole. It has been said that "spiritual people are people who can see the connections among things." And while religion is thought by many in a secular age to constitute but one strand of a busy life, religion at its best serves as a lens through which the
whole of life may be perceived in fitting relation. Thus as Whitehead saw so clearly, all education is ultimately religious—fostering the capacity to see life whole. One person we interviewed said, "When I'm working on the details I try to ask, what is the larger thing I'm doing here? To be able to work on the details and keep the big picture in view is what life is all about."

Embedded in disciplined practice of holistic thought is critical, systemic thought—the ability both to see the connections among things and to step outside a "system" and reflect on its strengths and limits. The academy does take pride in the formation of critical thought. But it is the linking of critical thought with a capacity for holistic thought that challenges the organizational and ideological norms of most colleges and universities. Yet human beings seek to make sense of the whole of self, world, and cosmos. And when the questions of integration, wholeness and ultimate are neglected, we become vulnerable to narrow, arrogant, cynical, and finally dysfunctional interpretations. On the other hand, when we learn to practice thoughtful dialogue about living questions across disciplines, institutions, and sectors, our souls are stretched and we are led to places we did not plan to go.

Constructive Encounters with Otherness

Human beings are highly social creatures and we are appropriately dependent upon "networks of belonging." We are best able to thrive when we have a secure sense of place and people. The history of human life cannot be told apart from the imagination of "tribe." We all need tribe. No matter who we are or how sophisticated we perceive ourselves to be, we are oriented to tribal norms whether they be obvious and explicit or subtle and diffused. But the shadow side of tribe emerges whenever "we" would tolerate treatment of "them" that we would not tolerate among "our own."

The single most defining pattern we found in the formation of those committed to the common good was that sometime during their formative years (which in some cases extended into their thirties) they had a constructive encounter with another or others significantly different from themselves. That is to say, they had a significant, transforming encounter with another outside their own tribe.

An encounter with the other re-orders our assumptions about "we" and "they" when it allows us to discover that the other suffers as we do, knows yearning, joy, love, hope, and disappointment in the ways that make us most deeply human and constitute the dimensions of life that foster empathy and compassion. When we recognize the other to be as fundamentally human as ourselves, our sense of "we" is enlarged and forms the ground of commitment to the common good.

College can be the place of such meeting. But this kind of meeting is dependent upon the establishment of an environment that fosters trust, agency, dialogue, perspective taking, critical-systemic and holistic-integrative thought. This kind of meeting is dependent upon more than simply bringing people of differing experience and perspectives into mere proximity to each other. This kind of transformative meeting takes time. It requires support and intentionality. It belongs in any curriculum that is going to prepare us for participation in the commons of the 21st century. One of the women we interviewed told us:

I had my most important interracial, international experience of my life when I was a senior in college. The Hollingsworth Fellowship sponsored young people from all over the world, and our theme was: "World peace can be brought about only by world understanding." You can't understand people unless you live with them. The experience came at the time in life when it's needed most, when you're developing your philosophy of life.

Learning to see through the eyes of the one who is other to us inevitably takes us to places we did not plan to go.

Formation of Souls

In short, what we discovered in our study of people who can sustain commitment to the common good is a kind of consciousness, an apprehension of life as it is in its profound interdependence. But along with this apprehension of life in its complexity and diversity, is the ability to tolerate the consequent ambiguity because truth has become large enough to acknowledge Mystery which they do not comprehend but steadfastly seek to apprehend more faithfully. They typically reveal an elegant mix of hubris and humility, what might be described as a strength of soul.

There are some who suggest that to "care for souls" is to depart from the rigorous work of disciplined cognition. Our times call for great souls, that is, ordinary souls committed to the common good. The imagination of the world has been captured by the likes of Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, and Maya Angelou. These embody an integration of intellect and spirit that our study suggests is dependent, in part, upon experiences of trust and agency, the ability to take the perspective of another, to practice critical, systemic thought, and holistic-integrative thought. It is dependent upon constructive encounters with otherness. To "nurture souls" is a great and demanding work, and it will lead us to places we did not plan to go. ☐
Handwriting

I am this: the one who made a handful of
dust a people, speaking bone out of nothing.
Galaxies, forests, daylight shimmered from my fingers
and became their names.

All things beneath you, I like a canopy
over you. Through garden and wasteland I followed
you. By pillar and dream I protected you.
I withheld nothing.

Do you see the palms of my hands, the letters
engraved squat and bold? I have written your name
there, a deep lithography deforming my
skin. You distort me.

Your legacy is a picked-over carcass,
the rough outline of my intentions. Still the
indelible covenant of my palms endures,
unforgettable.

These marks do not wither like your loyalty.
They itch for clear pronunciation, but your
stiff tongues stumble thickly over the ancient
alphabet of scars.

I will rename you, carve a new blessing
with concise spikes, with the thorny red vowels of
pain. Surely you can remember this jagged
monosyllable.

Heath Davis Havlik
I. Introduction: Titles!

I've been carrying in the back of my brain for some time the tensive character of the theme of this year's conference. On the one hand, we're exploring what it might mean to "nurture souls." On the other, we're investigating the "sciences of human development." The two activities have a very different feel, and evoke contrasting images.

I've also been worrying about this tension as I mused on what to say, perhaps in part because when I reflect on my life as a teacher in the Christian community, neither phrase fits comfortably. "Nurturing souls" catches for me neither the embodied character of teaching nor the dissonance of challenging persons to take on strange, new ways of thinking and acting. The phrase "sciences of human development" suggests an instrumental, empirical realm far removed from the emotionality of learning. "Nurturing souls" suggested I should immerse myself in the literature of depth psychology, and the "sciences of human development," in the literature of developmental psychology. I know just enough about these fields to respect the wisdom they offer, but it is not the wisdom on which I rely. So how should I navigate my way?

Educational philosopher Margret Buchmann, in a wonderful essay to which I will return later, says that for teachers ultimately "uncertainty and imperfection are overtaken by the need to act." A phone call a few weeks ago from the Lilly Fellows office asking for a title for my presentation initiated the first action. It wasn't a day with time for extended reflection, so I let resolved to go with what rose to the surface. "The grace of teaching" immediately came to mind, only to be rejected just as quickly. Too simplistic and too pious for such an academic audience, I said.

But "the grace of teaching" it was to be, not simply because I lacked time to formulate a cleverer title (or a more pretentious one). It just wouldn't go away. In my heart of hearts, I believe teaching is a deeply spiritual undertaking, a graced experience of a God revealed in often surprising ways. By working at becoming a teacher—let me be clear that teaching is a "costly" grace—I believe I'm also being drawn more deeply into the gracious vitality of God. At the same time, my understanding and practice of Christianity shape my activity as a teacher. To the extent that I wrestle with the demands of discipleship, I discover some disturbing questions about priorities and pedagogical practices. And a deeply consoling affirmation about where one's passion and energy are most wisely spent.

With my own title decided, I revisited the conference theme and saw it with new eyes, remembering the comment of Flannery O'Connor that "The action of grace changes a character. Grace can't be experienced in itself... Therefore, in a story all you can do with grace is to show that it is changing the character" (Fitzgerald 1979, 275). O'Connor knew that a novelist must show a character's qualities, not merely refer to them. Concrete detail and evocative images and lines of action enable readers to "see" grace at work. So, too, does knowledge about how human beings mature and learn—the "sciences of human development"—provide us with a means to nurture and challenge the depths of those whom we teach, that is, speak to their souls. If a college or graduate education is to be a "graced experience," then we will have to embody grace in word and deed, using every resource we can. As Jesus put it in that intriguing parable of the unjust steward, whom Frederick Borsch calls the "resilient rascal" (1988, 17-24), "... for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light."

In my presentation today I will attempt to construct a dialogue between the two worlds of Christian discipleship and educational work. Does being a practicing Christian make any difference to our pedagogical practices? Does the fact that we are teachers working in colleges and uni-
Universities influence our understanding and practice of Christianity? My intent is to evoke gratitude for the graced character of our work and animate our holy perseverance in this strenuous profession. For it is also our own souls that need nurture.

First, however, a word about that elusive term "soul." Poet David Whyte tells us that "soul" immerses us in two worlds:

We know intuitively that the word Soul represents energies and qualities in human beings that defy categorization. Soul stands for both a life bound and held by time and a life outside of time. Contemplating soul, we might imagine simultaneously both the worm burrowing through damp, close-packed soil and the hawk forgetting itself on a keen wind. We live between two worlds, both equally difficult to embrace: the first and most familiar, a life struggling through the everyday grit and grime of incarnation, and the second, perhaps more fleeting because of the stressful nature of our time, an experience of complete participation and joyful self-forgetfulness. We have, on the one hand, the devil in the details—the trash, the washing up, the necessities of bill paying and earning the money to do so—and, on the other, a numinous experience of existence where all our strategies melt away in movement and encounter (1995, 94).

My plan is simple. I will develop five convictions about the nature of teaching that come from my "lived knowledge and probed experience." As I proceed, I will explore how each of the five relates with the Christian life. Since I intend both my convictions and the connections to Christianity as a catalyst for extended conversation, I hope they will stimulate you to articulate your own deepest beliefs about teaching as a Christian vocation.

II. Five Convictions about Teaching and the Christian Life

1. Teaching is fundamentally about relationships, about not imposing oneself upon the subject or upon the learners, but in fashioning an appropriate response to both. As in all relationships, it is dependent upon the ability to listen and to make connections. It is grounded not simply in interpersonal relationships, but also in a relationship with the subject matter. There is no substitute for knowing one’s subject and for working that through in light of the pedagogical process. Teaching requires us to think our way from the subject matter as we understand it into the minds and motivations of those we teach. Teaching involves the asceticism of de-centering, of imagining how others might come to grasp a concept or feel about a controversy.

Accordingly, we have no formulas to follow. If anything, much of contemporary literature regards teaching, in the words of Joseph McDonald, as an “uncertain craft”:

Real teaching, I learned in time, happens inside a wild triangle of relations—among teacher, students, subject—and the points of this triangle shift continuously. What shall I teach amid all that I might teach? How can I grasp it myself so that my grasping may enable theirs? What are they thinking and feeling—toward me, toward each other, toward the thing I am trying to teach? How near should I come, how far off should I stay? How much clutch, how much gas? (1992, 1).

McDonald’s language contrasts sharply with the literature of twenty or so years ago, which manifested greater interest in explicating “scientific” models. These earlier studies (e.g., the Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System, the Florida Taxonomy of Cognitive Behavior), tended to isolate classroom encounters in the quest for empirical data. Two leading theorists expressed the prevailing ideology in 1974: "The classroom activities of teachers and pupils are observable events. They have discoverable causes and consequences" (Dunkin and Biddle 1974, 29). Researchers of this era “investigated” by “observable means” derived from “performance criteria.” Today, however, qualitative research has largely superseded quantitative studies. Researchers work at less distance in their efforts to get inside the ways teachers think. They use “participatory action research” and work with case studies. The current literature approaches the teaching-learning process with a certain reticence.

Teaching and learning are such complex processes, and teachers and learners are such complex beings that no model or practice or pedagogical approach will apply in all settings. A lot of fruitless time and energy can be spent trying to find the holy grail of pedagogy, the one way to instructional enlightenment. No philosophy, theory or theorist can possibly capture the idiosyncratic reality of your own experience as a teacher. . . . As teachers we cross the borders of chaos to inhabit zones of ambiguity. For every event in which we feel things are working out as we anticipated they would, there is an event that totally confounds our experience (Brookfield 1992, 197-198).

As teachers we cross the borders of chaos to inhabit zones of ambiguity.” I muse often on this line. In a strange sort of way, it is consoling. More than that, it reminds me that the classroom is holy ground, that the relational character of teaching places us not in the realm of the observable and measurable, but in that of the mysterium fascians et tremendum. We are not to be totally in control. Even as we strive to be clear and compelling in our presentation of material in order to help others comprehend the world, we are immersed in the incomprehensibility of the Holy One at work in creation.

Note the tension inherent here. We are obliged to
use our God-given minds to their fullest extent. “A shallow mind is a sin against God,” as one of the characters in novelist Chaim Potok’s *In the Beginning* phrases it. Or, as Roberta Bondi recounts in her evocative memoir, “It is God who gave you your mind; never be afraid to use any of God’s gifts to its fullest” (1995, 75). So we must cultivate reason, logic, analysis, planning—demand them of ourselves and of our students as a *religious responsibility*. At the same time however, our religious tradition provides language by which we might place rationality in its proper place. It provides us with a respect for finitude and with an awareness of mystery.

It also offers us stories and images by which we might invite others into the realm that transcends rationality. Our Scriptures are filled with paradox and poetry, lest we think that God could be revealed in merely propositional speech. Elijah discovered God not in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in the “sound of sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:12; NRSV). The Holy One of Israel, we are told, “used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11). But when Moses requests that he be shown God’s glory, he sees only the divine “back,” because “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live” (Ex. 33:20).

It is our religious tradition that gives us a vital perspective on the “zone of ambiguity” we inhabit. It is the cloud of unknowing. If revelatory experiences typically happen on the mountain top, it is because the peaks are often obscured by clouds.

Remember Sinai, for example. When Moses goes up the mountain on the third day, it is shrouded in a thick cloud. The revelation is veiled with the mystery of God’s elusive presence. And when the venue shifts to Jerusalem, we find not only that mountains surround Jerusalem, but that the Temple rests on Jerusalem’s highest place. Clouds swirl about the Temple Mount. At its dedication, a cloud of incense fills the Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). We are told (Leviticus 16:1-13) that incense hides the Divine Presence in the Temple. Ironically, it thereby also serves to accentuate it. Similarly, the cloud of Divine Presence overshadows Jesus while he prays on the mountain: Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!” (Luke 9:35).

Is not the educational process like these revelatory moments? The lure of the mountain. The desire to know more, to see more. And the experience of never having a clear vision. Only a view obscured by mystery. Intense study reveals the breadth and depth of our human longings, but it never satisfies them. Gregory of Nyssa reminds us in the *Life of Moses*: “And this is the real meaning of seeing God: never to have this desire satisfied. But fixing our eyes on those things which help us to see, we must ever keep alive in us the desire to see more and more. And so no limit can be set to our progress towards God.”

2. Teaching is not to be confused with telling or with technique (though both are utilized). Teaching revolves around thinking; it is an intellectually rigorous activity. One, of course, learns to teach by doing. But doing alone is insufficient: it must be a deliberate doing, i.e., a practice that is imagined, rehearsed, enacted, reflected upon and redone. Lee Shulman offers a useful heuristic, worth quoting at length (1987, 15):

**A Model of Pedagogical Reasoning and Action**

- **Comprehension**
  Of purposes, subject matter structures, ideas within and outside the discipline

- **Transformation**
  *Preparation*: critical interpretation and analysis of texts, structuring and segmenting, development of curricular repertoire, clarification of purposes.
  *Representation*: use of a representational repertoire, which includes analogies, metaphors, examples, demonstrations, explanations, etc.
  *Selection*: choice from among an instructional repertoire which includes modes of teaching, organizing, managing and arranging.
  *Adaptation and Tailoring to Student Characteristics*: consideration of conceptions, preconceptions, misconceptions, and difficulties, language, culture, and motivations, social class, gender, age, ability, aptitude, interests, self concepts, and attention.

- **Instruction**
  Management, presentations, interactions, group work, discipline, humor, questioning, and other aspects of active teaching, discovery or inquiry instruction.

- **Evaluation**
  Checking for student understanding during interactive teaching; “testing” student understanding at the end of the lesson or units; evaluating one’s own performance, and adjusting for experiences; consolidation of new understandings and learnings from experience.

- **Reflection**
  Reviewing, reconstructing, reenacting and critically analyzing one’s own and the class’s performance, and grounding explanations in evidence.

- **New Comprehensions**
  Of purposes, subject matter, students, teaching and self.
Yet not all thinking is directed toward decisions about the content or the students or the "multiple small uncertainties" of the pedagogical process. A teacher's thinking must also include contemplation. Contemplation teaches us how to pay attention. "Contemplation sets aside ties to self-involved willing and feeling, to given conceptual frameworks and schemes of utility, substituting a careful attention that does not exploit the object of thought, nor change it in any way." If we fail to pay attention, we will fail at teaching. A Japanese friend told me that when she began her teaching career, a sage veteran told her to image each of her students at the end of the day. If she couldn't recall a particular face, she hadn't been paying sufficient attention to that student.

I mentioned in the introduction Margret Buchmann's phrase "uncertainty and imperfection are overtaken by the need to act." It is appropriate here to reflect on the full paragraph for which that sentence is the conclusion:

Teaching demands recognizing that students and teaching subjects can neither be known altogether, nor once and for all. The more teachers think about their subjects, the less they are sure of their ground, becoming clearer about the limits of their understanding and coming to share in the "learned uncertainty" of scholars. The more they contemplate their students, the more they will become aware of the fact that their knowledge of them is imperfect and constructed, a fallible vision also because people change, and are supposed to change, in school. Still, students and subject matter have to be brought together, on given understandings. Uncertainty and imperfection are overtaken by the need to act (1989, 18).

Contemplation, which William Shannon defines as "a way of making oneself aware of the presence of God who is always there," has deep roots in Christianity as well as, of course, in Eastern religious practice (1993, 209). The art of contemplation depends on fostering awareness, cultivating wonder and drinking deeply from the wells of silence.

3. Perhaps we might term this, following Sharon Parks, "led where we did not plan to go." Rigorous preparation and attentive enactment neither assure us of achieving whatever end we had intended nor account for what happens in the souls of those whom we teach. At least three corollaries suggest themselves. The first: the more painstaking our preparation, the more prepared we will be to lay it aside in order to follow the flow of the process. It is sometimes necessary, as football fans here know, to call an "audible." For those who find analogies drawn from the athletic field mystifying, we might look to an aphorism coined in 1891 by philosopher Josiah Royce: "... [W]hen you teach, you must know when to forget formulas; but you must have learned them in order to be able to forget them" (1965, 113).

The second corollary: we will learn as much, perhaps more, from those strategies that failed or fizzled as we do from those which seemingly succeeded—if we engage in that move Shulman calls "reflection": reviewing, reconstructing, reenacting and critically analyzing one's own work and the performance of the students. (On Mondays even the audibles get reviewed!) The third corollary I believe to be of the greatest importance: we will never know precisely what has been transformative in the soul of another. We can, of course (and should), assess whether someone has comprehended the vocabulary or understood key concepts or successfully synthesized material. We don't know what's happening deep inside the soul of another—and, thankfully so, or we would never find the courage to go into the classroom day after day, year after year. To the extent, however, that we try to raise questions that transcend formulaic solutions or to inspire communion with an author's passion, we will likely glimpse only a shadow of what is happening—if at all. Teaching requires faith the size and expansiveness of the mustard seed.

All this requires us to negotiate a delicate balance between intense involvement in the pedagogical process and proper distancing. "How near should I come, how far off should I stay?" Just this week, for instance, a student from whom I would not have anticipated a significant degree of self-revelation told our section a soul-rending story about her educational journey. Stunned, I found myself praying that my response might honor the profundity of her revelation. How does one appropriately manifest awe at the courage many students show in persevering in study despite enormous pain?

Perhaps Paul's formula ("I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" [1 Cor 3:6]) is the most apt account of a teacher's function in the "science of human development."

4. Teaching involves playing many roles, most of which are not on center stage or at the podium but behind the scenes. Precisely because teachers encounter so many multifarious situations, plan for so many diverse circumstances, and make so many decisions while teaching, Lee Shulman argues in a memorably entitled article, "It's Harder To Teach in Class than To Be a Physician" (1983:3). Some of our most important roles are played off stage—designing creative assignments, crafting engaging questions, offering extensive response to papers, reworking syllabus in light of student needs. Others are risky, such as committing oneself to rely less on the lecture and more on interactive strategies. Some of these roles come more
naturally to us, and others impose new demands on us, demands for which we may feel prepared neither by personal predilection nor by professional training.

Talk about risk may seem like cheap grace when we’re gathered in the safety of a conference. Back at the “Bar-S,” however, it’s not so easy. It’s the lifted eyebrow of a senior colleague, or the acerbic comment of the department chair. Worst of all, it’s the rolled eyes from students— or their closed ones. The folded arms. The look that says a senior colleague, or the acerbic comment of the chair. Worst of all, it’s the rolled eyes from people, whom he taught particularly by his hospitality.

Jesus challenged people to enter imaginatively into new ways of understanding. His puzzling stories and provocative questions compelled his hearers to take a fresh angle on the taken-for-granted or to consider a radically different reading of reality. And, though the parables were intended not so much to convey information or to list ethical principles as they were to persuade hearers to a new way of living, they demanded that people think.

In particular, I find the parables an invitation to creativity. They depicted God’s reign in vivid speech. Nearly always they took a surprising turn: rogues commended for their cleverness (Luke 16:1-9); last-minute workers on par with early birds (Matt 22:1-15); erring children—prodigal sons and grumbling elder brothers—both accepted (Luke 15:11-32) and despised Samaritans revealed as heroes (Luke 10:30-37). As one commentator has quipped, people probably reacted to the parables by scratching their heads. “I don’t think I get what you mean by that story. But if I do, I don’t like it” (Crossan 1975, 55-56).

I’m not suggesting that we all need to go forth to emulate Jesus as a brilliant story-teller. I am, however, hinting that discipleship to Jesus, God’s parable, invites us to risk playing some roles with which we might have some initial discomfort. If, after all, the children of this age are so shrewd in dealing with their own generation, how much shrewder must we be in teaching for the reign of God! Are we not to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves”? (Matthew 10:16).

5. In teaching we experience ourselves as both vulnerable and privileged. Teaching brings us face to face with our finitude, with our ignorance, clumsiness and narrowness. Too little in my own background, for instance, has prepared me for the diversity of Union Theological Seminary. On my best days, it’s exhilarating. On other days, it’s ascesis, the experience of my own parochialisms unveiled. As Roger Simon says “As a ‘place’ of meeting and an act of provocation, teaching is an occasion where one may come face to face with difference. It is a place where one is constantly confronted with the incommensurability of that which cannot be reduced to a version of oneself” (1995, 90).

Accordingly, Margret Buchmann writes, “[Teaching] demands . . . a sturdy self on the part of the teacher, combined ‘with a yielding and receptive character of soul’ incompatible with undue concern for self-protection of advancement” (18). A sturdy self? Perhaps on our best days. But what about those times when we feel fragile, dull and distracted?

So teaching brings us face to face with our limitations. Knowledge beyond our mastery. Students whom we know in fragmentary and incomplete ways. Systems that close us in and seem to bleed us of our very life. Demands on our time and energy that overwhelm and sap our energy.

And teaching brings us face to face with our sinfulness. We do not always use our power wisely or in the service of others. Our pursuit of knowledge may lead not to wisdom but to self-aggrandizement. We may use the authority our knowledge bestows on us in domineering and authoritarian ways. We may develop an inflated sense of our self-importance. Like the disciples, we may vie with one another for places of honor, counting citations of our works and envying others the spotlight. We sin, thereby failing one another, our students, ourselves. And so we are thrown back upon the compassionate God in whose mercy our transgressions are removed from us “as far as the east is from the west” (103:12).

Conclusion

The ultimate grace of teaching is that God desires the flourishing of creation. God desires that we teachers help others to flourish, and so participate in the work of creation. Perhaps the “sturdy self” Buchmann advocates is best imaged in Psalm 1. We are to be “like trees planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in due season and whose leaves do not wither.” Gerard Manley Hopkins ends one of his unnamed sonnets: “Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.” This is for me the prayer for teaching. “Nourish my roots that I may be sturdy enough to enable others to flourish. Let me be receptive, welcom-
ing, like fertile earth. Let growth be abundant."
Teaching not only embodies grace. It graces all who submit to its discipline. To paraphrase Hopkins, teaching keeps all our goings graces.

Works Cited


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announces the Fall Conference, October 18-20, 1996

Nurturing Souls: Scholarship and the Christian Worldview

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GOOD WOMEN, GOOD WORKS:  
VICTORIAN PHILANTHROPY AND WOMEN’S BIOGRAPHY

I. Introduction

When we gather together our own filtered images of Victorian women, we usually imagine the corsetted and confined women of Merchant-Ivory movies, like Room With a View. More recently we’ve been captivated by the long-suffering, pre-Victorian heroines of Jane Austen’s novels in Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion. The ideal Victorian “angel in the house”—whose life was more ornamental than useful, whose most strenuous duty was pouring tea for her doting husband or father—is inaccurate at best and misleading at worst. Much of my research has been dedicated to dispelling this myth of passive Victorian femininity, to exploring the literal and literary lives of Victorian women, lives represented in the great fat novels and biographies of the 19th century. I am fascinated by the roles Victorian women played in shaping public life, despite their prescribed duties as guardians of hearth and home. More recently my research has led me to the field of Victorian biography, a field traditionally cast in masculine terms and focused primarily on public men such as Sir Walter Scott, Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Dickens, and Thomas Carlyle.

This past summer, I spent seven weeks in the British Library and other London archives reading hundreds of little-known memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies of women philanthropists with titles like: Sarah Martin, the Prison Visitor of Great Yarmouth, Noble Work by Noble Women, An English Woman’s Work Among Working Men, and Heroines of Our Time: Being Sketches of the Lives of Eminent Women.

Pamela Corpron Parker has just completed her term as a Fellow in the Lilly Program at VU, where she taught in the Department of English, in Christ College and in the Freshman Seminar program. She has taught her speciality in Victorian women’s fiction as well as traditional English courses. In the summer of 1995 she attended an NEH seminar in London, and in the summer of 1996, she is writing job applications.

I wanted to find out what motivated Victorian women to enter into philanthropy in unprecedented numbers? At the same time, what created the sudden demand for biographical accounts of the lives of eminent and not-so- eminent Victorians, particularly women?

I hope to argue that these memoirs constitute an alternative feminine biographical tradition, distinct yet related to the more familiar Victorian biographies of great men and great works. I would argue that these narratives represent an untapped reservoir of women’s social and literary history. Moreover, they represent remarkable examples of Christian service and community commitment, providing narratives of compassion, humor, and individual courage.

II. Philanthropy

For the past several years I have been researching literary representations of women’s philanthropy, particularly those written by British women of the 19th-century. Though I will discuss this term in greater detail later, philanthropy, at least as I use it here, refers to the personal charitable dealings of Victorian women of the middle and upper classes with the poor and distressed of their communities (Summer 33). While the names of Elizabeth Gaskell, Hannah More, Anna Jameson, Amelia Opie, Clara Lucas Balfour, Josephine Butler, and Florence Nightingale, may be less familiar to us now, they were revered and sometimes reviled during their own times. These women were active philanthropists and authors who not only recorded charitable activities but also presented their literary contributions as a form of philanthropy itself. As Deborah Epstein Nord has recently argued in Walking the Streets: Women, Representation and the City, they “justified their public work and their writing careers by casting them as extensions of their domestic duties, a fulfillment of their private responsibilities in the public realm”(209). Many of their
works made arguments that went something like this: If women had the maternal skills to tend their own families, then they were the logical choice to nurse and mother the poor, the sick, and the orphaned (Nord 209). Likewise, as first-hand witnesses to the suffering of the poor, they were duty-bound to share their experiences and promote greater works of philanthropy in their readers.

Many of these women expanded their informal philanthropic opportunities into full-fledged careers or lifetime crusades. Josephine Butler worked with destitute women and prostitutes, supported the movement for higher education for women, and crusaded against the Contagious Diseases Acts. She not only edited numerous books and periodicals about her philanthropic interests, but she also wrote an autobiography and several biographies, whose subjects include a reformed prostitute named Rebecca Jarrett, the Spanish saint Catherine of Siena, and her sister, Harriet Meuricoffe. Butler later became the subject of numerous biographies herself. Similarly, Hannah More wrote poetry, a novel, plays, and numerous didactic tracts, and she used her considerable earnings to launch a network of Sunday schools in West Cheddar that was so extensive, she was accused of having her own lay bishopric. Her novel, Coelobs in Search of a Wife (1808), and her sister’s memoir of their lives, Mendip Annals (1859), both inspired women readers to emulate her philanthropy and proved extremely influential as a model for future biographies. Clara Lucas Balfour, who combined careers in public speaking, temperance activism, writing and editing, was also one of the most prolific biographers of the late nineteenth century. Elizabeth Gaskell’s prominence as a novelist gave her even greater clout when requesting funds for charitable organizations, such as Manchester’s District Provident Society. She also wrote the Life of Charlotte Bronte (1857), one of the most popular biographies of the Victorian period. All of these women used their writing to publicize their philanthropic concerns and used their philanthropic concerns to authorize their writing careers.

By mid-century British philanthropy was so commonplace as to become an obligatory rather than voluntary activity for most upper- and middle-class families. Women were involved in house-to-house visiting, fund-raising, temperance activism, street rescues of prostitutes and orphans, as well as volunteering in public institutions such as hospitals, work-houses, creches, asylums, and prisons. They led prayer meetings and classes for coal miners, railroad workers, sailors, millhands, seamstresses, and poor children. They spoke in churches and public halls for a variety of social and religious causes. The sheer numbers and variety of philanthropic organizations are staggering, and they often had very specific moral and social causes, as the following names may suggest:

“The Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys”
“The Forlorn Female’s Fund of Mercy”
“The Royal Humane Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned”
“The Guardian Society for the Preservation of Public Morals by Providing Temporary Asylums for Prostitutes”
“The Ladies Association for the Benefit of Gentlewomen of Good Family, Reduced in Fortunes Below the State of Comfort to Which They have Been Accustomed”
“The Friendly Female Society for the Relief of the Poor, Infirm, Aged Widows and Single Women, of Good Character Who have Seen Better Days”

By far the most common form of philanthropy among middle-class women was house-to-house visiting; that is, visiting the homes of the poor, the destitute, and deprived in their own communities. Female visitors felt “protected by class privilege and emboldened by the ethic of charity; they entered the neighborhoods and dwellings of the poor bringing nourishment, clothing, and advice on housekeeping and child rearing” (Nord 209-210). Virtually every London parish church sponsored a visiting society, and often different societies competed with one another for the custom of the poor (Prochaska 104). Philanthropists threw their energies into their work with evangelical and entrepreneurial fervor, discovering their niche and carving out their turf in the laissez faire market of poverty and vice.

The use of women as home visitors accorded with society’s deeply ingrained beliefs about the family and woman’s place as the guardian of the home. Yet, women’s philanthropic work became more than a logical extension of their cultural role as domestic angels; it was another of the significant economic and political functions performed by middle- and upper-class wives (Langland 295). While genuine compassion, religious faith, and concern for social stability prompted many women into philanthropy, it also became a social imperative for those of the upper and middle classes. Along with the elaborate rituals of etiquette, dress, and sociability, participation in philanthropic activities became an important sign of family status (Langland 295). An invitation to join a fashionable charity, such as the Ladies’ Royal Benevolent Society (which was patronized by the Queen), carried considerable social prestige. As one historian puts it, Victorian philanthropy was “a convention observed by those who were, or wished to be, anybody” (Owen 165).

Still, the duties of visitors were often difficult and heart-rending, requiring serious commitments of time and energy on the part of individual women. Entering the homes, often hovels, of some of London’s poorest districts could be a harrowing experience. The memoirs of visitors are filled with scenes such as the following:
W.K. and his family were in the utmost distress, when a member of the Committee first visited their wretched habitation; two children lay dead on the same table; another child was dangerously ill; the poor man disabled by severe rheumatism; and his wife in a state of distraction, occasioned by a long series of afflictions and painful privations. The relief afforded came opportunely and the Visitor has had the pleasure of seeing the father and sick child restored to health, and the mother to a comparative state of composure of mind. It is not too much to say, that they have been raised by the Society from a state bordering on despair, and from the brink of perishing (qtd. in Prochaska 114-115).

III. Philanthropy in Literature

Images like this were frequently replicated in Victorian literature. Philanthropy, and the women who practiced it, took a prominent place in novels, biographies, periodicals, poetry, pamphlets, illustrations, visiting society manuals and reports. In much Victorian literature, the female philanthropist was either depicted sentimentally as a rescuing angel of mercy, or she was satirized as an interfering, self-important "Lady Bountiful" figure, extending her range of domestic tyranny. Characters such as Charles Dickens' Mrs. Pardiggle and Wilkie Collins' Drusilla Clack pried their ways into the homes of the poor with gifts of Bibles, tracts, peppermint lozenges, soup, and helpful (if unwanted) advice. While these caricatures may have been deserved in some instances, they also diminished and ignored the philanthropic work accomplished by many women. Victorian fiction also offers numerous positive examples of visiting heroines, and in some cases, such as Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South and Charles Dickens' Bleak House, visiting the homes of the poor marks the heroine's initiation into wider experience and the beginning of social and personal revelation (Nord 211). Gaskell's novels, in particular, elevate the significant social, political, and domestic work accomplished by female philanthropy even as they evaluate the limitations of this work to solve the larger problems of the poor.

In Gaskell's North and South, for instance, the reader encounters a model female philanthropist in the novel's heroine, Margaret Hale. Margaret's visits to the home of the working-class Higgins family provide her and the reader with a more sympathetic and well-informed understanding of the devastating consequences of sudden urbanization and industrialization. Margaret's chief interest is Bessy Higgins, a girl her own age, whose work in the carding room at the cotton mill has irrevocably damaged her health. Margaret's philanthropy takes the form of sympathetic listening as well as physical and spiritual ministrations for the dying Bessy and her family: she reads the Bible to Bessy, promises to be a "friend" to her younger sister, Mary, and prevents their father, Nicholas, from a drinking binge the night after Bessy's death. Margaret views her intervention in the Higgins family as primarily moral, but she also provides Mary Higgins with much-needed employment as a household servant, offers crucial financial aid, defuses working-class frustrations through her discussions with Nicholas, and carries many of his complaints back to John Thornton, the mill owner. Visiting the Higgins family thus enables Margaret to extend her range of domestic influence into the public arena of social and economic intervention.

In addition to fiction, numerous periodicals focused on women's philanthropy, such as British Mother's Magazine, The British Workwoman Out and at Home, The Philanthropist, and Woman's Work in the Great Harvest Field. For the most part, these publications serve to valorize women's philanthropy and recruit greater numbers to their causes.

IV. Biography

While literary, journalistic, and artistic representations of women's philanthropy were common, the genre which presented and promoted women's philanthropy most was biography. By the mid-nineteenth century, the massive expansion of the popular press generated an unprecedented supply of information on public figures. The reading public clamored for details on various public personalities, and publishers found they could sell quite successfully biographies of persons of less than "eminent" stature. The celebrated name, whether male or female, became a marketable commodity which translated itself into numerous biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs (Corbett 101). Accordingly, the popularity of memoirs about prominent female philanthropists grew.

The memoir was a more acceptable venue for women writers than the biography and autobiography because it was a less "self-centered" narrative which "legitimated the telling of their own lives without demanding that they commit full disclosure" (Corbett 100). The majority of the texts I've read fall under the category of "memoirs" or "biographical sketches," particularly those works published before 1850. These memoirs are often introduced with the rhetoric of sacred duty, an obligatory response to family or public requests for a remembrance of the life of someone recently dead (Most memoirs were published posthumously, within 5-10 years of subject's death.). Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Bronte, perhaps the best-known biography of a woman from the Victorian period, follows this narrative pattern. Gaskell was asked by Bronte's father to write the biography, and she called it her "sacred duty"—even though it was also a great career opportunity for her. In this way, these texts were presented as being written under spiritual or kinship obligation rather than such "unfeminine" motives as professional ambition or the desire to satisfy the public curiosity for private detail.

Recent studies of Victorian biography emphasize mas-
culine literary traditions and ignore most of narrative biographies of women's lives. They map the influences of such literary luminaries as Plutarch, Samuel Johnson, and William Wordsworth on 19th century biographers. It is argued, for instance, that from Plutarch, Victorian writers took the classical concept that biographies should be morally edifying, from Johnson the practice of using letters and familial anecdotes to give insight into the public man, and from Wordsworth the Romantic model of the solitary genius in conflict with a larger society. While the morally instructive, didactic quality of these works gave Victorian biographers their rationale for their writing (Nadel 18), the content and tenor of those lessons varied greatly between male and female biographical subjects and for different reading audiences. The rhetoric of "manliness" so prominent in the biographies of "self-made men" (such as Samuel Smiles' Lives of Engineers, for instance) is transformed by a rhetoric of "womanliness" (Kershaw 18) in women's biographies. Biographies of women writers and philanthropists frequently defended their subjects' "feminine qualities" or provided testimonies of their domestic prowess. Gaskell, for example, provides detailed descriptions of Charlotte Bronte's fastidious housekeeping, dainty appearance, and devotion to her family to ward off criticism of her "unwomanly" profession. Many of the biographies, including Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Bronte, record the physical discomforts and weaknesses of their subjects as a way of emphasizing their female frailty and spiritual martyrdom.

Despite these feminine disclaimers, many of the biographies had feminist goals hidden in the lives of their subjects. For instance, in Clara Balfour's 1854 Working Women of the Last Half Century: The Lesson of Their Lives, she argues that "woman, if true to duty, must be a worker" (1). Her definition of "working women" has little to do with women's paid labor in industry or the professions. On the contrary, she distances herself and other "working women" from "the term 'working classes', '[because it] conveys a false and restricted idea" (1). Instead, her collective biographies of "representative women" describe English middle-class femininity as specifically rooted in women's unpaid philanthropic activities. On the "good works" of such "genuine working women" (14) as these, Balfour argued, "the healthy progress of society depend[ed]" (2). According to this argument, it was both a feminine and national duty for middle-class women to participate in philanthropy.

While these works are little known and little studied by twentieth-century scholars of British literature and culture, they provide tremendous insights into the roles and reading habits of Victorian women, revealing the feminine ideals which many Victorian women aspired to. This combination of biographical and philanthropic narratives interests me, as does the considerable moral power with which this gesture invests writing women and lady philanthropists. Women's biography, in the form of memoirs, biographical sketches, collected lives, and individual portraits, was an evolving and popular literary genre. These works engaged in the discursive struggle surrounding the philanthropic movement, as well as the struggle for feminine authority deeply embedded in that movement. Beneath the rhetoric of social responsibility and religious conviction in the fiction, biographical writings, philanthropic treatises of women writers emerges a subtext of gender and class politics. Their works participate in rhetorical strategies intended to justify middle-class women's entry into the public sphere and to assert their place as the moral arbiters of English society.

While this tradition of women's biographical writing offers rich possibilities for literary and cultural analysis, I would like to know why we know so little about these works and these women? What aesthetic, historical, political, and gender dynamics have contributed to their suppression? How do these biographies reveal the real and imagined lives of nineteenth-century women? How do women's biographies differ from the standard masculine biographies of "great men and great works" which have come to define the field of Victorian biography?

V. But is it any good/why study this stuff at all?

While these questions intrigue me, I am often asked another question. Recently, a colleague asked, "Is this stuff any good? Why not let all those obscure ladies molder away in their graves?" While his question irked me at first, it provided me with an opportunity to explore why these texts matter, both to me and to the larger field of literary studies. While I might argue for the relevance of novels or biographies based on their intersection with pressing social problems, this does little to prove the "literary value" of the text or guarantee its status as a work of art. Some scholars, teachers, and students of literature would argue that literary criticism should concern itself with the specifically "literary" features of a work. They might ask, doesn't 'great literature' separate itself from transitory issues such as 19th-century philanthropy? Doesn't literature that is captive to the fluctuations of history become propaganda rather than art? Shouldn't it remain material for the historian rather than the literary critic? (Tompkins 186)

Jane Tompkins, an important American literary critic, provides us with some great answers to these questions, and much of my response will paraphrase her. The choice between Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens, Henry Fielding or Fanny Burney, is never made in a vacuum, but from within a particular perspective that determines in
advance which literary works will seem "good." This is not to say that there is no such thing as value or that value judgments cannot or should not be made. We are always making choices, and hence value judgments about which books to read, teach, write about, recommend, or have on our shelves. The point is not that these discriminations are baseless; the point is that the grounds on which we make them are not absolute or unchanging but contingent and variable.

Questions like the one my colleague asked me assume that literary values are fixed, independent, and demonstrably present in certain "masterworks." That we agree about which writers are great and which are minor today does not mean that these judgments are obvious and self-evident. Their greatness is not a natural fact; it is constantly being produced and maintained by literary anthologies, course syllabi, book reviews, magazine articles, book club selections, radio and TV programs, and in recent years, which novels make their way into Hollywood movies. All you have to do is look at the Norton Anthologies to see how the literary canon has changed in the past 15 years. How many of you, for instance, have read Kate Chopin's The Awakening? Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God? Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"? None of these work were considered "great" 20 years ago, but they are commonly taught in literature courses now.

As Tompkins says, "Great literature does not exert its force over and against time, but changes with the changing currents of social and political life" (192). These biographies of Victorian women do a kind of cultural work within a specific historical situation, and they are valuable for that reason. Their philanthropic plots provide us with a means of thinking about our own community commitments and our own responses to human suffering. They described certain aspects of Victorian social reality which the authors and their readers shared; they dramatized its conflicts and recommended solutions. Literary texts work, express, and shape the social contexts that produce them, rather than achieve timeless, universal ideals of truth and formal coherence.

British women's biography, as I understand it, provided Victorian readers—and provide us now—with the rich variety of women's lives and women's social contributions. They allow us to hear narratives other than the more common political, industrial, and literary triumphs of great men and their works. While narratives of British women's lives frequently maintained the status quo of social and gender hierarchies, they also revealed numerous instances of social injustice and called their readers to greater compassion and social awareness. They revealed Victorian attitudes towards class, gender, and nationality. We may not be comfortable with all the roles women played in the historical past, but works such as these underscore that women played significant and diverse roles—roles that can't be contained in one tidy narrative (Ezell 165). Victorian women writers offer us the opportunity to hear other voices and expand our current understanding of literary history.

The struggle now being waged in universities all across the country, including Valparaiso University, over which writers deserve canonical status is not just a struggle over the relative merit of literary geniuses; it is a struggle over who has the right to tell the stories of British literature and history (Tompkins 201). So next time you look at a course syllabus, pause a moment to consider what has been included and what may have been omitted. You might want to find out for yourselves if there are good women and good works that you don't want to miss.

Works Cited


Dear Editor:

was carefully peeling the orange.

A little too much emphasis on

Keeping a Cool Head

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

"Crisis" was the word on her lips;
"crisis" was what she was saying, with a
little too much emphasis on k-not the
quiet k as in "Christmas" but more like
the k in "Criminyl" or "Curses!"

Moebie had decided to speak, and I
thought I knew what she was
saying, with a

Not the right answer," she said.

This was very Moebie, incapable of
accepting fact graciously. "I count a
number of possible crises," she said,
and I suddenly realized that things
were bad with her. She had men­
tioned the other day planning to look
in at Barnes & Noble. In Dogwood we
have a big Barnes & Noble bookstore
in the Barracks Road Shopping
Center, named for the Hessian sol­
diers' barracks there after the
Revolutionary War. Thousands of the
mercenarys had been detained there
as prisoners, and they gradually all
slipped away, soon founding families
in the Blue Ridge foothills.

It is unrecorded history; one year
they were there, and the next year they
had moved on. None was thought to
have gone back to Germany. Instead
of crisis, osmosis, absorbed into the
land, in an era when enough land
existed to absorb thousands of human
beings. The land did not inquire their
origin.

Things were bad with Moebie
because in giving time to gathering
zines, she had not adequately been fol­
lowing magazines and newspapers.
Zines are postmodern, which is to say
unguarded, brash, and desultory,
something like the Hessians, escaping
untimidly into a stretching New World,
imperfectly literate. While magazines
are always claiming to have a slick han­
dle on things: politics, urban manifes­
tations, ecosystems, the cinema, cars,
cuisine, exchange processes, the
works.

Having a handle these days some­
times means having a sort of convic­
tion of existing or imminent crisis.
The two-party system is down the drain
for a few months every four years, with
nothing to replace it except loose can­
nons. Too many people are having
babies, and too many people are not
having their babies. Cars' windows do
not repel bullets. Films show more of
the body, more often, and some show
all of the body, this completeness
being a sort of dead end, not possible
to go beyond, thus a real crisis in re­
presentation.

Crises: People who would have a
time hard telling their pastor the dif­
ference between an Areopagitica and an
Agamemnon claim anger over the
absence of the classics from the cur­
riculum. Or, Hollywood is to blame,
having placed handguns near our bed­
room headboards, and the number of
people plugging each other is now
enough or more. Or, Christo is stuck
in his career, along with the whole
avant-garde, tiresomely wrapping and
unclothing something yet again. Or,
rock 'n' roll is no longer classically sex
and drugs but grunge, the beat not
going on, age of mosh.

"I'm surprised," I said to Moebie,
"that you would ask me a question like
that." "You," I said, "are the expert
around here on culture, on postmodern
fusions and interventions, on simulacra
and deferrals." "Have parts of the
orange," I said.

She had promised to bring sever­
al oranges, but on the way back from
Barnes & Noble, after three hours of
browsing magazines, she had forgotten
to stop at Food Lion. No bananas in
her house, no apples, and only one
orange. We both like oranges, also
coffee, also the great pagan sun in the

Charles Vandersee, at the University of
Virginia, heads for Scotland in June for a
conference on "poetry and history" with a
paper on some American poems since 1950.
He regularly writes from Dogwood.

The Cresset
room, and her bird with bright green wings. She had come back with the Sunday New York Times after having been gone long enough to have a head done in dreadlocks, but oranges were deferred. Her peignoir was still in the sunny chair, complacent, and under it mules from her dreaming feet. We were here to gather resources for a picnic.

She took the whole orange, and since things were bad with her, I made no objection and went to the refrigerator. There was a note saying that the plums had been eaten—"so sweet and so delicious." We would have to stop at Bodo's Bagels to get Caesar salads, a poor idea, since Sunday noon was always crisis time, with a long line coming out the door and stretching into the parking lot. There is no accounting for Bodo's popularity; it is not a franchise.

In the car, we continued the conversation, and I tried to explain that a crisis, whatever the word might mean etymologically, surely had not much to do with sex, party collapse, good literature driven out by magazines with handles, or headboards with Hollywood bullets. A crisis would be when nobody was writing, nobody saw an injustice worth arming against, or final proof that the sperm-count decline is real and irreversible. Those would be crises. A generation training no instrumentalists, a state bartering its last wetlands for a mass of parking spaces—those conceivably could be crises.

With that congealed expression that I always associate with house dressing, Moebie let me know that I was misunderstanding entirely. "This is serious," she said. "Looking at magazines I ordinarily don't look at," she said, "front covers with words like National American Public Interest Spectator Review Criterion." "And one called Culture Wars," she said. Maybe there is such a one, I thought to myself (meaning No Way), but later on at Barnes & Noble there it was.

"People think we're at a crisis in American civilization," she said. "Here is Ralph Reed," she said, "head of the Christian Coalition, the largest fervid political organization in the Western World." "He refers to the U.S.," she said, "as 'a culture generally acknowledged to be in crisis.'"

"It could even," she said, "be a general global crisis, of authority, of legitimacy, of moral standards, of family incoherence, of expectations, of democratic viability in the face of violence and welfarism." "And so forth," she added, still looking concealed.

"The expression is 'family breakdown,' I explained. "Families," I ventured, "have always been more or less incoherent, but the contemporary discourse of crisis used the term 'breakdown.'" Zines, transient, have no discourse, but magazines at the crisis end of the spectrum have a definite discourse, a code, a sort of tic, and Moebie would have to be brought over to it. "Crisis," I tried to explain, "is a code word meaning, 'I don't like any of it.'" "These magazines," I said, "are written by people who look out and don't like it."

"What would you say," she said, "is this 'it'?"

Another of those impossible two-letter words, I thought to myself. What kind of national language is this, anyway, this crumbling Europe-based confection of words? Still, didn't all languages have these awful pronouns? What kind of human enterprise is language, anyway? Wouldn't the best national language, for the best nation, be the one with fewest problematic pronouns? That must be why families were incoherent, one reason: these pronouns loose as cannons.

The "it," I thought, would be what? Prayerless schools, parentless children, surplusless budgeting, peaceless city streets, political correctness, contentless curricula, tuneless music, four-letter words that everybody knew, rampant self-aggrandizement to the detriment of community in the absence of a Trancendental Signifier? Sex and death, anywhere, everywhere. And of course the whole passel of feminists, gays, humanists, regulators, the godless media, deconstructionists, multiculturalists, the NEH, the NEA, the ACLU, AIDS, the works. Not, I supposed, oil supertankers or spent nuclear rods, or the ever more pythonic embrace of fashion and marketing, or highstepping gogetters with golden parachutes, or corporate layoffs, or paranoid gated communities.

Really, though, why was Moebie being uncharacteristically contentionless? If all the right-wing magazines were vying to be loudest in screaming crisis, why did she bring it up with me? Moebie knew me well enough to know that whenever, according to me, enough people said one thing often enough, it must surely be wrong. Anything repeated often enough has to be wrong.

I saw no reason to believe that there was a crisis. There were simply more things around not to like, understandable in an enlarging and acquisitive nation. There were more channels on TV not to like, more houses of Congress (if you count tobacco/agribusiness and religious coalitions), more tasteless fatless sugarless foods, more stoplights, more people of both genders walking around with shirttails out, and so forth. You could call things in the aggregate a cultural crisis, but then if an actual cultural crisis came along you would not have a term for it. Language as premature ejaculation, yet again.

What, after all, if all the churches and movie studios shut down production, or a decimating plague struck Silicon valley, or all pharmacists and paramedics went on strike, or a new wave of knothingness burned all the libraries? Or, as Whitman put it, infants were being "christened after tyrants and traitors." Here would be cultural crises.

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I could see from Moebie's expression that I was not telling her anything new in my silent ruminations. She had not, apparently, been taken in by the tic magazines, and was toying with me as a sort of Sunday genuflection to the light of reason. Like most good Americans, on Sundays I do not turn my mind on till later in the day, after church and lunch, and Moebie was interested at the noon hour to see if I was unguarded enough to grant a culture war or cultural crisis.

So I said, “So you agree.” “The skill of reading returned to you,” I said, “after months of wacky fonts and grainy pages in the zine world.” “You’re reacquainted,” I said, “after three hours in the Barnes & Noble magazine section, with the normal prose of high dudgeon.”

This provoked her guarded laugh, “dudgeon” being what she calls one of those “prissy” words. In her mind a language worth having as a national language would be a prissless language, a language in which simpering and fawning words would somehow not be possible, or possible only in dialogue in remakes of movies such as the successor to the sequel of Gone With the Wind. Deep South girls in white organdy with paper fans at the heads of staircases—that sort of thing. Their prissy retorts to upstart suitors.

“People are being taken in, though,” she said. “People think that a few naked movies make a crisis,” she said, “or a few bad cities represent the breakdown of America.” “And there are such cities,” she said. “Count them,” she said. “Washington.” “Washington,” I agreed. We waited.

“I was going to add New York,” I said, “but despite potholes and the United Nations, the city has cleaned its subway cars and still has the best delis.” “Washington,” she said, “and—” “East St. Louis,” I fairly shouted. “Also Detroit.” “Pittsburgh used to qualify,” she said ruefully. “Ineradicable soot. Maybe Youngstown still does. Rusty, jobless, bleak.” That was all we could think of. Miami was laundering cocaine dough, but that made it a bad city only in the eyes of Internal Revenue, and what revenue agent was ever an incisive urban wonk?

This was probably going at it the wrong way, however. Crisis may be like cancer; it eats away from the inside, insidious. Systemic, not localized. Bad TV, bad schools, bad families, bad food, bad language, all metastasizing in cities and hamlets everywhere, create crisis, or conceivably could. Except that all these were good business, which put the whole thing in remission. You could hardly have a national crisis if business was good. And when business itself turns bad, it knows enough to turn to things that are good. If you harvest all the tuna, you go for dolphins. If people stop watching bad TV, to work on schemes for deploying future lottery winnings, business can make other kinds of bad TV to lasso them back, which is good. TV unifies our culture, thus if everybody is watching bad TV, this is good.

The bad family is bad because the two heads are busy working so as to be busy buying, to keep the economy from plunging into crisis. Bad schools, with handguns and prissy unoffending textbooks, are holding up those two crucial industries, firearms and publishing, besides being good for good schools. Bad TV and bad language make the U.S. the cultural envy of the rest of the world, elevating our self-esteem, staving off a crisis of worthlessness. Our pacifying freedom of expression and schlock are what other continents, under thumbs of iron chancellors or effete antiquity, crave mightily and pay for.

“A culture in crisis might not have paper or energy for zines,” Moebie reflected. “And these giant bookstores!” she said. “Not only not shut down, but soup and shortbread and expensive syrupy coffee mixed drinks.” “Your friends see you there,” she said, “nourished and intelligent.”

“We have parks to choose from,” I said, picking up the theme. “The city and county have not given the parks away to firing ranges or chip factories.” “You can buy wine on Sunday,” I said, “to take with salads and baguettes.”

“Nonetheless,” Moebie said, “there are crises if people think there are.” “No disputing that,” she augmented. “Perception is reality, because people live by perceptions.”

I thought of disputing it, because this was one of the shibboleths of the century. How had mere wishful thinking for crises attained such sovereignty? Bad pop psychology. Which, though, unifying our culture, is probably good.

Instead, I suddenly thought of the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, which does such a good job, I guess. Not in controlling disease, which is what we have garbage pickups and antibiotics for, and franchised vitamin outlets, but in giving us information, about what diseases are now current, and where to find them. Couldn’t we, I thought, as we reached the park, having forgotten the corkscrew, set up a Center for Crisis Control? Not to control crises, but to make up some benchmarks, or headboards, by which to define and recognize crises.

Then we would know what we were talking about. We would have more mastery of our bodacious and desultory national language, if not of ourselves, no small thing, if not large enough.

From Dogwood, faithfully yours, C.V.
Letter from Amsterdam

James Kennedy

The Dutch do a lot of things differently from Americans. Their "radical" approach to drugs and euthanasia policies, of course, has received a lot of attention in recent years, just as "Progressive" Dutch Catholics and colorful countercultural figures did back in the 60s. But "progressiveness" is hardly the only striking feature of Dutch society. The very smallness of the place often has a great impact on visiting Americans. Amsterdam itself is hardly like any American city; not only because of its lack of skyscrapers (which the soft and sandy ground makes prohibitively expensive) or abundance of narrow gabled houses, but because in size and feel it is more like a village than a contemporary urban space. Its inhabitants bicycle to work, or buy fresh bread at one of the corner bakeries. The very economies of scale give Amsterdamsam in particular and the Netherlands in general a different quality of life than anything Americans are bound to experience in their own country.

One of the most intriguing features—and one of those least well-known—of life in the Netherlands is the educational system, which, historically at least, rests on concepts substantially different from our own. The difference is based not only on "tracking," a system where students are, at age 12, sent to different high schools on the basis of their demonstrated aptitude. This hierarchical system of education, often resisted in the United States for its elitist and anti-democratic effects, is the rule rather than the exception among global educational systems; the Dutch are hardly exceptional in this regard. Rather, one of the singular features of the Dutch educational system is its historical pluralism. Americans still tend to think that "public" education must consist only of the values and beliefs to which all, or almost all, Americans can subscribe. For this reason, the privileging and public funding of any religion must be prohibited. As a result, America's public schools (and universities) promulgate a uniform, lowest-common-denominator morality which is supposed to steep children in the "values" conducive to American democracy and individual fulfilment.

This is not the way the Netherlands solved the problem. The contours of American public education stemmed from the dominance of a cultural Protestantism in the 19th century, which slowly secularized itself in the face of religious diversity. No such consensus existed in the Netherlands. Over a third of the population was Catholic in the late 19th century (a figure only slightly higher today) and Catholics resisted the efforts of liberal Protestant elites to create a public school system that was indifferent or hostile to their educational concerns. At the same time, many conservative Protestants (mostly Calvinists) were skeptical of the Protestant establishment's commitment to Christian education. This skepticism on the part of conservative American Protestants to public education was never as strong, and did not emerge for a very long time. The difference in the reaction of Protestant conservatives can be attributed, at least in part, to two reasons. First, the divide in Protestantism was probably greater in Holland than in the United States; the liberals were more liberal, and the conservatives more conservative. The second—and more important—factor was that Dutch Protestant conservatives often did not believe that they represented the whole nation, whereas many conservative American Protestants believed that the United States was historically and fundamentally a Christian country. American Christians, therefore, were more attached to the notion of a universal, public and Christian education than many of their Dutch counterparts.

As a result, there was no broad national consensus for what a public school ought to be. Dutch leaders, therefore, decided to split the differ-

James Kennedy is one of the current Lilly Fellows in the Program in Humanities and the Arts at VU. He teaches in the Department of History, and writes in the area of civic and religious intersections, particularly in the Netherlands. His frequent visits there prompted this account.
ence. After long campaign by Dutch Catholics and conservative Protestants, the School Law of 1917 funded all schools large enough to be viable—including all religious institutions. Parent associations were thus free to found their own schools with state support. In return for financial support, the state has retained the right largely to determine the curricula, and has monitored educational quality through the use of national, standardized examinations. As a consequence of this law, religious (as opposed to "public") schools have flourished in Holland; in the 1980s, about two-thirds of all Dutch students went to religious schools, roughly half to Catholic, roughly half to Protestant institutions.

Note that this is not an attempt by the state to establish any particular religion; this arrangement let any and all comers, religious or not, form their own school associations and receive state funding on the basis of relatively neutral, procedural standards. In fact, in recent years, Muslim and Hindu schools—catering to many of Holland's new immigrants—have been established under the same principles. Rather than subjecting everyone to a common civic philosophy and education, the Dutch system stimulates publicly funded religious and educational pluralism. The state, at least in theory, no longer decides with what worldview subjects will be taught; this is left to the associations running each of Holland's schools.

There are some problems with this system, and some politicians and educators—often those with few religious commitments—recently have asked whether this pluralistic model for education should not be dismantled. In the first place, there is no guarantee that any of these schools will promote the kinds of sensibilities that a majority of Dutch believe is essential in a democracy. In the early 1990s, a debate raged in parliament whether Christian schools could reserve the right to fire homosexual teachers. The socialists and liberal parties—forming a majority—thought they did not; the Christian Democrats thought they did. Finally, parliament decided upon a slippery compromise: homosexuals could not be fired "on the sole fact" that they were homosexual, but they could, presumably, be fired for advocating it as a lifestyle, or living a lifestyle openly at variance with the morals of the school. And employment for homosexual employees is only one issue in the question: Who should decide? The state—or individual schools?

This raises a related concern about this arrangement, although from the other side: the problem of verExistemening, literally, "state-ization." Since the Ministry of Education pays for schools and regulates the curriculum, it has exercised considerable say in school affairs, and over time religious schools have looked more and more like extensions of the state. This is most manifest in teacher training. Although Catholic and Protestant educational organizations exist, it is often hard to distinguish Catholic and Protestant teachers from their secular counterparts; all have been trained under the same guidelines and share the same professional ethos.

Another problem is a bottom-line consideration; institutional pluralism is an expensive option. Often, this arrangement is not the most efficient use of public funds, since the number of schools—and their size—are determined by the choices of parents, not financial considerations. Since the Dutch government is, like ours, in a severe budget deficit, there is a strong financial incentive to do away with the system, or at least raise the number of students required to form a state-funded school. Moreover, the current government is not particularly well-disposed to the continuation of religious schools. In 1994, the Christian Democrats—the chief patron on the religious school—was badly defeated at the polls, and were excluded from the governing coalition for the first time since 1918. Some leaders of the socialist-liberal coalition, while wishing to avoid the appearance of being anti-religious, have raised the question of whether, in this day and age, religious schools are still valuable, especially since they cost so much. These schools are not likely to shorn of state support any time soon, but it is clear that state financing of education has reached a crisis, and that there will be pressure to merge religious institutions together, or absorb them into non-religious ones.

Incidentally, the cause of religious schools was not helped this spring when it was revealed that the biggest sex scandal ever to rock Dutch education took place at an orthodox Calvinist high school in Amersfoort. A geography teacher had shown pornographic films to male students and then initiated sex acts with them. Scores of students were involved, over a period of twenty years. The headmaster, an exceedingly traditional Calvinist, had known about some of the excesses, but let the teacher off with a warning, not divulging to the parents what had transpired. He presumably thought that the good name of the school would thus be preserved. The sheer scope of the allegations—which seems to widen by the day—has helped to further raise questions about the value of the religious schools.

But perhaps the greatest problem facing religious schools today is that many of them have lost—since the rapid secularization of the 1960s—their religious distinctiveness. Most parents still want their children to go to a religious school, but in many cases, the secularized attitudes of parents, teachers and students alike has created schools that are only nominally religious. A friend once told me that at his Christian high school in Amsterdam, he was one of the very few students not to be hostile toward religion—any religion. Studies indicate
that this secularizing trend has been most pronounced in Catholic schools. The scramble for scarce students in the 1980s and 1990s has further eroded the erstwhile character of many schools, as school administrations feel pressure to dilute any religious flavor that might turn prospective students away. The trend toward mass education, evident since World War II, has made it much harder to maintain religious distinctiveness; institutions became indispensable components in technical training, not in the transmission of religious values.

This trend has been particularly evident in the higher technical schools and the universities. The Calvinist Free University of Amsterdam (established in 1878) and the Catholic University of Nijmegen (1928) had been founded as alternate institutions to the vaguely Protestant state schools. By the 1960s, the religious identity of these universities rapidly disintegrated. This occurred not only because of the theological changes that swept through the decade—Dutch Catholics were among some of the most radical in the tears following Vatican II—but because these universities were overwhelmed with new students and new faculty in the postwar education boom, many of whom had no meaningful connection with the religious traditions of the schools. Nijmegen and the Free University became extensions of state-sponsored mass education, and have, for the most part, become indistinguishable from other schools. Students specializing in theology at Nijmegen (still under the auspices of the Vatican) and philosophy at the Free University will get a recognizably Christian Education, but these departments are really solitary exceptions.

The problems outlined above are all very serious challenges to the Dutch system of educational pluralism. And yet these problems have nothing to do with the two chief objections that many Americans have to state-funded religious education, namely 1) that it is bad (or unconstitutional) because it promotes the establishment of religion and 2) that it dangerously corrodes civil society by robbing us of a common education and a common set of experiences. The first argument hardly strikes me as credible for a number of reasons—including the fact that it has not led to the establishment of religion in the Netherlands. The second problem is trickier, but it seems to be premised on the notion that if our public schools collapse, we are one dangerous step closer to Bosnia. But why wouldn’t we be one step closer to the Netherlands, one of the most peaceful nations in Europe?

It has been the great American fallacy to suppose that social peace and tolerance is best pursued by inducing everybody to become part of a common mold, to share the same values, to have the same standards. Our educational ideals, whether in primary, secondary or college education, whether in public or private schools, are closely tied to the notion that we need to build a common ethic and a common vision that everyone can share. We all face the same problems, so we should all have the same values. But part of the problem is that we also may risk greater violence when we insist that everybody sign on to the same program. Clearly, the whole public school system largely begged the question of who decides what gets taught, and how it is taught. As a result, we really have no way to adjudicate the problem of “values” in public education. Conservatives, moderates and liberals have often tried to solve the problem by asserting their agendas in the public schools. Attempts to transcend party spirit by offering a curriculum that is as morally and theologically bland as possible—many textbooks go this route—does not really solve the problem either; it simply says that the public sphere has no need of substantive morality and theology.

The pluralist education system in the Netherlands is hardly perfect, and it is more than fair to say that it has fallen on hard times. But the pluralist tradition does offer American educators valuable insights—even if they don’t wish to go as far as supporting the educational voucher system, which would bring American education closer to the Dutch pattern. In the first place, it suggests that perhaps we can conceive of diversity as pluralism, in which church-related schools—whether elementary schools or colleges—are allowed to build up distinctive religious and educational traditions, rather than accommodating themselves to a vague civil religion that will be non-offensive to everybody. In other words, pluralism frees us from the American tendency to impose, for the sake of a harmonious and homogeneous civil society, a set of common values and commitments on everybody. So rather than flattening out the Christian tradition to make their institutions more inclusive, Dutch pluralism would suggest that Christians use their own institutions to intensify and strengthen the links between the Christian faith and learning. In this way, one might hope to find diversity without the level of conflict now plaguing our educational endeavors.

There are obviously all kinds of pitfalls in strengthening Christian higher education. Will the faculty and the constituencies stand for it? Will it foster provincialism? But the Dutch example frees us from the unwarranted assumption that religious and educational homogenization is the only way to prevent civil strife.
Christian Colleges and Civil Society

Robert Benne

I remember first coming across the concept of “intermediate groups,” or “mediating institutions,” or “voluntary associations” in graduate school at the University of Chicago. We were given an assignment to read William Kornhauser’s *The Politics of Mass Society* (1959). In that book the author laments the erosion of intermediate groups and the ensuing emergence of “mass society,” a condition in which isolated individuals unconnected to intermediate groups are vulnerable to domination and manipulation by an ever-expanding state. I was so fascinated by Kornhauser’s ideas that I wrote my dissertation on “Responsibility in Mass Society.”

Of course the idea of intermediate groups was not at all new. DeToqueville, that inexhaustible source of insight into American society, pointed out the importance of voluntary associations in the life of early America. He believed that they were key to self-governance and hence to a stable and flourishing democracy. Berger and Neuhaus, in their influential *To Empower People* (1977), made a strong argument for using “mediating institutions” to get many social functions performed rather than expanding the state.

Now the concept is really flourishing. Communitarians commend “social unions” as a continuing source of social solidarity. Those who study formerly communist societies are especially interested in what they call “civil society,” those free, private and independent organizations that connect people with each other and play important roles in societies with states that are limited not only constitutionally but also in terms of capabilities. In such countries the re-emergence of a flourishing civil society is crucial for the preservation of democracy. Reconstituting them is no simple matter, however, because totalitarian regimes destroy both civil society and the habits of people that can sustain it.

I.

Obviously, churches are crucial in this schema. They are “intermediate associations” par excellence. In American society they are numerous and varied. Only recently have churches been given their due as bulwarks of civil society, partly I suspect, because of the secularist bent of most social scientists. They simply do not like to admit that religious convictions—and the institutions they sustain—play an important role in modern societies.

But important roles they do play, and the “they” includes the many church-related institutions besides the churches themselves. When one thinks of the kinds and numbers of institutions founded and sustained by the churches one is duly impressed with their role in civil society. Nursery schools, kindergartens, elementary schools, colleges and universities, orphanages, social service agencies, homes for the elderly, hospitals, cause-oriented voluntary associations, service and recreational organizations . . . . the list goes on and on.

Theorists of intermediate organizations point to the many functions they play. They provide services that the state need not supply and thereby obviate an ever-growing Leviathan. They are schools of virtue; they shape the character traits that sustain good citizenship. They communicate values and shore up identity. They provide structures of belonging so that people do not feel isolated and alienated. They represent groups of people to higher levels of power and authority. They protect people from arbitrary intrusions by the state. They increase social solidarity. Their multiple claims on persons give those persons a variety of sources of information and loyalty; such persons are not inclined to paranoid politics.

II.

Certainly one of the most important of these intermediate organiza-
tions are church-related colleges and universities. They perform many of the above-listed functions as well as their primary function—education. For Lutherans these colleges and universities have been highly prized vehicles for transmitting their heritage to succeeding generations. In doing that they also play an important role in sustaining civil society.

Private, church-related colleges and universities, however, are an endangered species. All of us experience the admissions "crunch" each spring where we try to maintain our numbers. The consultants tell us that there are simply too many colleges basically like us, and encourage us to develop marketable "margins of difference." They suggest that a lot of us won't be around in the twenty-first century. And, while there is no doubt some self-serving alarmism in these consultants' message, there is enough truth in it to give serious pause.

Os Guinness, in his The American Hour (1993), argues that civil society has been caught in a pincers' squeeze from both above and below. From above we have the continuing expansion of the state. It takes over more and more functions once performed by voluntary associations, families and individuals. (Think, for example, of the diminishing percentage of students attending private schools even though their absolute numbers are at least holding their own.) What the state does not take over directly it regulates. Because of its vast resources it becomes indispensable to the survival of private institutions, and when it pays the piper it calls the tune. (Most faculty in private institutions take the required non-discrimination rules to mean that one cannot intentionally hire members of the sponsoring religious tradition to carry on that tradition.)

Also from "above" comes the huge economic organizations that demand an education that will prepare people for business. If our graduates are to get employment, they need to go easy on the liberal arts and "get practical." Indeed, as the culture is shaped increasingly by commercial values, the liberal arts seem to take on decreased importance. An additional worry is that private for-profit schools offering practical education at a low price will further erode the place of private liberal arts colleges.

Finally, as George Marsden has pointed out, the graduate schools from which our faculty come have worked mightily to eliminate religious tradition—in both its intellectual and moral dimensions—as a relevant factor in education. Education is supposed to be neutral and objective, based on rational criteria of truth. Religious tradition, so graduate schools often claim, will soon become irrational and intolerant if it plays any meaningful role in the educational process. Therefore, in order to talk about it at all, one must understand it in other more respectable secular categories.

So, Guinness suggests, state, economy and university constitute one arm of the pincers that is putting the squeeze on private colleges from above. From below, he says, we have a galloping individualism fueled by a commercial culture that idolizes choice and an atmosphere of individual rights and freedoms that refuses to grant authority to any corporate tradition. Utilitarian and/or expressive individualists are not inclined to connect with colleges with demanding liberal arts and religious traditions.

III.

Where does this leave the sector of civil society in which many of us have our callings? Squeezed indeed. Interestingly enough, however, this is exactly the time when such colleges and universities are so sorely needed. Faced with the growing centrifugal forces of multiculturalism and post-modernism, public institutions, I believe, will have more and more difficulty coming up with coherent visions of education, especially those kinds of education that effectively form citizens, let alone those kinds of education that transmit a religious and/or cultural heritage. The public behe­mots of education will simply be dispensers of useful knowledge to meet the demands of the individuals who come to them. They will be unable to fulfill some of the key functions of civil society precisely when our society badly needs them.

What will be doubly tragic, though, is that just when society will need colleges with real character, the colleges themselves will have in many cases squandered whatever distinctiveness they had. That is, precisely when we will need colleges anchored in living religious and liberal arts traditions we will find that the colleges have been deracinated by the pincers movement described above, and by their callow capitulation to it. They will have lost the very characteristics that make them valuable contributors to civil society; they will have adapted to the bland mold of others who have capitulated.

As I have indicated, there are many external forces that push toward the deracination of these colleges; it is no simple task to survive in the midst of them without losing one's soul. But I am convinced that most colleges have been deeply complicitous in their own undoing. Their leadership and faculties have either failed to muster the courage discern what has been going on or, if they have have failed to provide a constructive alternative to the deracinating process. Perhaps a combination of ignorance and cowardice made up the formula for that complicity.

What has been going on? In brief, this is the way I see it. The external forces mentioned above have slowly marginalized the religious traditions
that once were crucial in the social, moral and intellectual life of church-related colleges. The sponsoring religious heritages have gradually lost their public relevance for the main functions of the respective colleges. Except for a few exceptions among the colleges, the religious heritage has been pushed out of the center. In some colleges it remains one tiny note among the booming peals that issue from secular sources. In others it is tolerated only as an ornament that graces the ritual events of the college's life. In yet others it is represented only by the first few chapters in the college's bicentennial history.

It would be difficult to plead total ignorance of this process, but it is plausible to plead that these secularizing processes have been operating piecemeal over a long period of time. Past leaders may be partially excused from seeing the reality of the emerging situation. But it takes willful blindness not to discern their massive presence now. Even in the face of unmistakable evidence, however, some leaders still rationalize the situation. They claim that the colleges still stand for the unfettered search for the truth. Isn't that a Christian value, they ask? Meanwhile, however, those very schools eliminate the Christian intellectual tradition as a significant source of truth. It is a bystander at best. Why then, one might ask, do we bother to keep up appearances?

IV.

A few Catholic and mainstream Protestant colleges and universities have had the courage to maintain the public relevance of their religious heritage in their hiring policies, curricula, intellectual life, moral life and overall ethos. I dare say, though, that the vast majority have not. They have amalgamated into the generic private, church-related liberal arts college, which is under threat of extinction.

The evangelicals, fundamentalists and conservative Catholics have fared better. They have had the courage to insist that their religious heritage have public relevance in their colleges and universities. Sometimes the fruit of their efforts has been very impressive; Wheaton and Calvin, for example, are among the best liberal arts colleges in the country. Fundamentalist institutions like Liberty University are probably better than most liberal Protestants think, but even so they do not provide models for any of our Lutheran colleges. Their ways of relating Christ and culture are simply not an option for us. But it is difficult not to admire their courage and resolve in making the Christian vision relevant to higher education.

Lutherans, it seems to me, have a wonderful tradition of Christian humanism. Our particular way of relating the Christian vision to secular human learning might be termed "dialectical." Following from our paradoxical theological tradition, we tend to see the conversation between Christ and culture as full of creative, but unresolved, tension. Such a dialectical Christian humanism should be very attractive in a modern world in which past certainties—such as the Enlightenment confidence in reason and science—are being eroded. It is time for the Christian vision to take its rightful place in the conversation about what human flourishing is all about. Such conversation in our colleges will guarantee that we will make strong contributions to civil society.

But do we have the zeal and courage to make such a Christian humanism live in our colleges and universities? For some the game is over; they have no meaningful relation to their historic Christian heritage. Others have a chance. A few stand in positions of strength. But even those few must tend their gardens with care. We should tend them not only or even primarily because we want to play our constructive role in civil society, but because we believe that such a Christian humanism has intrinsic truth and merit. We want to carry on not only because it is useful to society but above all because it is true. 

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Christian intellectuals have urged a largely secularized establishment to reexamine its commitment to religion-free education. Marsden’s *Soul of the American University*, in fact, already has received considerable notice among secular intellectuals, many of whom are sympathetic to, if not persuaded by, the author’s arguments for religious inclusion at the end of the book. Whatever their judgment, it is a work that has deservedly received their attention. Well-written and wide-ranging, *The Soul of the American University* is both a substantial piece of scholarship and a highly engaging account of how America’s premier colleges and universities, once conceived as Christian institutions, evolved into bastions of “nonbelief” hostile to any substantial religious presence in higher education.

Marsden describes the formation of a predominantly “evangelical” Protestant establishment, with roots in an older Puritan tradition, that ruled over most of America’s colleges until the late 19th century. The college presidents and teachers of this establishment—many of them clergymen—thought of themselves and their work in strongly Christian terms. At the same time, their establishmentarianism (Marsden avoids the word) prompted them to put their institutions in “service of the Republic.” Their abiding commitment to the nation seemed to require that American colleges drop their “sectarian” identity in favor of a more inclusive, nondogmatic and ethical Christianity which could shared by nearly everyone. In this way, Christianity could serve as a unifying force in American society.

After the Civil War, social trends, particularly the explosion of industrial capitalism, the rising demand for scientific experts and growing religious diversity, made it increasingly difficult for the nation’s colleges to maintain meaningful links with the churches and be sensitive to the demands of a market driven society. Marsden argues that many Protestant colleges—and the emerging universities—solved the problem by defining their institutional Christianity broadly enough to fully harmonize it with scientific ideals and national unity. “Freedom” and “tolerance” became the watchwords of the liberal Protestant establishment. These Protestants became increasingly hostile to efforts by other believers—particularly Roman Catholics—to privilege “creeds” over the “academic freedom” they regarded as central to the Protestant educational enterprise.

By the early 20th century, religion had disappeared as an important force in America’s colleges and universities; the curricular and research priorities of these national institutions had made it irrelevant. Modest efforts by liberal Protestants to assert a religious presence at the edges of university life—through voluntary religious societies and divinity schools—failed to stem this tide. Yet the Protestant traditions at these schools did not entirely disappear; a “liberal Protestantism without Protestantism” has continued to set the tone at these institutions. Devoted to “academic freedom,” the post-Protestant establishment—in a variation on liberal Protestantism—now regards all religious viewpoints as “sectarian” in nature and thus incompatible with the highest ideals of the American university.

Marsden’s tone is never harsh and he stresses that he is not looking for “culprits.” Most of his subjects, he writes, acted with the best of intentions. Nevertheless, *The Soul of the American University* is highly critical of two closely-associated aspects of establishment Protestantism: its epistemological naiveté and its pretensions to speak for everyone. Because it was devoted to objective science and the highest ideals of the nation, the establishment was blind to its own assumptions. Rather than transcending “sectarian” dogma, as they imagined, the mandarins of America’s premier institutions were committed to political, social and (this is Marsden’s point) religious dogmas of their own.
Furthermore, Marsden argues, the “established nonbelief” in today’s American universities is equally naive and intolerant of religious views—and equally in need of correction.

Marsden’s last chapter is a brief articulation of his solution to the problem of “established nonbelief.” The widely-held notion that faith must be kept out of academic life should be replaced by genuine religious pluralism, in which religious concerns, like those stemming from feminists or ethnic groups, are regarded as a legitimate basis for doing academic work. Moreover, private religious colleges should be given the freedom to develop their own intellectual communities, without hindrance from a secular establishment, which might wish to impose its own notions of diversity. In making this case, Marsden, a member of the Christian Reformed Church, is inspired by a model of society developed by Dutch Calvinists at the turn of the century, in which Roman Catholics, Protestants and secularists each were accorded their own institutions—and their own right to participate in the public sphere.

As an historian, Marsden has done good work in the past, and The Soul of the American University has a drive and cohesion which surpasses the much-touted Fundamentalism and American Culture (1980). Marsden manages to synthesize institutional histories into a broad-strokes interpretation of American intellectual culture, and he knows how to construct a persuasive and engaging argument. The book, however, seems to insinuate—it is never directly stated—that if Protestants like, say, Francis Patton and Woodrow Wilson (both presidents of Princeton) had been a little more sophisticated in their epistemology, and less bound to nonsectarian education, the greatest secularization of American higher learning might have been less thorough. This is an interesting counterfactual consideration. But given the pressures on these institutions and the massive changes in society, it may be too much to expect that the efforts of presidents and faculty could have done much to stem the tide of research specialization and mass education, forces usually inimical to the maintenance of a strong Christian presence in higher education.

Still, The Soul of the American University is a first-rate accomplishment, and it is both an important historical contribution and a useful catalyst in the contemporary discussions on the nature and future of American universities. But despite all the new sympathy for the reinclusion of religion into American public life, it will probably be some time before Marsden’s appeal for religious pluralism is implemented. It has become second nature for many secular academians—never mind the American public—to regard religious influence in education as antithetical to free inquiry, and this habit of mind will die hard. Perhaps The Soul of the American University can also serve as a clarion call to those of us in church-related higher education, whose own commitments to a broad, ethical and inclusive Christianity are ominously reminiscent of those voiced by the Protestant establishment at the turn of the century.

James Kennedy

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more than many sparrows

Consider the sparrow:
the commonest of birds,
“typically dull gray-brown”
two for a penny. A meager offering.

The commonest of birds,
without charisma or flash.
Two for a penny; a meager offering
to a glitter-greedy world.

Without charisma or flash,
they still catch their Maker’s eye.
To a glitter-greedy world
their falling goes unnoticed, but

they still catch their Maker’s eye,
just like your stagnant dreams.
Their falling goes unnoticed, but
they do not die anonymously.

Just like your stagnant dreams,
typically dull gray-brown:
they do not die anonymously.
Consider the sparrow.

Heath Davis Havlik

Back in the late 1960s, colleges and universities abandoned the in loco parentis approach to student life. Unfortunately we substituted little in its place. We abandoned the very generation of students who, having been inadequately parented and haphazardly educated, may have been least able to function left to themselves (69).


These common labels for some eighty million young people born between 1961 and 1981 indicate a specific position in the birth order of Americans—a location between the post WWII Baby Boomers and those born starting in 1982, a group now often referred to as the Millennial Generation. Academics William H. Willimon and Thomas H. Naylor go beyond birth order descriptors and call these eighty million, or at least the fourteen million of them who are currently of college-age—the “abandoned generation.”

In their compelling book The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education Willimon, Dean of the Chapel at Duke University in North Carolina and Naylor, professor emeritus of economics at Duke and lecturer at Middlebury College in Vermont, suggest that the American college campus is in a crisis marked by a deteriorating moral climate among young people—a crisis born of the failure of parents, teachers, professors, and administrators “to teach an ethic of concern and to model a culture of responsibility” to the children and adolescents in our personal or professional care. Today’s college students, they caution us, have “experienced few authentic connections with adults” and have been left largely to their own devices in “a culture characterized by dysfunctional families, mass schooling that demands only minimal effort and media idols subliminally teaching disrespect for authority and wisdom” (16-17).

This abandonment by adults or “culture of neglect” has spawned a cohort of 17 to 22-year olds who come to college quite fragile, not very secure about who it is, fearful of its lack of identity, and without confidence in its future. Many students are afraid of themselves and afraid of relationships...This diminished sense of self has caused a growth in racism, sexism, assault, date rape, attempted suicide, eating disorders, theft, property damage, and cheating on most campuses (16).

This inventory of campus behavioral problems will come as no surprise to most academics or student affairs professionals. We deal with them nearly every day in the classroom, the library, the laboratory, the athletic field, the rehearsal studio, the residence hall, the student union, the counseling center. Willimon and Naylor themselves confronted these issues perhaps most directly in a freshman seminar titled The Search for Meaning which they team taught at Duke, and from which experience grew their 1994 text and workbook set with the same title. The authors provide a syllabus for this ambitious interdisciplinary course (philosophy, religion, psychotherapy, literature, women’s studies, fine arts) as it was taught at Middlebury College in an appendix to The Abandoned Generation.

In the view of Willimon and Naylor,

The three most visible symptoms of the crisis in higher education are substance abuse, indolence, and excessive careerism. Underlying these symptoms are three fundamental problems: meaninglessness, fragmentation of a student’s life into unrelated, incoherent components; and the absence of community (15).

Their descriptions of these symptoms and problems are pointed and powerfully stated. Early in the book we read:

Campus alcohol abuse is indicative of a plethora of social, psychological and economic problems confronting today’s college students. Broken homes, teachers who don’t teach, the failure to integrate the residential and academic components of college life, the professionalization of college athletics, grade inflation, curriculum sprawl, and the absence of community on campus are all important pieces of the puzzle. But above all is the abandonment of higher education of the moral, character-related aspects of education, the widespread, but, we believe, erroneous assumption on the part of administrators that it is possible to have a college or a university

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Faith To Live By, from Allan Bloom’s active role in shaping not only the life rings painfully true. Research data college faculty and students about the frus­
terations and disappointment of campus student behaviors. Provocative quotes education among undergraduates in American confirms some of our worst fears about life philosophy and programming, fac­
institutions, of course, already affirm that higher education must take an active role in shaping not only the minds, but the characters and souls of undergraduates.

Religiously affiliated colleges and universities and many other private institutions, of course, already af­firms the centrality of moral and spiritual education among undergraduates in their mission statements and in their practices of core curriculum, student life philosophy and programming, faculty/staff development, community ritual, and other aspects of campus management. Willimon and Naylor draw deeply from Calvin College pro­fessor of philosophy and academic dean David A. Hoekema’s excellent review of the features, achievements and shortcomings of student behavior regulation, Campus Rules and Moral Community: In Place of In Loco Parentis (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994). Hoekema identifies three stances that institutions of higher education adopt with regard to the supervision of student behavior: the restrictive stance, similar in many respects to in loco parentis or at least in loco avii (in the place of grandparents); the permissive stance, which Hoekema drolly identifies as non sum mater sua (I am not your mother); or the directive stance aptly named by Hoekema in loco avunculi (in the place of the uncle).

Hoekema believes the directive philos­ophy to be most appropriate for today’s campuses because it “commu­nicates two guiding principles: First that the institution is not neutral with respect to the conduct in question; second that it relies on example and persua­sion, not on specific rules and their enforcement, as their means of preventing undesired conduct” (Hoekema 141).

Hoekema suggests three steps campuses can take to recover a moral community on campus: 1. Top admin­istrators must acknowledge that seri­ous student misbehaviors (alcohol and drug abuse, sexual harassment and abuse, racism, academic dishonesty) occur on campus and that they threaten the institution’s values and are “deeply out of harmony with the institution’s goals and ideals.” 2. Because such poor conduct principally harms students, students themselves must play a role in the remediation. 3. The campus must systematically encourage the modeling of positive behaviors by supporting organizations that are morally responsible and denying support and recognition to groups that repeatedly violate the moral and behavioral standards of the community (Hoekema 157).

Willimon and Naylor set out a formidable plan for recovering the sense of institutions as “intellectual and moral communities dedicated to the mutual pursuit of knowledge and character” (162). They go well beyond Hoekema’s emphases; they take on the higher education establishment:

We believe that what is called for in higher education is nothing less than a complete restructuring of universities including the way they are orga­nized, the way undergraduates are taught, and the substance of the cur­riculum. The ultimate aim of restruc­turing is to improve the quality of undergraduate education, increase its value, and reduce its cost—to create a community of scholars and teachers that will enhance students’ critical thinking skills and their search for meaning (102-3).

Willimon and Naylor propose eight strategies for “reform and rein­vention of American higher educa­tion” (161-162). The first strategy clearly applies only to large multi-cam­pus institutions and is more the domain of state legislatures and boards of trustees rather than educators:

- “Downsizing: Downsize universities by spinning off undergraduate educa­tion to smaller satellite colleges.”

Another group of Willimon-Naylor strategies would require the overturning of some of the most care­fully protected privileges of the profes­soriate:

- “Tenure: Replace the tenure system with a system of long-term contracts.” This battle has raged on hundreds of campuses for decades.
- “Teaching: Require undergraduate professors to teach at least three or four courses per semester.” Nothing new on most smaller university and college campuses where budgets are limited, but not likely to happen at large research institutions.
- “Curricula: Reduce the freedom available to undergraduates in their choice of courses.” Many students would argue that they have time for very few “elective” courses after they meet the requirements of their institution’s general education program and major and minor areas of study.
- “Course Load: Increase the number of academic courses required each semester to graduate from four to five.” Again, this is already the case at many schools. Willimon and Naylor also recommend a school week that includes Saturday morning classes—a
practice long since forsaken by most schools at the insistence, I suspect, of students who found themselves in need of more weekend hours for jobs and socializing, and of faculty demanding more time for family and scholarly work and research.

Most promising are the Willimon-Naylor tactics for recovering campus environments that foster “a strong sense of community among students, among faculty, and between students and faculty—a sense of belonging and connectedness” (143) reasonably apply to smaller schools, both public and private, as well as large, research institutions, and may be more easily effected by faculty, staff, administration, and students:

• “Residential Colleges: Introduce a system of residential colleges into existing colleges and newly created ones.

• Learning Communities: Create sustainable learning communities within residential colleges.

• Participation: Make college policymaking more participatory so that students, faculty, and administrators are included in the process.”

College residence halls—often allowed in the move away from in loco parentis to degenerate from proactive learning environments to passive nocturnal storage bins, or worse—hold tremendous potential for nurturing the kinds of learning communities Willimon and Naylor recommend. Strengthening existing ties and developing new initiatives between academic and student affairs units cannot help but build a more holistic approach to higher education and help prepare students for lifelong learning in and out of traditional learning settings. Even where the highly desirable residential college model is not feasible for lack of resources or other obstacles, campus residentiality and home-away-from-home services for commuter students can and should be managed to more intentionally promote the connectedness that the abandoned generation does not feel.

My own campus has taken a bold step in this direction by realigning its student affairs division under the office of the provost, placing it structurally at the same level as academic deanships. The school’s student affairs professionals are now in a better position to meet the recommendations of the 1993 Student Learning Imperative Project of the American College Personnel Association, especially the need to make ‘seamless’ what are often perceived by students to be disjointed, unconnected experiences by bridging organizational boundaries and forging collaborative partnerships with faculty and others to enhance student learning (ACPA 3).

A student learning task force of faculty, students, and student affairs staff met last spring on our campus to develop recommendations for enhancing learning opportunities of all kinds. The final report was shared with the university president, provost, and members of the board of directors, and many of the recommendations have been acted upon individually or woven into exciting plans for restructuring residential life. This past fall a dozen or so faculty, student affairs staff, and campus chapel staff gathered for several conversations on influencing the ethical development of students. Our anecdotal evidence and research data confirmed that the recent crop of students is clearly more in need of modeling and tutoring about moral issues, values, and ethical judgment than generations past. And our collegial dialogue about our students and their needs nourished our sense of common purposes in higher education.

The Abandoned Generation is important reading for student affairs

To the Desiccated Scholars

...putting names on things is the most vital activity in the world. Tree. Flower. Dog. But don’t ask them to prune the tree, plant the flower or take care of the dog, unless you enjoy Unpleasant Surprises.

The Tao of Pooh

There we are collecting data cataloging information sorting life into neat little squares like the wooden printer’s boxes used for holding napkins in our refectory. We are so busy with the essentials of life we know what’s most important we have our sixty-hour work-weeks and our no-time-for-fun personas we follow all of the rules (in several different languages) we know science and math history and literature medicine and law we are everywhere doing the important things asked of us so, is it any wonder that the voice who says, “Come here and sit by me, let me wrap you in the sun; may I breathe Spring across your fluttering eyes; say nothing not now, rest.” is it any wonder that this Quiet bleeds through us onto our clean white uniformity?

Christopher J. Renz, O.P.
professionals, faculty, and college and university administrators. The Willimon-Naylor agenda for higher education will infuriate some and inspire others. But few who know today's colleges will find unfamiliar territory in the authors' campus maps, and fewer still will disagree that the problems the authors identify are real and unlikely to yield to anything but radical interventions.

Margaret Franson


As a recipient of a Lilly Endowment, Inc. research grant on religion and higher education, we were pleased to discover Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and Higher Education, the excellent volume which Douglas Sloan has produced out of his own Lilly-funded research project. In this review, we discuss his book while engaging his findings in light of our own discoveries at Baylor University.

Sloan's study of mainline Protestant involvement with American higher education begins with the observation that the history of American higher education is also the history of Protestantism in America. Indeed, it is the story of the dis-establishment of American Protestantism from its near hegemony in American culture. About this displacement many reflective Americans are ambivalent. On the one hand, for many groups, the 19th century Protestant-dominated culture was often unjust and hypocritical. It belittled and marginalized non-Caucasian, non-Protestant, and non-male points of view while celebrating, as the center of its perspective, a God whose love extended unconditionally to all creatures everywhere.

On the other hand, as the twentieth century comes to a close, among mainline Protestant denominations support for Christian higher education is perceptibly more tenuous. In the dominant academic culture, the very idea of religious higher education is problematic. Indeed, some academics regard both Catholic and non-mainline Protestant colleges and universities as necessarily "sectarian" and unlikely to be "real" colleges and universities. Some leaders of universities which once were proud to call themselves Christian (or Methodist, for example) are embarrassed now by their religious connections and prefer to regard those religious ties as part of a quaint past or merely expressions of noble enlightened moral ideals. But this displacement of religion from higher education would be surprising to the mid-19th century leaders of Christian colleges and universities and to their educated public. Why and how did this happen?

A growing number of scholars are studying the alienation of church and university in twentieth century American culture. Douglas Sloan's Faith and Knowledge makes a valuable contribution to this growing body of scholarship. Sloan's book is valuable for at least two reasons. First, Sloan's story is about how mainline Protestant denominations, led by such powerful thinkers as the Paul Tillich and the brothers Niebuhr, began after World War I to engage and attempt to regain a central role in American higher education and how this effort collapsed by the late 1960s. Sloan's work begins where George Marsden's, The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief, leaves off, thus filling in an important part of the story left untouched by Marsden's impressive scholarship.

Second, Sloan's excellent work not only provides an impressive, detailed picture of the creative efforts by representatives from mainline churches and the academic community to rebuild a fruitful relationship between church and university, but also he provides a powerful explanation of why this re-engagement failed. What initially, in part, prompted the retreat of religion from the academy was the insistence that faith and knowledge are entirely separate spheres of human activity. Faith is a private matter, so it began to be claimed at the turn of the century. Its truths are impenetrable by, or inaccessible to, scientific or common sense knowledge. Christian churches rightly consider these truths to be necessary for human flourishing and proclaim them to the world. Modern American universities, however, transmit and discover knowledge, those truths which are gained by experiment and publicly verifiable experience and which are the basis for technological and material success.

Rather than challenging the intellectual and religious frameworks that suggest that religious faith and human knowledge exist in two separate spheres, having nothing in common, the leaders of the Protestant theological renaissance leave unchallenged this bifurcation of human life into one of the many dualisms so characteristic of modernity, says Sloan. Their contribution to the problem of faith and knowledge is an epistemological paradigm, a two-realm theory of truth, which degenerates uneasily into a private/public (professional) dichotomy with the consequence that religion and religious perspectives will be positioned vulnerably in the modern university.

To summarize, Sloan contends that the two-realm theory of truth is the typical response of mainline Protestants to an increasingly narrow conception of knowledge centered in positivistic science. He argues that this response is grounded in Kantian-
inspired reconfigurations of faith and knowledge whose ultimate consequence is to claim that knowledge is a cognitive matter while faith is not. Additionally, he associates the two-realm theory of truth with the theological renaissance of the 1940s and argues that it is an inadequate response to the intellectual crisis which has displaced religion from the principal academic centers of the American culture.

Our own research at Baylor University provides a useful vantage point from which both to confirm and evaluate critically Sloan's central themes. To foreshadow our conclusions, we confirm that the two-realm theory of truth was both dominant among Protestants and that it was inadequate. If, however, Sloan is suggesting that its origins are the philosophy and theology of Kant and Schleiermacher, we disagree.

Interestingly, we have discovered an analogous view at Baylor, but one which appeared as early as the 1890s. Given that Kant was not very influential on American Protestant educators in the late 19th century, there is little reason to see the two-spheres view at Baylor as growing out of Kantian-like distinctions between faith and knowledge. Our colleague, Elmer H. Duncan, for example, finds in his investigation of the journals of Protestant educators in America that, during the mid-to late-19th century, they make two and a half times as many references to Sir William Hamilton as to Kant.

With Sloan, we view the two-realm theory of truth as an inadequate response (more on that later) to an "epistemological crisis" for the tradition of church involvement in American higher education. Epistemological crises occur when practices or beliefs that once had a clearly defined content and a readily available justification cease to cohere or make sense. In the throes of an epistemological crisis, evidence that once pointed unambiguously toward a certain conclusion becomes open to rival and often incompatible interpretations; a sense of self-deception, error, irony, ambiguity, or skepticism often replaces what was once unrivaled self-assurance and comfort in one's beliefs.

Christian colleges and universities found themselves confronted with an epistemological crisis at the turn of the century. Baylor University is an instructive example. In 1889, Leslie Waggener, chair of the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin, had on several occasions publicly denounced denominational schools and called for their disbanding. With a Ph.D from Harvard University and a faculty position at a "newly born" state-sponsored university, Waggener embodies and articulates for Baylor the challenges posed by the new generation of American Universities. For these, the primary goals of the university are the production of new knowledge by research and its application by technological innovation for the sake of social and economic progress. These goals are rivals to the overarching goal of American higher education in its colleges and universities until this "academic revolution"—the intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation of students. So, it is not surprising that Waggener insisted that education was not the legitimate work of churches and that denominational universities could not be but "pious frauds." Now that the state had education in hand, he suggested that the denominations should "retire to innocuous desuetude." Baylor University, the oldest university in Texas, should disband or abandon its religious commitments, if Baylor wanted to serve the public and its common good, so Waggener argued.

But, why must Baylor's educational practices be fraudulent pieties? Because, as one might put it today, its moral and spiritual commitments are not the product of value-neutral methods of inquiry. Thus, if a religious-identified university is consistent and faithful to its religious commitments, it must violate the deepest intellectual commitments of the new modern university (methodological neutrality, academic freedom, and tolerance of academically responsible divergent views).

Of course, Baylor's leadership, like many in their day, was shocked by these vituperative attacks. This is not surprising, either. When Baylor University was founded in 1845, to be a college in America was to be a Christian college. Sloan reminds his reader of the changes in the academic culture's understanding of knowledge (quantitative, mechanical, and instrumental) and its implications for the role of the university. This narrative about "knowledge" helps explain the epistemological crisis to which the two-realm theory of truth was a response. (Jeffrey Stout's Flight from Authority describes another way to tell a narrative about "knowledge" and the displacement of religion from the centers of intellectual life in Western Culture.)

Long before Tillich and the Niebuhrs put forward versions of the two-realm theory of truth, leaders at Baylor had put forward similar views. In 1890, B.H. Carroll, the chair of the Baylor's Board of Trustees, responds to Waggener's attacks by insisting that Baylor does provide the legitimate academic service one would find at a University of Texas at Austin. However, by "a simple method of addition," Baylor supplemented independently defined university goals with a separate set of concerns for the spiritual development of students. Later, Baylor President S.P. Brooks (1902-1931) explained Baylor's educational task as "the full and harmonious development of the whole man, leaving nothing out." Yet, this aim, he explained, is best pursued by activities...
divided into two spheres, a material and a spiritual sphere. Baylor’s work in the material sphere includes activities in laboratories, in libraries, and in the newly emerging disciplines which give shape and substance to the new academic curriculum. Baylor’s work in the spiritual sphere includes compulsory chapel, extra-curricular opportunities for Bible study, and “home” and “foreign” mission activities.

We claim that Baylor’s “two-spheres” view of Christian higher education grows naturally out of Scottish common sense philosophy’s inability to cope with the challenges of Darwinian biology and with the historical-critical method of studying the scriptures as an academic enterprise, rather that from Kant or Schleiermacher, for example. Hence, the “Old Time” Christian college faced an epistemological crisis for which the “two-spheres” view was a common response, and from modernity’s vantage point, an ad hoc response. When one could no longer believe that the same method (Baconian inductivism) of studying/reading the book of “nature” and the Bible produced harmonious and convergent answers, one response is to seal hermetically each era from intrusion from the other. Later when Scottish common sense philosophy loses its place in the cultural mind-set, Tillich and others will appropriate Kantian-like justifications for the separation of “faith” and “knowledge” into wholly independent and autonomous spheres.

Sloan contends that the two-realm theory of truth is inadequate for two reasons: (1) it perpetuates the sorts of unhealthy dualisms so characteristic of the modern era; (2) the relation between the two spheres will be unequal (ix). We maintain that Sloan could put his criticisms more forcefully. First, the two-realm theory of truth is an incoherent response to the crisis of faith and knowledge because it subverts one of the fundamental aims of the theological renaissance: the re-engagement of mainline Protestantism with the dominant academic culture and its institutions. For, as Sloan indicates early in his book, the church’s claim to have a legitimate role in higher education depends on one’s ability to show an essential connection between knowledge and faith (viii). But the two-realm theory of truth denies that an essential connection between knowledge and faith is possible. Thus it denies Protestant churches (and other religious communities as well) an intellectual basis for having a legitimate role in higher education.

Second, the kind of inequality suggested by Sloan leads to institutional conflict and instability. Institutional conflict arises because the claims on the university from one sphere are conceptually unrelated to those of the other, and since one has no paradigm which relates the claims of each sphere to the other, one has no “reasonable” way to resolve practical conflicts when they occur. Indeed, these conflicts are reduced to power struggles. However justified a decision may be from within the appropriate sphere, it will likely appear arbitrary and ill-conceived from the other sphere, hence a power-play. At Baylor, we have observed that the faculty inevitably become the guardians of the academic tasks; the administration, the guardians of the religious character of the institution. It is not surprising, then, that the faculty will see hiring policies that require knowledge of a prospective candidate’s religious involvement as irrelevant and arbitrary. The administration, on the other hand, will see these measures as both relevant and necessary.

Institutional instability arises because it is difficult to yoke the two spheres equally. This difficulty encourages a university to teeter between secularism and fundamentalism. Since the modern university privileges the production and transmission of the knowledge and skills relevant to success in a market-driven, but “naked public square,” typically religious claims on the university are seen as irrelevant, especially in “bottom-line” decisions. Thus, religiously-identified universities which desire national acceptance and prestige will tend in practice to marginalize religious concerns. This helps explain the historical trend of mainline Protestant universities to secularize. Inequality grounded in incoherence breeds institutional instability.

For Christian universities which want to be “modern” universities, like many Lilly Network schools, the dangers are obvious. As long as the “faith and knowledge” epistemological crisis remains unresolved, being a modern university will mean separating one’s religious commitments from the central tasks of the modern university—the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. This epistemological instability will be one (though not the only) important variable in the secularization (or the “fundamentalization” of religious colleges and universities. Contervailing forces obviously exist, or Baylor University, if Sloan is correct in his analysis, would have lost its religious identity long ago.

His advice for such universities is simple and direct: new epistemological possibilities must be envisioned, possibilities that bridge rather than re-erect boundaries between faith and knowledge. We take him to be suggesting a tantalizing task: transcending the mesmerizing modern bifurcation of faith and knowledge is the project of Christian scholars in a postmodern world.

Sloan’s analysis and critique of the “two-realm” theory of truth makes intelligible the failure of mainline Protestant denominational efforts to recover a central role in higher education in America. Many who work at religiously identified colleges and universities (like faculties at most LFP network schools) will find Sloan’s story sobering and his call for a new rela-
tionship between faith and knowledge attractive. Sloan's own proposal calls for a radical transformation in our way of understanding knowledge. He offers Rudolf Steiner's emphasis on imagination, inspiration, and intuition as providing access to the qualitative, non-sensory dimensions of reality. This kind of model allows us to think of the spiritual dimensions of ourselves and our world without recourse to dualism and as a cognitive enterprise, he suggests.

Whether or not one agrees with Professor Sloan's own solution to the crisis that now confronts many religiously-identified colleges or universities, one will admire the lucidity of his story about the epistemological and historical elements of their present predicament.

Michael D. Beaty
J. Todd Buras


Without much fanfare, Philip Gleason of Notre Dame has established a reputation as one of the great American historians of the late twentieth century. His earlier writings on German-American Catholics, ethnicity and assimilation, and problems in American Catholic history and thought (especially Keeping the Faith, 1987), have all combined astute historical analysis with a measured sense of critical judgment that have made them frequent touchstones for other scholars. This is all the more remarkable because Gleason is, like the late historian David M. Potter, one of those relatively rare birds on the American scene: an instinctively conservative scholar who has gained influence across a wide spectrum of thought.

Like Potter's, Gleason's conservatism has almost nothing to do with the usual American brands associated with Manchester economics, militant nationalism, and attachment to social hierarchies. It is, rather, a matter of a thoughtful moral sensibility and regard for tradition deeply rooted in particular institutions and ways of life. It is probably no accident that such sensibilities have appeared in people like Potter and Gleason who grew up in one of the few large, distinctive subcultures that have been, at least historically, somewhat at odds with the prevalent American norms. In Potter's case it was the South; in Gleason's it is American Catholicism. For Gleason, Catholicism is first of all a matter of faith. But the particular community of American Catholicism has also plainly provided him not only a subject matter for his histories, but a valuable angle of vision from which to scrutinize wider American intellectual and social practices.

Contending With Modernity is, at one level, simply what it purports to be: a thorough history of the evolution of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. Since no comparable history has existed, this alone is a valuable achievement. But Gleason is much more than a narrow institutional historian, and the real importance of this book lies in the way that he links the history of Catholic higher education to the larger religious and intellectual history of twentieth-century American Catholicism and American life. That history, in Gleason's telling, ultimately ends up raising more questions than it answers. But those questions are richly instructive not just for Catholics, but for anyone concerned about the prospects of religiously informed learning and intellectually alert religion in America.

The institutional story Gleason tells is largely one of the frequently controversial but ultimately inevitable reconstruction of Catholic higher education to conform with the normative "modern" practices of American colleges and universities. In the late nineteenth century most Catholic "colleges" were undifferentiated teaching institutions still tightly run by religious orders, based largely on continental European models of academic organization and curriculum (particularly the Jesuits' sixteenth-century Ratio Studiorum), and hostile to emerging American models of postsecondary learning. Gleason carefully traces the process by which Catholic colleges were compelled, sometimes over much internal objection, to accept the major institutional features of the modern American higher education revolution: the sharp distinction of secondary, undergraduate, and graduate studies; accreditation by external agencies; electives and diverse subject matters rather than fixed classical curricula; the bureaucratic credit-hour system of academic accounting (which, Gleason astutely notes, represents a clear educational analogue to emerging American modes of industrial production); the dominance of university-based scholarship and the Ph.D; and eventually coeducation—though this last was very slow to arrive among Catholics.

Many Catholic academic leaders originally saw these phenomena, and many others, as inextricably linked with the anti-Catholic or at least nonreligious secular practices that seemed to have taken hold in the advanced centers of American learning in the late nineteenth century. By this time, interestingly, Catholics seldom feared Protestantism, which seemed a fading presence in higher education. Rather, their enemy was what they understood to be a new kind of anti-religious learning. But partly out of the necessities of survival, and partly because some progressive Catholic academics became convinced that these educational practices themselves were religiously neutral and even beneficial to
academic quality, Catholic colleges gradually accepted most of the features of institutional modernity.

Except for the Catholic University of America, an early and not entirely successful attempt by the entire American hierarchy to create a single graduate center for all Catholic higher education, most Catholic colleges were slow to become full-fledged graduate and professional universities. Most Catholic colleges, especially the women's colleges, were relatively small and served primarily undergraduates. It was not really until after World War II that places like St. Louis, Notre Dame, Boston College, and Georgetown aspired to become important centers of scholarly research and graduate training. Gleason's narrative of these developments occasionally bogs down in excessively detailed account of internal debates within the religious orders and the National Catholic Educational Association. But it successfully conveys a strong sense of the close connection between the American Catholic Church and its colleges, and of the dense American Catholic subculture that sustained and enlivened these institutions.

But if Catholics gradually accommodated American institutional modernization, Gleason argues, they fiercely resisted intellectual modernism for much of the twentieth century. The changing fortunes of this resistance provide most of the real drama and interest of this book. Especially because of the papal condemnations of "Americanism" (in Testem Benevolentiae, 1899) and "Modernism" (in Pascendi Dominici Gregis, 1907), Catholic scholars and universities took intellectual paths that led them into fierce opposition to most of the major trends of modern thought. These trends, particularly the various forms of intellectual skepticism and moral relativism that appeared to be springing up everywhere in twentieth century America, were universally seen by Catholics as utterly contrary to the truths of faith.

The major weapon in the extended battle that American Catholic intellectuals waged with modernity was the recovery of neo-Thomist philosophy, which had been promoted since the mid-nineteenth century as the distinctly Catholic way of approaching all significant intellectual questions. Gleason's history is most original and provocative in arguing that the period of the neo-Thomist domination of Catholic thought, particularly from the 1920s to the 1950s, was far more rich, complex, and productive than most present-day writers are willing to admit. While Gleason accepts the scholarly consensus that the papal condemnations of Americanism and modernism repressed scholarship and stifled some forms of creative Catholic thought, he persuasively contends that the hegemony of Catholic neothomism was by no means the disaster that many contemporary Catholics believe it was. Gleason's conservative instincts are thus most in evidence in his rather barbed criticism of the post-Vatican II Catholic liberal tendency to disparage almost every feature of American Catholic thought and life prior to the renewal:

The post-Vatican II reaction against Neoscholasticism has tended to blind recent commentators to the positive role it played in the second quarter of the twentieth century, when the Thomistic revival undergirded what contemporaries sometimes called the 'Catholic Renaissance,'

Gleason further adds:

During that era it shaped American Catholic intellectual life, including higher education. Indeed, confidence that Thomism could overcome modern error inspired Catholic educators to talk of creating a Catholic culture that would ultimately displace the flawed culture of modernity.

The heart of Gleason's book, a section called "Challenging Modernity Between the Wars," provides a deeply learned and highly engaging account of the way that the "Catholic Renaissance" worked to provide a powerful functioning ideology—a comprehensive world view—that successfully motivated and unified Catholic intellectuals and their colleges for many decades. While some bombast and narrow dogmatism inevitably appeared among the Catholic partisans in these earlier "culture wars," Gleason effectively shows that these features were far overshadowed by the extremely important positive contributions the neo-Thomist synthesis made to Catholic thought and education.

However one judges its ultimate value, Gleason contends, the historical truth is that neo-Thomist ideology provided a clear, forceful approach to central problems facing Christianity in the twentieth century. It presented a way to integrate reason and faith, so that they effectively buttressed one another. It provided religious justification for the inquiry of Catholic thinkers in every academic area, and so inspired fine works of Catholic history, literature, political theory, and so on, as well as philosophy. It provided a "philosophy of life" according to which colleges could teach their students not only what to think but how to live according to Catholic principles. It suggested a way that Christian faith could be deployed to critique and mold major features of American society and values... And finally, and perhaps most important for Gleason, it offered Catholics a "God-centered" account of divine action in the world that stirred a profound religious awakening that touched far more than human intellects.

The God-centeredness that was integral to Thomism, and the affective reactions it aroused, help us to understand how the philosophical
dimensions of the Catholic revival nourished, and was in turn nourished by, the literary, aesthetic, and even mystical dimensions of the revival. The Catholic synthesis embraced all of these facets of the movement, bringing them together as inter-related parts of one whole.

As an example of this synthesis, Gleason cites the beautiful statement of Raissa Maritain, a prominent figure in Catholic circles of the day: "To pray [and] to understand was for me one and the same thing: the one made me thirst for the other, and that thirst I felt to be constantly, and yet never, quenched." He also correctly points to Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker movement as another manifestation of the Catholic revival, especially noteworthy because it combined "the most radical kind of direct-action social Catholicism with a very traditional type of personal piety—which included, incidentally, partiality for retreats of an ultra-spiritual, almost mystical sort."

These parts of Gleason's book thus effectively evoke the strong passions that American Catholic culture sustained between the wars and immediately after, and help explain the enormously valuable confidence that neo-Thomism gave to Catholic administrators, scholars, and teachers in sustaining their enterprise. It also successfully explains some of the intensely romantic as well as rational appeal that the "Catholic synthesis" once had for many young Catholic intellectuals, inspiring them into an astonishing array of social and cultural activities.

Yet despite his generally favorable treatment of the Catholic intellectual revival, Gleason is no mere romantic nostalgist. He takes full account of the weaknesses of neo-Thomism even in its heyday, particularly its tendency to glorify all things Catholic, even when they were second-rate or worse. And the book's account of the breakup of the Catholic scholastic synthesis after World War II—at first underground and gradu-
al in the 1950s, then public and rapid in the 1960s—is as clear-eyed, precise, and unsentimental as his early explanations of its rise and dominance. It is apparent, in Gleason's telling, that this breakup was to some extent inevitable. He shows that, while the decline started with a postwar anti-Catholic backlash in American culture, it gathered momentum with internal Catholic intellectual self-criticism as well as a growing awareness of various problems and divisions with neo-Thomist philosophy and theology itself.

By the time of Vatican II, most avant-garde Catholic intellectuals were in open rebellion against neo-Thomism. Catholic colleges and academies, now intensely ambitious to achieve the "excellence" and intellectual prestige that they discerned in the leading secular universities, could not teach their students a unified worldview that most of their scholars and leaders no longer believed in. At Notre Dame, a 1953 university self-study could still talk about "the unity of knowledge," and about integrating the curriculum around a commonly accepted core of Catholic theology and philosophy. By 1961, a similar self-study reluctantly acknowledged that the departmentally committed faculty no longer accepted such ideals, and that while the "integration of knowledge" might be valid in theory and desirable as a goal for individuals, "as a principle of curricular integration it is an illusion"—the kind of statement that would have shocked earlier generations of Catholic educators. Of course most Catholic higher educational leaders, like Notre Dame's formidable Father Theodore Hesburgh, still believed firmly in the centrality of Catholic theology and the distinctive identity of the Catholic university. But with the neo-Thomist synthesis in shambles, they had a harder and harder time saying exactly what that identity meant, and especially in speaking for their increasingly fragmented and narrowly departmentalized faculties.

It is a final measure of Philip Gleason's traditionalism that he breaks off his history in the mid-1960s, with Vatican II and the "Land O'Lakes Statement" of Catholic university leaders that declared "the Catholic university must have a true autonomy in the face of authority of whatever kind. . . ." He thus refrains from examining the complex developments in Catholic higher education since the 1960s, or to offer anything like a manifesto for the problems of "Catholic identity" that he believes have become more and more acute since that time. He leaves little doubt, however, that he finds much of the present condition of Catholic higher education less than inspiring, at least in its religious dimension. A brief, final section is entitled "Accepting Modernity," but in light of his earlier interpretations it might well be called "Capitulating to Modernity." Yet Gleason is no mere reactionary, nostalgically yearning for a return to a previous age or for a revival of neo-Thomism. He also knows that in some ways the best Catholic universities are far stronger than they were in the old days. But he does insist that the task facing Catholic academics today is to forge from the philosophical and theological resources uncovered in the past half-century a vision that will provide . . . a theoretical rationale for the existence of Catholic colleges and universities as a distinctive element in American higher education.

If that is the crucial task for Catholic academics, it may be useful to emphasize that among the "theological resources uncovered in the past half-century" might be the awareness of Protestant thought as a cognate component of the "Catholic intellectual tradition." Contending With Modernity necessarily says little about the other sectors of religious higher education. But Gleason's history should remind us that modern American Protestant academics and their institutions have
been far more negligent than Catholics in thinking about how their faith relates to contemporary thought and life. And learning about Catholic universities' dilemmas from Gleason and other Catholic scholars like David O'Brien (From the Heart of the American Church, 1994), may suggest that these problems must now be addressed, at least in part, in ecumenical terms. Not least among the reasons for this is that Catholic universities now include committed Protestant scholars and students in their midst, while some of the remaining visibly Protestant universities include serious Catholics in their faculties and student bodies. (In some cases it may even be, ironically, that faculty from religious colleges' non-sponsoring denominations are among the most deeply committed to the institution's Christian mission). It is increasingly evident that church-related (or "churches-related") American higher education of all kinds must sink or swim together.

Gleason's superb history ought to remind everyone in higher education, whether Christian or not, that the genuine institutional "pluralism" that prevailed in the heyday of the Catholic synthesis served not only the Catholic Church but American society by embodying a quite different sense of what knowledge and education might be, it demonstrated that the conventional American models were by no means universal, and raised certain kinds of crucial questions that other educators tended to ignore. Our intellectual and cultural conditions are utterly different from those at the turn of the last century, when the modern revolutions in higher education first stirred Catholic Christians to vigorous action. But the needs of our church and society, as well as the demands of faithfulness, are certainly no less urgent.

Mel Piehl

Notes About Poets—

Barbara Bazyn writes from Chelsea, Iowa, where she teaches at Marshalltown Community College. She has published in The Critic and previously in The Cresset.

Heath David Havlik received a degree in Creative Writing, Poetry from University of California, Santa Cruz. Now working on a fourth screenplay, she has published poetry in Paper Salad Poetry Journal, Ostenatious Mind, and Abbey.

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Mel Piehl
The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, established in 1991, addresses two critical problems faced by church-related institutions of higher learning in the United States. First, though many church-related colleges and universities are seeking to recover or refortify a sense of purpose and identity, there has been no sustained national conversation expressly designed to renew and deepen a sense of corporate vocation among these schools. Second, settings for the formation of younger scholars who wish to pursue their vocational commitments at church-related colleges and universities scarcely exist in the United States. In brief, the hegemony of the secular research university has gradually eroded both institutional and individual senses of Christian vocation, leaving many schools and many Christian scholars in need of renewed vision and mutual support.

The Lilly Fellows Program therefore consists of two distinct but integrated programmatic initiatives. First, it has established and will steadily expand a national network of church-related institutions of higher learning and sustain among them a discussion of Christian understandings of the nature of the academic vocation. The network represents a diversity of denominational traditions, institutional types, and geographical locations. Representatives from the network institutions meet annually for a national conference. Additionally, several workshops and mini-conferences are scheduled annually on the campuses of the network institutions. A biannual newsletter reports network activities, provides listings of young scholars interested in teaching at church-related institutions, and includes reports from conferences and workshops.

Recent developments include the formation of a National Network Board, consisting of nine Network representatives. Together with the Lilly Fellows Program staff, this Board has devised several new Network projects:

- A series of Summer Seminars for College Teachers designed for junior faculty from Network Schools;

- An annual Summer Institute for Fellowship Applicants and Advanced Graduate Students, each exploring a fundamentals issue addressed by the Lilly Fellows Program;

- A series of Mentoring Programs on Network campuses intended to provide junior faculty members the opportunity to acculturate themselves into the ethos and traditions of a particular institution.

The Lilly Fellows Program is also in the process of gathering materials for three new publications: a bibliography of articles and books relevant to church-related higher education in America; a guidebook for mentoring; and a collection of essays and reviews related to Christian higher education.

Second, the Lilly Fellows Program offers young scholars in the humanities and the arts a chance to renew and deepen their sense of vocation, and to enrich their postdoctoral intellectual and spiritual life within a Christian community of learning. Each academic year Postdoctoral Fellows are appointed for two-year periods, selected from candidates interested in considering the relationship between Christianity and the academic vocation. The Fellows are prepared, through a variety of teaching experiences, through participation in a weekly colloquium, and through regular association with mentors, to seek permanent employment within church-related institutions of higher learning. A total of fifteen postdoctoral fellowships have been awarded to date as part of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts.

The Program also sponsors one Senior Fellow, selected from nominees from the network schools, to spend the year on the Valparaiso University campus, working closely with the Lilly Fellows Program. The Senior Fellow engages in research and writing, is a resource person for the Postdoctoral Fellows, participates in a year-long colloquium, and contributes to the annual conference the following fall. The first five Senior Fellows came from the following Network institutions: Calvin College, Goshen College, Saint Mary’s College, Boston College, and Berea College.

These initiatives bring focus, clarity, and energy to a critical aspect of a much larger project: the imaginative reformulation and implementation of an agenda for church-related higher learning for the twenty-first century.

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