

Valentine Mettle is an artist and graphic designer born in 1961 in Lagos, Nigeria and now living in South Africa, whose works can be seen in public places, homes, and government establishments. He combines a love for color and movement, pattern and texture to create dramatic scenes. He also enjoys working with pastel and acrylic wash on location or with the subject before him.

His triptych *From Struggle to Victory* is included in the exhibit “Between the Shadow and the Light.” In June 2013, art professors from the United States and artists from South Africa came together for the R5 seminar; they spent two weeks visiting locations around Johannesburg and Cape Town where they met with artists, activists, academics, and spiritual leaders. They also shared their art with one another and discussed what it means to work as Christians and as artists. They then returned home and produced works that are included in an exhibit that opened at Xavier University’s McKenna Museum of African American Art in New Orleans in September 2014 and will travel throughout the United States through 2018. The artistic leaders for the project are Rachel Smith, Gilken Professor of Art History at Taylor University, and Charles Nkomo, a Zimbabwean artist living and working in Johannesburg.

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Student Success in Church-Related Higher Education

Mission as Ground, Path, and Horizon for Post-Baccalaureate Student Success

Under the Rose

Purple Haze: Paul Thomas Anderson Takes On Inherent Vice

Hilarious History: James McBride's The Good Lord Bird

Meditating On the Saints: Wherever They Are

We Need to Talk: About National Conversations

"Peace in Our Time": Confronting the Challenge from Russia

Hymn Brackets

Depression

Hitchin' a Ride
whatever is **TRUE**

whatever is **NOBLE**

whatever is **RIGHT**

whatever is **PURE**

whatever is **LOVELY**

whatever is **ADMIRABLE**

if anything is excellent or praiseworthy
—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8
Success in Higher Education

Every year around this time, high school seniors make decisions about where they will go to college. Whether their choice is to enroll at a large, flagship state university or at a small liberal arts college, or at one of the many options somewhere in between, they are making a decision that is likely to have a significant impact on their lives. And as the cost of higher education continues to rise, these students and their families are anxious to know exactly what that impact will be. Questions about the value of higher education are often answered in terms of the job possibilities that a college degree opens up or the increased income earning potential of college graduates. But there are other answers to this question that, although more difficult to explain or measure, are no less important. There are many purposes of higher education beyond career advancement, among them: education for democratic citizenship, acquiring the virtues appropriate to the life of a scholar, and the love of learning for its own sake.

Christian institutions of higher education have their own unique answers to these questions. In September 2014, representatives from universities and colleges in the Lilly Network of Church-Related Colleges and Universities gathered at Xavier University in New Orleans for the Lilly Fellows Program Workshop for Senior Administrators. The topic of the workshop was “From Mission to Meaningful Lives.” Participants discussed how each school defines student success and how each schools’ theological traditions shape that definition. They also heard two plenary addresses, both of which are included in this issue.

In an address written by Ursinus College president Bobby Fong, who passed away several weeks before the workshop, and read by Valparaiso University’s Mark Schwehn, participants were asked to reflect on how they can help students come to know the world, to know themselves, and to know God. In her address, Patricia O’Connell Killen, Academic Vice President of Gonzaga University, explored how church-related schools can translate their missions into specific strategies for defining and achieving post-baccalaureate success.

The 2014 Workshop for Senior Administrators was held in conjunction with the Twenty-fourth Annual National Conference of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts. The conference’s theme, “A Future City, A New Creation: Equal on All Sides,” highlighted the meaning of the apocalyptic in the Christian tradition. The conference featured the debut of the art exhibit, “Between the Shadow and the Light,” which is the result of the R5 project. Art professors from universities in the United States joined with artists from South Africa to visit sites around Johannesburg and Cape Town, where they experienced the realities of life today in South Africa. The exhibit features artwork inspired by these experiences, and a few of these works are featured on the front and back covers of this issue.

Also included in this issue are photographs of Bethel University (St. Paul) art professor Kenneth Steinbach’s 2013 exhibit, “Under the Rose.” The exhibit centered on a full-scale model of a Predator drone, ornamented with laser-cuttings based on patterns found in Islamic architecture, medieval Christian confessionals, headscarves of Somali school girls living in Minneapolis, and camouflage patterns used by US forces in Afghanistan. For his body of artistic work, Steinbach was awarded the 2014 Arlin G. Meyer Prize in Visual Art.

The word “apocalypse” evokes images of destruction and death, but it also offers the hope of rebirth and renewal. As creation itself groans as if in childbirth, awaiting the time when it will be transformed, we each await our own transformation through God’s grace (Romans 8:22–23). At Christian colleges we cannot make this transformation happen, but we can invite our students into the process of change and offer them a community in which they might grow in their understanding of creation and discover the person who God is calling them to be within it.

—JPO
Student Success in Church-Related Higher Education

Bobby Fong

Editor's Note: After preparing the following lecture for presentation at the Lilly Fellows Program Workshop for Senior Administrators, held at Xavier University, New Orleans on September 25-26, 2014, Dr. Bobby Pong passed away several weeks before the workshop was held. The lecture was read in his honor by Mark Schwehn of Valparaiso University. It is reproduced here with the permission of Suzanne Dunham Pong, who retains the copyright.

Higher education is under fire today for not adequately preparing sufficient numbers of graduates for careers in an increasingly competitive world marketplace. The Department of Education is hard at work on a presidential scorecard for colleges and universities that would include a metric for how much an institution's graduates earn one year after commencement. Success in these instances seems defined by whether a graduate can get a job and how much she can get paid for doing it.

But such an attenuated definition of student success is shortsighted. It is unlikely that most of our graduates will work in one job for a lifetime. They may change jobs eleven times and change careers three to five times. A third of them will work at jobs that don't yet exist. Moreover, salary does not necessarily correlate to a job's social utility. School teachers and social workers and ministers don't earn the salaries of engineers and software programmers, but what they contribute to the welfare of others is no less significant. It is a travesty that other purposes of higher learning—the joy of mastering a subject for its own sake, the preparation of students for democratic citizenship—seem to carry less weight these days than career preparation.

More fundamentally, however, an exclusive emphasis on education as career preparation represents an error in logic and imaginative reach. Making a living is a necessary and laudable aspiration, but it is a means to the larger end of making a life of purpose. One works to live; one does not live to work. To make the means an end to itself suggests a confusion in values. Harvard University President Drew Faust observed that in recent years forty percent of Harvard College graduates went into the financial industry. While she had no objections to a career on Wall Street as such, she was concerned that the Harvard experience somehow was narrowing students' perceptions of what was worthy and excellent, reducing questions of vocation to an economic calculation (2008).

Faust's anxiety directs us to a deeper issue, a malady not of those who fail to get jobs after graduation but afflicting the motivations of those who do. In January 2014, New York Times columnist David Brooks opened a keynote address by recounting the final meeting of a senior seminar that he taught at Yale. On that day, he asked every student to cite what was the most transformative book each had encountered over four years in college. Unexpectedly, several students responded that they had kept so busy networking and participating in activities to burnish their resumes that they barely
had time to do assigned readings for class, much less read a book through and reflect on it. One student said he was saving favorite texts to read after graduation (Brooks 2014).

Brooks went on to lament that discourse among his students was dominated by economic concerns, where what graduates might do to gain employment took precedence over what kind of people they aspired to be, where the emphasis on outcomes led them to value what they could measure rather than trying to measure what they should value. Privileged was a utilitarian culture of external validation. Lost was the sense that college was an opportunity for students to develop an internal landscape of the self, to cultivate their souls.

Jesus Christ declared, “You cannot serve God and mammon” and “What does it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” As important as it is to prepare students for the workplace, our definition of student success must encompass the cultivation of the soul and its relation to God.

It is here that the mission of a Christian college must distinguish itself. We rightly begin with first things, and the first thing undergirding the very existence of our colleges is that God calls us into relationship, relationship with God, with others, and with the world. Indeed, if we are faithful to our obligation to assist students in soul-making and in ascertaining what love of God and neighbor means for them, our colleges would stand as counterpoints to narrowly utilitarian definitions of student success. Our colleges would be prophetic practitioners of what William Deresiewicz, in his recent book Excellent Sheep, laments that elite higher education fails to do: to nurture students “pregnant in soul” (2014, 174).

I want to discuss three dimensions of student success at the Christian college: 1) what does it mean for students to know the world, 2) what does it mean for students to know themselves, and 3) what does it mean for students to know God.

At first blush, knowledge of the world seems to be familiar ground. We seek to foster in students wide-ranging knowledge of the natural world, society, and cultures through study of the sciences, humanities, and the arts. We want students to master different ways of apprehending the world: creating knowledge in the sciences is different from creating meaning in literature; there are different methodologies for verifying insights in physics as opposed to psychology. We encourage students to study in depth in one or more subjects and possibly to do some original research in order to know how arduous it is to garner evidence in support of a hypothesis or

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What is exceptional for us is our belief that the world to be known has been created and sustained by God, and to fully explore the world we want our students to find a healthy and proper balance between knowing the Creator and knowing the Creation. In To Know as We Are Known, Parker Palmer observes: “Christians have too often spoken of ‘knowing Jesus’ in a way that tends toward one of two extremes. Either the believer ‘knows’ Jesus in a way that excuses him or her from knowing anything else (like physics or psychology or English literature), or the believer contains the ‘knowledge’ of Jesus in a compartment labeled ‘religious’ and engages in other forms of knowing as if there were no connection” (1983, 49).
Mark Noll has dealt with the first issue in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1995). College is not the Church, and pietism cannot substitute for intellectual rigor. Some Christian students may enter college seeing the world as wholly metaphor, a window through which the Creator is seen, and where knowledge is simply tools for a trade, tent-making as an occupation while one's calling is to proclaim Christ. This mindset betrays a contempt for Creation, a gnostic denigration of the material. In his more recent book *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, Noll writes, "... to confess the material reality of the incarnation is to perceive an unusual dignity in the material world itself... It is part of the deepest foundation of Christian reality... to study the world, the human structures found in the world, the human experiences of the world, and the humans who experience the world... Much that is intrinsic in Jesus Christ should drive a person to that study" (2011, 35, 41).

In turn, Parker Palmer eloquently warns against the other extreme, the objectification of knowledge, where the world is mere fact to be categorized, dissected, analyzed, manipulated, and mastered. Not only does the observer stand at a remove from the object studied, but objects are regarded in isolation from one another. Lost is the impetus toward connecting disparate phenomena. Knowledge becomes classification, a sorting of the world by disciplinary mode or hermeneutical theory. Even God is relegated to a slot in the epistemic universe. One can teach mathematics, government, literature, even spirituality without reference to God.

By counterpoint, Jesus, the incarnation of God, is both fact and metaphor, material and spirit. He declared, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." We see Jesus as God and see through Jesus to God. Writes Palmer, "In Christian tradition, truth is not a concept that 'works' but an incarnation that lives... [W]e come to know the world not simply as an objectified system of empirical objects in logical connection with each other, but as an organic body of personal relations and responses... Education of this sort means more than teaching the facts and learning the reasons so we can manipulate life toward our ends. It means being drawn into personal responsiveness and accountability to each other and the world of which we are a part" (1983, 14–5).

One instance of what such a relational approach to knowing the world entails can be found in Martha Nussbaum's discussion of "cosmopolitanism" in *Cultivating Humanity* (1997, 50–67). She emphasizes that education should be about exposing students to the unfamiliar, to the variety of the world. Students generalize from experience, and too often they assume that their own experience is normative. Education is about confounding previous experience. This ranges from gaining a more nuanced understanding of the natural world to learning to live with human difference. In particular, while the Christian faith proclaims what binds us as a common humanity, we can't forget that we cannot be human in general: we express our humanity in culturally-mediated ways. Language is a quintessential human capacity, but no one speaks "language"; one speaks English, or Chinese, or Swahili. Christians can both affirm the claims of universal humanity and uphold a commitment to cultural diversity. We must affirm equal opportunity and assess individuals according to their achievement, on the one hand, but we must also strive to give place and voice to different cultural practices, acknowledging that the very definitions of "success" and "happiness" are culturally mediated. For Nussbaum, engendering a cosmopolitan mindset means balancing how universal human capacities are expressed in culturally specific ways. For Christians, this does not nullify the declaration that all are in need of the redemptive grace of God, but it acknowledges that the Good News must be heard by each in his own language. It does not obviate the need for judgment, but it does call for sensitive, generous, and patient discernment of what constitutes truth and falsehood, right and wrong. We need to encourage our students to appreciate the occasions when they are uncomfortable with the strangeness of the world. Those very moments can be occasions for initiation into the variety of the world, where the intelligence is cultivated.
and circumstances enable the maturation of the heart.

All colleges seek to initiate students into knowledge of the world. At the Christian college, however, success is found not simply in mastery of the facts and methodology of a discipline, but in the ability to place learning in a relational context of connections and obligations to others and to God. To truly know an aspect of the world is hard work. It calls for and inculcates intellectual virtues such as tenacity, patience, honesty, and judgment. It grows out of a respect for and love of the Creation, where curiosity manifests itself in precision of thought and action borne out of passion for the object studied. But learning is also communal, and knowing means not only mastering a subject but making connections to other subjects and other lives. It calls for and inculcates moral virtues such as humility, tolerance, and civility. These are markers of student success in knowing the world, and as teachers what we are called to model.

Professors not only teach their subjects; they teach their students. Mastering the discipline, knowing an aspect of the world well, is only the beginning of pedagogy. In turn, the student is more than a receptacle for knowledge. There is a knower to be cultivated, and an integral part of mission at the Christian college is helping students to know and to love themselves.

One of the formative experiences of my undergraduate years was working through three books from InterVarsity Press known as the "Learning to Love" series: Learning to Love God, Learning to Love Yourself, Learning to Love Others. The series was founded, of course, on the two Great Commandments, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." I was accustomed to admonitions to love God and love my neighbor, but I had never confronted what it meant to love myself. Yet the second commandment makes love of self the touchstone to how to love my neighbor. Moreover, the first commandment, to love God, is premised on cultivating a heart, soul, and mind capable of inclining toward God. If one cannot truly love God or others without developing a sense of self, the Christian college has a stake in intentionally making space for soul-making, the cultivation of the inner landscape of our students’ lives.

What do I mean by soul-making? I offer a useful formulation not from a theologian but from a poet. In an 1819 letter, John Keats described the development of the soul as the interaction of three materials: "the Intelligence, the human heart (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind) and the World or Elemental space suited for the proper action of Mind and Heart on each other for the purpose of forming the Soul." The world is the staging area, what Keats calls "the vale of Soul-making." The intelligence refers to the mind, the capacity for apprehension and analysis with which humans are born. And the heart, the seat of affections and empathy, is the mediator between the mind and the world, the conduit to soul-making. He writes:

Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! [The heart] is the Minds Bible, it is the Minds experience, it is the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its iden-
tity... what was [a] Soul before it came into the world and had these provings and alterations and perfectionings?—An intelligence—without Identity—and how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart? And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances? (2002, 290–1).

As teachers, we need to guide our students in accommodating themselves to the pains and troubles of the world so as to school their hearts and engender their souls without daunting their courage and hope.

For Keats, the soul is not a “thing.” It is tantamount to the individual identity a person forges in the course of living. It is the self as formed by the narrative circumstances of one’s life. We begin as undifferentiated minds, intelligences without individual identities. But we are capable of learning, and in our ability to apprehend and create knowledge, our eyes are opened, and we can become as gods. We are schooled in the world, a world of circumstance and contingency that the mind struggles to apprehend. It is not the learnings of the mind that make the individual, however. The wisdom of the soul is knowledge of the world filtered through the medium of the heart. And it is a particular aspect of the world to which the heart must respond: the circumstances of a “World of Pains and troubles,” a “Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!”

For Keats, the cultivation of the mind alone is insufficient to create an individual identity or soul. Current tendencies to regard education as simply the accumulation of knowledge and skills for the workplace would have been greeted by him with dismay. Making a living is necessary for subsistence, but in what way does this differentiate humanity from ants in a colony or bees in a hive? Where is aspiration, where is creativity, where is beauty, where is love, where is personal meaning and purpose? Keats might ask, “How can schooling contribute to the process of individualization so that each student is afforded opportunity to develop a sense of self and its relation to the world?”

According to Keats, the provings of the heart are intimately tied to feeling and suffering the pains and troubles of the world. By contrast, for many of our students, pains and troubles, setbacks and failures, accidents and disease, discipline and sanctions are unexpected and even unwarranted deviations from the callow presumption that their lives should be a smooth progression from success to success. Suffering is regarded a consequence of injustice or pathology. If troubles come, then the world should be reformed or the individual medicated. But the Gospel of Prosperity is not the Christian Gospel. Let me be clear: we should be grateful for the philosophical, political, and social progress that has engendered a more capacious sense of common humanity and universal rights, progress engendered in part by Christians, and we have benefited in body and mind from advances in science and medicine. But there is a difference between a therapeutic outlook, one that regards pains and troubles as encumbrances to be resolved, and a more tragic and Christian view of the world that sees as part of being human the “heartache and the thousand natural shocks/ That flesh is heir to.”

In Cultivating Humanity, Martha Nussbaum posits the importance of students needing to develop empathy, the capacity to place themselves in the situation of others (1997, 85–100). For Nussbaum, this can occur in study abroad, in a residential college, in any activity that rouses a sense of human connection. Above all, it can be rooted in the narrative imagination where works of literature enlarge our sense
of life's contingencies. James Baldwin famously observed, "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me the most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive" (American Masters).

Whether through a text, an experience, or the model of a life we encounter, we learn to test alternative pathways to how we ourselves might live. Stories enable us to rehearse models for our own lives, and those stories include not only myth, history, and fiction, but the accounts of our ancestors and the narratives of our contemporaries. Indeed, as teachers, our lives are texts our students read. Our students seek ways in which others' stories can constitute strands in their own narratives.

Our identities are expressed in our life narratives, and those narratives necessarily encompass the pains and troubles of our own lives and those of the world. As Christians, we acknowledge the reality and corruption of sin. It is through a heart pierced by pain and trouble that we open ourselves to mercy for our own frailties and to compassion for those of others. In pathos we cultivate pity. As teachers, we need to guide our students in accommodating themselves to the pains and troubles of the world so as to school their hearts and engender their souls without daunting their courage and hope. We need to help them construct narratives of the self that will stand them in good stead in times of trouble.

Robert Bolt, in the preface to his play A Man for All Seasons, anticipated the concerns of my remarks a half-century ago, writing, "...the individual who tries to plot his position by reference to our society finds no fixed points, but only the vaunted absence of them, 'freedom' and 'opportunity'; freedom for what, opportunity to do what, is nowhere indicated. The only positive he is given is 'get and spend.'" By contrast, what Bolt found in Thomas More, the protagonist of his play, was "a man with an adamantine sense of his own self":

He knew where he began and left off, what area of himself he could yield to the encroachments of his enemies, and what to the encroachments of those he loved. It was a substantial area in both cases, for he had a proper sense of fear and was a busy lover... [B]ut at length he was asked to retreat from that final area where he located his self. And there this supple, humorous, unassuming, and sophisticated person set like metal, was overtaken by an absolutely primitive rigor, and could no more be budged than a cliff. (1962, xi, xii)

In the play, More declares:

If we lived in a State where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us good, and greed would make us saintly. And we'd live like animals or angels in the happy land that needs no heroes. But since in fact we see that avarice, anger, envy, pride, sloth, lust and stupidity commonly profit far beyond humility, chastity, fortitude, justice, and thought, and have to choose, to be human at all... why then perhaps we must stand fast a little—even at the risk of being heroes. (140–1)

Bolt concludes that this is "my explanation and apology for treating Thomas More, a Christian saint, as a hero of selfhood" (xiv). It is also why I have asserted that soul-making at the Christian college entails helping our students know and love themselves.

So if successful Christian college students are equipped to know the world and to know themselves in the ways I've described, what does it mean for them to know God? Our faith teaches us that God knew us before we came to know God. As Parker Palmer put it in the title of his book, which carries the subtitle A Spirituality of Education, what we seek for our students, and ourselves, is To Know as We Are Known. Knowing God in this sense is not simply knowing things about God, God as a subject
of study, but being in relationship with God, the God Who calls to each of us.

And what is the nature of this God Who calls? St. Peter exhorts Christians, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, ‘Be holy, as I am holy.’” This is more than an admonition to action; it is an invitation to being. As Moses discovered, approaching God as manifested in the burning bush meant treading on holy ground, ground sanctified by God’s presence, to encounter I AM WHO I AM. God is holy, that is, self-sufficient and complete in righteousness. We are called to wholeness and integrity, mirroring the holiness bequeathed us by grace through Jesus Christ. That grace arose from the love of God for the whole world. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Because the God Who is holy is also the God Who is love, because we are to be holy as God is holy and to love as God loves us, we are called to be God’s holiness and love in the world.

At the heart of our endeavors is to assist our students in understanding how each might live out this calling. One of the pleasures of being a college president is inviting speakers to address students at commencement. In 2002, Archbishop Desmond Tutu told this story at the end of his remarks at Butler University:

A farmer stands at sunset looking out over fields of grain when a traveler comes along and joins him. The traveler observes, “It’s wonderful what you and God have done with these fields!” The farmer answers, “You should have seen these fields when God had them to Himself!”

The Archbishop then declared, “God is in the world, but we are God’s Hands.” Proceeding to point at various ones of the graduates, Desmond asked, “So how are you going to be God’s Hand? And you? And you? And you?”

It is natural for students to think that answering God’s call for them entails decid-
circumstances. As teachers and administrators, you and I have encountered students who want to make lives in the academy as we have done. But even for the most intellectually promising, “many are called, but few are chosen.” Fourteen of us who received our doctorates in English at UCLA, one of the top dozen English literature programs in the country, went on the job market in 1977 and 1978. Two of us got tenure-track jobs. Our students only see those on the faculty who survived such odds. And the current situation in higher education, with its increasing reliance on contingent part-time adjuncts, bids well to be even grimmer. So in what way has a philosopher, art historian, or teacher forfeited her calling if she can’t get a job? Or do we err in presuming that a life of purpose can only be realized through one’s occupation? Is a person any less called by God because circumstances prevent him from working in a particular field?

There are two senses in which we may be called. The first is transformative, where one finds life directed to a new purpose after encountering God. The second is a sense of being directed by God at a particular time and place to do something specific. For the Patriarch Abraham, the transformative call was to leave the city of Ur in response to God’s promise to give him a new land whence God would make a new nation. One instance of a specific call to Abraham was the directive to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him. For the Apostle Paul, the revelation on the Damascus road turned his understanding, his values, and his life upside down. The call to cross over to Macedonia to preach was a specific call.

Distinguishing between transformative and specific calls is crucial. The two types of calling meld into each other, but specific calls, each having to do with a given time, place, and circumstance, are nestled under the larger transformative call that determines the shape and heft of one’s life. The confusion surrounding the word “vocation” stems from the fact that some people find a single lifelong work growing out of a transformative call, while others find that in different stages in their lives, they pursue different vocations that nonetheless have a common root in a transformative call that defines, at heart, who they are.

One of the people who deeply influenced my walk with God was my junior high youth group sponsor. Larry worked as a truck driver, a house painter, and a laborer to support himself and his family, but his ministry was fostering the young people of our church into relationship with Jesus Christ. He was indefatigable in providing transportation in his station wagon, in leading Bible studies and devotions, and in encouraging generations of Chinese Bible Church teenagers in the arts of leading the youth group. I discoverd I had the gift of administration because of him. Larry no doubt experienced many specific calls in his work life and marriage, but he divined that the essence of a transformative call was less about what he was called to do than the kind of person he was to be. He was God’s man, and in living out that essential fealty he found specific ways to be God’s Hand in the world.

In the end, knowing God means being transformed by our relationship with God. St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” And what are the characteristics of that transformed mind? St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think on these things.”

The Christian college should serve as a place where students can affirm their

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transformational calls and discern the specific calls that take them as God's Hands into the world. Discernment of calling and vocation naturally occurs in a community of supporters and mentors. Such communities facilitate discernment, and they are well-nigh indispensable for the daily living out of one's vocation. A circle of loving friends provides strength for living, the perseverance to pursue one's calling. Abraham was surrounded by family; Paul by a circle of companions. The consolation of calling is that we are not required to go it alone.

At the very least, our students can learn about the world, they can learn about themselves, and they can learn about God. They can be equipped in knowledge and skill to make a living.

But the essence of calling is less about what one is called to do than the kind of person one is to be. Christians should be able to mirror the God Who knows them by growing in holiness and love, and the college should nurture such growth. At the faculty convocation marking the beginning of this academic year, Whitworth University Provost Caroline Simon exhorted her colleagues, “To fulfill our mission we will need to help our students grow in more than intellectual virtue. We will need to help them grow in moral and spiritual virtues. We will need to help them develop more compassion and more courage and more justice and more hope and more generosity, more joy and faith and love, than they have when they begin their... education.”

Not all of our students, however, will come to know God in this way. Nor will all know the world and those who dwell in it as a generative web of connections and obligations. Nor will all come to know and love themselves. What does it mean to succeed with these students?

First, we worship a Savior Who drew others to Him by invitation, not coercion. As we invite students to drink at the font of knowledge, Jesus invited the Samaritan woman to ask Him for living water. By the same token, both Jesus and the woman needed a drink from the water of Jacob's well. Both needed the water of this world. As we aspire to help our students grow in grace, let us not despise their ability to grow in knowledge, no matter how partial and incomplete. At the very least, they can learn about the world, they can learn about themselves, and they can learn about God. They can be equipped in knowledge and skill to make a living.

Second, student success is not simply a matter of what happens in college but what happens after. We encounter our students at one point in their lives. God may be waiting down the dusty Damascus road. Jonah evaded God's call to go to Nineveh, running away to Joppa and booking passage to Tarshish, but he encountered God on the stormy sea.

Our students seek a trajectory to their lives, a sense of destiny. In making sense of their lives, they inevitably tailor a life narrative in which overarching themes tease out the meaning of why and how they have lived. In that narrative, God may be lurking in the next chapter.

Third and finally, our students have our prayers, and prayers of a specific type. One of my favorite Gospel stories is that of the paralyzed man whose friends brought him on his mat to be healed by Jesus. Unable to enter the house because of the crowd, they climbed to the roof, broke open a hole, and let the man down. Then Scripture records, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven... I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” What is noteworthy to me about the story, however, is that the faith prompting Jesus to forgive and heal is not the faith of the man but of his friends.

This is a recurrent pattern in the Gospels: Jairus's daughter is not healed because of her faith—she is dead—but because her father believes. The centurion's servant is not healed
because of his faith but because of his master’s faith. The Gentile woman’s daughter is not healed because of her faith but because her mother believes.

As teachers we help our students envision what lives they might lead. We believe in their possibilities, and not seldom we believe in them when they cannot believe in themselves. At a Christian college, it is no great leap in our prayers of petition to believe for our students as well as to believe in them, to have faith that they may know God as God knows them.

Parker Palmer writes:

We cannot settle for pious prayer as a preface to conventional education. Instead, we must allow the power of love to transform the very knowledge we teach, the very methods we use to teach and learn it... I am calling for a mode of knowing and educating that is prayerful through and through. What do I mean by prayer? I mean the practice of relatedness.

On the one side, prayer is our capacity to enter into that vast community of life in which self and other, human and nonhuman, visible and invisible, are intricately intertwined. While my senses discriminate and my mind dissects, my prayer acknowledges and recreates the unity of life.... I reach for relationship, allow myself to feel the tuggings of mutuality and accountability, take my place in community by knowing the transcendent center that connects it all.

On the other side, prayer means opening myself to the fact that as I reach out for that connecting center, the center is reaching for me... In prayer, I not only address the love at the core of all things... I begin to realize that I not only know but am known. (1983, 10-11)

At the time of his passing on September 8, 2014, Bobby Fong was president of Ursinus College. From 2001-2011, he served as president of Butler University. Dr. Fong was past chair of the Board of the Association of American Colleges and Universities and served on the Presidents’ Council of the Association of Governing Boards and on the boards of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education, and the Lingnan University Foundation.

Works Cited


INCLEMENT SONNET

Tell me snow is falling on the willows now, fat, full, unhurried, for our bald neighbor-boy sleeps, his dark body beneath a blanket knit brilliantly blue, his body wilted with neuroblastoma. Here on the couch, Emma holds his head while I wonder at what's sent from above, what we'd believe drifts down during these months of ice, so far north we need Easter to end winter for us—not Eostre, Teutonic myth, vernal equinox; not eggs, red-iris bunnies, beribboned sweets. Tell me what comes next: tires spinning, marrow aspirating, gladiolus whispering when, when, Wednesday ashing our brows and, for each, some coruscating stretch, most Fridays not so good after all. Last week he told his mum, I get a new body if I go to heaven. Tell me it's coming soon, Pascha Sunday, that, as they lift, our arms will ache, will awaken, with all we've lost.

Susanna Childress
Mission as Ground, Path, and Horizon for Post-Baccalaureate Student Success

Patricia O’Connell Killen

How can the missions of church-related universities and colleges help graduates of these schools live meaningful lives in their post-baccalaureate years? A mission should serve both as the source of a theologically rich and practically relevant understanding of post-baccalaureate success, and also as the organizing principle for, and source of institutional practices that, cumulatively, awaken and cultivate in students more robust capacities for that success. When it comes to the question of the relationship of mission to post-baccalaureate success, a promising way forward emerges when we consider that mission has multiple functions. Mission is the ground, the path, and the horizon for all that we do in our institutions, including how we engage students around their aspirations for life and work after they leave us.

Appropriate and effective strategies for working with our students on post-baccalaureate success should flow from institutional mission and be grounded in the fundamental theological vision that undergirds mission. We give flesh to that vision through concrete educational and formational activities. As faith-based, faith-informed, and faith-saturated institutions, we seek to compose an educational and formational environment for our students that recognizes, honors, and discloses to them as yet unrecognized dimensions of their deepest aspirations and that equips them to creatively and fearlessly connect those aspirations to the world of work and life after graduation. When we do this well, we increase the odds that our colleges will animate the choices that each graduate makes about life and career, animate them in a direction that aligns more robustly to the visions of flourishing life contained in our mission statements.

This work has long been part of mission-based higher education. Doing it has become particularly challenging now, as the dominant cultural conversation regarding post-baccalaureate success, in its baldest form, reduces the question to whether a student gets a job in his or her field with a desirable entry-level salary for that position. If this formulation of the question prevails, we are all in trouble. Let me be clear: finding employment is important, but the mission of church-related higher education is far more than workforce training.

What is heartbreaking about “success equals job and good entry-level salary” is its distorted and diminished view of the human person. It is based on an inadequate anthropology that also is dangerous for its corrosive effect on capacities for communal life, which, theologically, flow from the Trinity. Yet, as people of grace, I believe we do best to see the challenge we face in society’s dominant conceptualization of post-baccalaureate success as an invitation. It is an invitation to return to our mission as a source of strategies that effectively link mission to graduates’ success, and, in the process, both remain better aligned with our respective institutional missions and develop language to articulate to the larger world, in terms it can understand, the value proposition for our colleges and universities. What I am proposing is a tack suggested by the late Avery Cardinal Dulles, namely, that when consensus is thin, we return to the originating stories and begin there (Dulles 1983).
Five Strategies for Advancing Mission-Based, Post-Baccalaureate Success

I want to propose five strategies for advancing mission-based, post-baccalaureate success. Each of these has a theological and pragmatic rationale. Each, I believe, can contribute to deepening students' capacities for critical and creative reflection, to extending their relationships into communities of all kinds, and to raising the altitude of their imaginations about their futures in mission-inspired ways. With each of them, I believe we need to start from the place of desire. "We search for a self to be. We search for other selves to love. We search for work to do," as Frederick Buechner put it in the first volume of his spiritual autobiography (Buechner 1982, 58). It is within the nexus of these three desires that we find the touchpoints to work with our students. In describing these strategies, I will provide examples from two institutions, Pacific Lutheran University, where I was for two decades, and Gonzaga University, where I serve now.

One: Provide More Opportunities to Pause and Ponder

I might also have called this first one, "Claiming the Essential Human Work of Growing Human Beings." All of our institutions, in one way or another, assert a connection between the liberal arts education that we include in our core curricula and the development of mature human beings. An essential characteristic of a mature, liberally-educated person is the capacity to slow down the leap from experience or event to judgment or interpretation, so that one can look again at the experience or event, and at the way one has made meaning of it. In that slow motion looking in two directions, less than adequate meaning can be discerned and richer, truer meanings begin to develop. This is the heart of reflection: slowing down that leap. And reflection is what occurs when we pause and ponder (Killen and de Beer 1994). Please note, I am not proposing simply "talking about" a particular topic. I am proposing thoughtful reflection.

Some opportunities for reflection need to focus explicitly on students' career and life aspirations. This is a fruitful beginning point for reflection because it is the place where we have the best chance of helping them to surface, reflect on, and potentially revise understandings of success that are inadequate. Inadequate understandings may fall short in terms of the theological anthropology and understanding of creation embedded in our mission statements, or they may be seen as so in light of each student's deepest desires. From such reflection students may also find their aspirations confirmed, revised, or deepened.

An essential characteristic of a mature, liberally-educated person is the capacity to slow down the leap from experience or event to judgment or interpretation.

The ability to build the bridge from the desire the students know and name to larger meanings is essential to our educational project. The psychologist William Perry taught a course at Harvard for first-year students on how to improve their reading. The students read the course title as "learning to read faster." Knowing that the students understood "improve" as "speed up," Perry designed the course so that some time at the beginning of each session was spent on exercises to increase reading rate. But from the beginning, and increasingly as the course progressed, he spent more time on exercises designed to help student engage the material: to summarize what they had read, to articulate key points, to ask questions of the text, to anticipate what was coming next, to sketch the structure of the argument. He included what the students understood their desire to be—to read faster—even as he knew that a strategy of dis-engaged but "fast" reading would not make them successful at Harvard. He also included what he knew was the deeper meaning of that desire as well as what they actually needed—reading in a more engaged manner. By doing so, Perry honored, responded to, and deepened his students' aspirations in a way that
also built a bridge toward their success at Harvard (Kegan 1998, 277–282). We need to take the same approach in working with our students on their ideas about success.

Some of the reflection for which I am calling occurs serendipitously in interaction between students and their teachers and advisers, some in student-to-student interaction, some in university ministry services, and some in solitary moments. But in a culture hell-bent on frenetic activity and constant connection, we can ill afford to rely on serendipity to assure reflective occasions for our students. And the stakes around the practice of pause are high. Without pause our students cannot learn to extend hospitality to themselves, a capacity fundamental to their ability to extend hospitality to others. I would argue that the practice of pausing and pondering is itself fundamental to students’ developing the capacity for empathy, a capacity without which they cannot be persons of conscience.

The practice of pausing and pondering is itself fundamental to students’ developing the capacity for empathy, a capacity without which they cannot be persons of conscience.

At Pacific Lutheran University we made this type of reflection a centerpiece of our PTEV program, “Wild Hope.” We offered training workshops on facilitating reflection to faculty and to student development staff. The student development staff, especially those in student activities, discovered as a side benefit of practicing reflection that it not only helped them to prioritize their own work better, it also allowed them to move far more rapidly and effectively from transactional to genuinely formational interactions with students. We set up six-week and nine-month reflection groups for students returning from study abroad in order to help them process their experiences, relate them to their educational and career aspirations, and to facilitate their re-entry into the campus. We incorporated far more reflection into service learning courses. We inserted carefully structured reflective activities into the first-year experience. We sponsored yearlong faculty seminars on vocation, intellectual life, and mission. And, after its first run at PLU’s annual Alumni Homecoming Weekend, a “meant to live” event, at which invited alums participated on a panel shared their reflections on mission in their lives since graduation, became a standing-room only event.

At my current institution, Gonzaga, University Ministry recently implemented retreats for juniors and seniors focused on work/career choices. In a collaborative project between academics and student development, we are implementing the first of a four-year “ZagExperience” program that, we believe, will increase both opportunities to learn information about and opportunities for reflection on education, life, and work. And, this fall, I was able to assign a senior faculty member who is skilled as a teacher and spiritual director to be a “Senior Faculty Adviser for Life/Career/Faith Reflection.” The assignment is my direct response to a student government survey on advising that identified a lack of opportunity to reflect on the relationship among education, life, career, and faith. This senior faculty member facilitates reflection with students in one-on-one and group formats, collaborating with Career Services, Academic Advising, and the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.
"We had the experience but we missed the meaning," wrote T. S. Eliot (1943), and his line might well be the motto of our time. If we are true to our institutional missions, this should not be the motto of our graduates. Our alums should be distinguished by their habits of reflection, habits Sharon Daloz Parks has described eloquently as contemplative, connected thinking (Parks 2011, 188–192).

We need to consider, however, whether those of us who lead and work at church-related institutions have become a bit complacent about the invitation to reflection that, I would argue, is at the heart of any theological vision. It is easy to share the theological answers too quickly, before we have heard the questions the students are bringing to us and while they are still acquiring a discriminating feel for the idiom in which they express them.

It is no small irony that today's movements in higher education, some of them avowedly secular, seek to develop what long have been dimensions of a Christian approach to life and learning. One of the fastest growing is the contemplative pedagogy movement (see Barbezat and Bush 2014). Developed out of the Association for Contemplative Mind in Society, this movement incorporates reflective and contemplative practices into courses in order to enhance students' capacity to negotiate the inner distress that accompanies confronting difficult, seemingly intractable challenges. Without that ability, students cannot engage those challenges and questions as whole human beings, and so are far less likely to be able to generate imaginative and appropriate solutions. Another educational movement emphasizes the importance of students learning metacognition—taking possession of their own learning process—asking not just "what have I learned," but "how have I learned this" and "what difference does it make." I believe we should aim for our institutions to be rife with reflective opportunities. We also need to help more of our faculty and staff improve their abilities to facilitate reflection. Our institutions will do their work more effectively when faculty discern connections among newer approaches to teaching and learning, the reflective practices we are asking them to incorporate into their work with students, and the theological vision that undergirds the entire project of our institutions.

Two: Foster Networks of Conversation and Connection

This second strategy also could be called "Leveraging the Communion of Saints." At my institution, and I suspect at yours, there is a sense of the value of community and a desire to continue experiencing community that runs deep in students and alums. Whether they put it into words or not, they experience something of the wholeness of the theological vision that inspires our institutions in how they have been and are treated while with us.

What I doubt we have done sufficiently is to reflect theologically on the meaning of that desire and to connect it explicitly to the deep theological conviction in our mission statement that whatever counts as salvation or the kingdom of God, it is at a fundamental level communal. In The Sacred Journey, theologian and writer Frederick Buechner, during his meditation on the meaning of the communion of saints, tells us that we should remember: "all the foolish ones and wise ones, the shy ones and overbearing ones, the broken ones and whole ones, the despots and tosspots and crackpots of our lives who, one way or another, have been our particular fathers and mothers and saints, and whom we love without knowing we loved them and by whom we were helped to whatever little we may have, or ever hope to have, of some kind of seedy sainthood of our own" (Buechner 1982, 74). Fostering networks expands that community. Three examples:

Each year GAMP (Gonzaga Alumni Mentoring Program) teams with Career Services and Student Development to put on a Seattle, a Portland, and a San Francisco Trek. These are major undertakings with nearly two hundred undergraduates and a bevy of faculty and staff traveling to these cities to meet with alums who are potential contacts, mentors, and/or employers in the area. Alums introduce students to their companies. The alums, some of them regents and trustees, love the treks. Helping with a trek is one of the first ways that a very new graduate with a job wants to give back to the university.
The treks are a concrete example of an activity focused directly on post-baccalaureate success. The students see clearly that a trek can help with career goals. But the alums value them equally, if not more than the students. Why? The alums are provided the opportunity to exercise hospitality, to welcome and assist students. They want to mentor them. In preparing for treks, the alums have the opportunity to reflect on their own lives post-graduation and on the connection of their post-graduation experience to their time at Gonzaga. The alums share their struggles, achievements, insights, and perspectives.

We need to animate these networks, to practice pointing toward the explicit connections among students’ studies and their experiences in them.

The networks that the treks build across age cohorts and time in career matter, and not just for smoothing transition from student to worker, or from position to position within or across professions or industries. The networks matter because they sustain, exhibit, and express a community of shared experience, an experience shaped by the mission of Gonzaga University. While there is much we could do to unpack the theological meaning of that experience, the vitality of it indicates health in an important dimension of institutional mission.

A second important network for strengthening the connection between mission and post-baccalaureate success is global. At Gonzaga our global students network is comprised of international students who are studying on our campus and domestic students who have studied abroad. We identify these students as global; they even receive special cords for commencement. International alumni also are becoming part of this network. Though less mature than the GAMP treks, the global network has comparable potential directly to benefit our students as they pursue life after Gonzaga. The global network also has significant potential to deepen and mature students’ understanding of community and responsibility on a global scale.

A third significant network is that of students, agencies, and community partners who come together through our service programs and service-learning courses. As with the global network, the strengthening of an ongoing network of conversation and connection built around the challenges and achievements of our students and Spokane-area residents with whom they partner in confronting poverty, abuse, environmental degradation, and more, deepens and matures students’ experience of community, challenges simplistic ideas about society, and has the promise of raising the horizons of their imaginations when considering the future. This network, like the global network, increases the odds that students will be grasped by big questions and graduate with the capacities for empathy and moral reflection that render them capable of recognizing and feeling obligated by the needs of those in the human family who do not have the resources and opportunities they have had.

These networks exist at all institutions, but the networks, if left discrete and disconnected in our thinking and in the thinking of our students, do not fully express or move students toward fulfillment of our mission. We need to animate them, to practice pointing toward the explicit connections among students’ studies and their experiences in these networks, and point to the connections between that and our mission.

There is much more that we could, and should, be doing with these networks—treks, global experience, and community engagement—in terms of providing opportunity for explicitly theological reflection that involves students, alums, and community partners. These networks are potent opportunities for the type of shared reflection on the use of our gifts in a world rife with poverty and injustice for which the former Father General of the Society of Jesus, Peter Hans Kolvenbach called in his 2000 address at Santa Clara University: “The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become... and the adult Christian responsibility they will exercise in [the] future toward their neighbor and their world”
We need to develop theologically informed, pastorally and pedagogically artful opportunities for reflection in the networks.

Three: Seed Curricular and Co-Curricular Programs that Stretch Students, Cross Boundaries, Awaken Relish for Challenge, and Teach Artful Risk Taking

Each of our institutions has a set of curricular and co-curricular programs through which we seek to provide a quality education to our students. Do we, however, have enough that cross boundaries of disciplines and of town and gown? That encourage our students to imagine more grandly? To step out and take risks? The missions of all our institutions, I believe, give us the permission, even the mandate, to engage the issues of our time and to imagine the future without fear and, in fact, to do so with a good bit of relish for challenge. And yet, I notice at church-related institutions, including my own, that we are in a time when some faculty and staff are more oriented toward preserving what has been than toward asking where faith and institutional mission are calling us into the future. This affects the array and tenor of our curricular and co-curricular programs. At least at my institution, I have been reflecting on whether the academic programs are appropriately stretching students, crossing boundaries, initiating students into the pleasure of working on real challenges, and mentoring risk taking robustly enough.

We have two programs at Gonzaga that are explicitly oriented this way, especially toward learning to take risks. The first is our Hogan Entrepreneurial Leadership Program. This program, which includes extensive involvement by alums and benefactors, mentors a set of students to develop the skills to be successful entrepreneurs. In the Hogan program, students from across disciplines come together to create and even launch entrepreneurial ventures. Many of them are interested in social entrepreneurship, doing good while earning a living. The second example is Gonzaga’s Comprehensive Leadership Program (CLP). Not unlike Hogan, it supports students who seek to develop the understanding, skills, and imagination to move into the future with the capacity and confidence to take some risks.

Another program that is successful at initiating students into the pleasure of engaging real challenges is student/faculty research, sometimes conducted with or on behalf of industry partners. (I could have included this activity as another type of network as well.) The Council on Undergraduate Research and other organizations are promoting student research, which also has been identified as a “high impact practice” (Kuh 2008). The meaning of “high impact” should be expanded significantly to help students develop the connection between the life of the mind they are living out through their research and our respective institutional missions.

Graduates of both Hogan and CLP do extremely well post-graduation. Students who do research at Gonzaga also are doing very well in being placed in either industry or graduate programs. We need to spend more time finding out why and considering how to infuse dimensions of the answer into other academic programs. And we need to tell our students and parents how and why these programs are excellent preparation for post-baccalaureate success.

Four: Prize Artful Pedagogy

In July 2014, Fr. William Ryan, SJ, a mentor of mine when I was an undergraduate, died. What stands out most to me now about Bill is that he treated his students as if we were capable of thought, whether he believed it or not. I opened my comments at his funeral with these words: “Powerful teachers and mentors are gifts. They come into our lives through no accomplishment or merit on our part. With wisdom and insight, they build a bridge from our deepest aspirations—aspirations we may not even be able to put into words—to the questions and conversations of their fields, the world of expertise. Through art, skill, and capaciousness of heart, teachers awaken, inspire, and challenge” (Killen 2014).

It is in the area of pedagogy—primarily pedagogy in the classroom but also in ancillary programs—where our institutions have the best long-term chance to influence our students’
post-baccalaureate success. Virtually all church-related institutions have a liberal arts core. Virtually all see as central their mission of helping students to develop particular habits of thought: to think clearly and carefully, accounting for multiple dimensions of a problem or issue; to probe with questions that are incisive and that can extend a line of thought; to construct cogent critique saturated with the best practices of scholarly charity; to make connections across courses, fields, dimensions of their lives, and from their lives to larger challenges and opportunities of our time; to imagine alternatives; to innovate; to take account of moral factors in a situation; to speak and write and interact ethically. If the AAC&U LEAP publications are to be believed, employers want to hire students with the capacities for thought that we say we cultivate.

There is even more, however, that we need to encourage our faculty, along with student development staff, to be cultivating in our students today. For post-baccalaureate success, we will do well to help students develop a malleable and eschew a fixed view of talent (Dweck 2004). We can ill afford more debacles like Enron. We want to help students develop resilience, that capacity to hold steady and to remain oriented to a larger purpose or vision, even when the going is rough. We want them, to the extent possible, to live free of fear. And for the time they are with us, we want to support them to learn to endure frustration, negotiate conflict, and get to the other side of disillusionment with a capacity to hope, all part of becoming adults (Killen 1997, 114–16).

This is no small order that I am laying out. It is, however, I believe, what our missions call us to do by way of our pedagogy. At church-related institutions, more than any other, faculty should be focused on, supported around, and rewarded for the quality of their pedagogy, broadly, richly, fully understood. To make this possible entails sustained effort to provide opportunities for faculty to become familiar with institutional mission and its sources within a particular tradition's theological vision. It entails aligning standards for evaluation with our mission. It entails an articulation of how artful teaching, significant intellectual engagement in one's field, advising, and academic citizenship, carried out at a pace appropriate for the institution, do cohere and feed vital sustainable lives. The fear that such lives are not possible is debilitating to faculty. It feeds a mentality of scarcity, a sense that any investment in the institution fundamentally exhausts. The corrosive effect on our institutions is costly in terms of mission fulfillment as pain and fear make faculty and staff hesitant to invest (see Robison 2014, 1–20). A first step in responding to and correcting faculty fear is a willingness to structure the faculty employment, review, tenure, promotion, and reward processes with what we say we value.

At Gonzaga, our mission statement now begins: “Gonzaga University is an exemplary learning community that educates students for lives of leadership and service for the common good. In keeping with its Catholic, Jesuit, and humanistic heritage and identity, Gonzaga models and expects excellence in academic and professional pursuits and intentionally develops the whole person—intellectually, spiritually, physically, and emotionally” (Gonzaga University 2013). The opening sentences imply an anthropology or view of the human person, an understanding of the community of creation, and an inherent connection among the true, the good, and the beautiful. As well, it implies an understanding of human existence, in proper Ignatian fashion, as an ongoing process of creation.

What our universities offer (perhaps better than other institutions can), once our students leave us, is the opportunity to connect the life of the mind to everything else that they love and care about, and to the world around them. This is why we need to describe powerfully for our students and ourselves, recognize gladly in our midst, and...
undertake an ongoing discipline of improving pedagogy. Doing so requires an act of faithful trust in the truth of our mission and in our own knowledge about what works well in higher education. It also requires an openness to learning more about how students learn and how we can compose richer learning environments for them, environments that increase the odds of their “getting it” and decrease the odds of failure. (And yes, this includes a willingness to engage the question of educational technology with an open mind.) We need a pedagogy that puts students at the center, and by so doing suggests the ways to build the bridge for our students into the expertise of our fields. This requires a community of reflective, artful teachers who take the time to converse with each other, across disciplines, about the moves they make in the classroom or lab or studio or community-based learning setting, and through that conversation to implement incremental changes that will make them even more artful teachers.

In all their teaching, artful faculty cultivate the apt gap between what students already know and what we would like them to know, between how they think and the greater connections they could be making in their thinking, between the questions they are asking and more incisive questions, between what they are learning and their own narratives of dream, desire, purpose, and calling. As Harvard educational psychologist Robert Kegan put it in his In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life, these faculty colleagues know how to be the “right companions for our students’ journeys.”

We need most, if not all, of our faculty colleagues to be the right companions for our students. The single most powerful engine to empower faculties in this way is to encourage and support faculty learning communities that explore concrete teaching practice. Such learning communities, when well facilitated, animate discussion among faculty about their teaching and student learning throughout the entire university.

Five: Get Our Story Straight and Stick With It

We become what we are addressed, both that which we address ourselves as being, and that which others address us as being. This is true for organizations as well, for we are telling each other stories about ourselves as individuals and as an institution all the time. So what is the narrative we are telling ourselves about mission and post-baccalaureate success? There are dimensions to a faithful narrative that will be present regardless of how an institution's mission statement is written. The narrative includes something about what it means to be a person and how a person continues to be created through her “desires, impulses, dreams, projects, relationships, and circumstances of life,” to borrow again from the Ignatian tradition, and in that process connects deeply and powerfully to the world, experiencing fully the wonder and suffering that go with being alive (Ignatius of Loyola, “Contemplation to Learn to Love Like God,” Spiritual Exercises). The narrative includes something about the possibility and joy of living with a greater range of freedom and imagination because Christ has set us free. The narrative includes something about the value of the educational experience our institutions provide. It needs to make quite explicit the connections between that education and what the world needs now, whether one intends to be in high finance, social service, or the arts. Here the narrative needs to be quite specific; this is what student-learning outcomes are about. The narrative needs to place our institutions and what we are about more squarely in the larger work of our time. This includes that we educate against the horizon of God’s desire for the world to flourish and not founder. Depending on our institutional cultures, traditions, and potential students, we may employ explicitly theological language generously or sparingly. Finally, however, somewhere along a student’s time with us, they need to hear the mission from us.

Yes, we need to tell, to narrate. Equally if not more so, we need to show more than we tell. Show how each part of the experience students have with us fits together with the other parts. Show how the institutional commitments, decisions, choices, and covenants that we have with each other—faculty, staff, administrators—allow us to be a place where students develop a deeper sense of what it means to be a "successful" person. Tell and show in such a way that students are grasped by the shared project
of the kingdom of God in which we participate through our educational mission.

It is no small thing to narrate this story now, with all the challenges that we face in the landscape of higher education today. But doing so, I believe, will orient our institutions more clearly and contribute to our helping students understand the connection between what they think they want and what they actually want; between what they imagine they will get from us and what we are asking of them; between what they aspire to and what we will offer them in response to their deepest aspirations, aspirations they are only coming to comprehend when they arrive at our doors.

Conclusion

"If real success is to attend the effort to bring a person to a definite position," Søren Kierkegaard wrote in his journal in 1854, "one must first of all take pains to find where [that person] is and begin there.... In order to help another effectively I must understand what [that person] understands. If I do not know that, my greater understanding will be of no help.... Instruction begins when you put yourself in [another's] place so that you may understand what [they] understand and in the way [they] understand it" (Dru 1959; I have altered the language to make it inclusive).

Kierkegaard's words are, I believe, apt for thinking both theologically and strategically about how we define student success in terms of our missions and how we compose our institutions as learning and mentoring environments so that our graduates have better odds of realizing that fuller, faith-informed vision of success in life and work. He reminds us that no small part of our project, given our call to leadership in our institutions at this time in history, is to wrestle with making explicit and intelligible to ourselves, to our faculty, staff, and benefactors, to our students and their parents, and to the larger society, the deep connection between our institutional missions and post-baccalaureate success. As Bobby Fong has articulated so eloquently, our graduates should be different: in how they embrace and know the world; in how they know themselves; and in how they know God. That difference should bear fruit in the maturing of their own aspirations for the future, in their understanding of the world they are entering, and in their embrace of the journey of love and loss, suffering and wonder, creativity and diminishment, community and solitude that are the lot of every human being. The vision of what we want our graduates to become is worthy. How we compose our institutions to invite the growth and transformation through education and formation that flow toward that difference is the art and skill of leading in alignment with mission. The stakes are high in the choices we make about personnel, programs, structure, and culture at our institutions. To lead in alignment with mission compels us to challenge and inspire faculty and staff to grow and change. Sometimes we must challenge them to change in ways and at a pace not always welcome, in ways not always understood, and variously a source of satisfaction, discomfort, exhilaration, anger, excitement, and sometimes fear.

For our graduates to be successful in ways that align with our best vision of our institutions and their possibilities, we must be willing to speak the theology that grounds our mission. We must do our work as administrators and leaders with the habits and practices of deliberation and decision-making that are congruent with that theology. In the day-in and day-out of our work, in word and in action, we are called to communicate five basic truths: 1) because of what God has worked in Jesus, in loving unto death there is safety; 2) that safety frees us to care enough about our educational project to be willing to learn and grow across the career span, and to care enough about our students to challenge them to become their best selves; 3) that what we do is participation in meaningful work that is part of the ongoing process of creation; 4) that this educational work we embrace can nourish and not simply exhaust; and, 5) that when we narrate our own stories, we are called into joy.

Patricia O'Connell Killen is Academic Vice President and Professor of Religious Studies at Gonzaga University.
Works Cited


BONHOEFFER, 1939

"Do your best to come before winter (2 Tim 4:21)—it is not a misuse of Scripture if I let that be said to me."

do your best to come to me before winter

it cannot wait
(by which i mean you cannot wait
or perhaps i cannot wait)

in December waves will surge
from beneath the sea
and ships be lost in cold waters

hard ground will offer no forage
and animals will patrol the forest
in packs

trains will not be available

so come to me before the snowfall
(by which i mean i will need you then)
when all turns to ice

already i see them frozen in place
glazed sculptures who have mouths
but cannot speak

no blood runs through them

you will need to share the trials
of the people (if you want to put it that way
i understand)

but I will need you to keep me warm
to bring forth sounds from my throat
that cry words made flesh

so please
come to me before winter
(by which i mean come now)

Karl Plank
Under the Rose
Kenneth Steinbach

Winner of the 2014 Arlin G. Meyer Prize in Visual Art

On September 26, 2014, at its twenty-fourth annual National Conference at Xavier University of Louisiana, the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts presented the 2014 Arlin G. Meyer Prize in Visual Art to Kenneth Steinbach, Professor of Art at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, for a body of work featuring Under the Rose.

The jurors for the prize admired the range of issues Steinbach engages, as well as the breadth of materials and forms with which he works. One juror wrote: "In Under the Rose, Steinbach takes on a potentially polarizing subject but through his highly selective use of physical materials with resonant histories, he shapes those materials into subtle yet insistently present forms that alchemize the subject into an altogether different entity; we see the complexity of the situation, and this keeps us from making easy judgments."

Another juror noted: "Under the Rose is visually arresting, and the delicacy and precision of its facture contrasts with the subject in a provocative way." Jurors also expressed admiration for the way Steinbach's work gives material form to the abstract goal of striving to live an ethical life, or rather, how his forms bring to mind the complications often involved in struggling to reach that goal.

The Arlin G. Meyer Prize is awarded biennially to a full-time faculty member from a college or university in the Lilly Fellows Program National Network whose work exemplifies the practice of the Christian artistic or scholarly vocation in relation to any pertinent subject matter or
literary and artistic style. The prize honors Arlin G. Meyer, Professor Emeritus of English at Valparaiso University, who served as Program Director of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts from its inception in 1991 until his retirement in 2002.

We include here remarks made by the artist to the Lilly Fellows National Conference when he accepted the award.

These photographs are installation shots of the work Under the Rose at Circa Gallery in Minneapolis, exhibited in September 2013. The principal image in the work is a full scale MQ-1 Predator drone cut into cotton muslin fabric with a CO2 laser. There are more than 10,000 patterns individually cut into the fabric, leaving a lace-like web of cloth in which each individual pattern is outlined with a blackened seared edge. It is a full size silhouette, about twenty-seven feet long with a sixty-six foot wingspan. The patterning on the work is laid out according to the interior and exterior schematics of the Predator drone.

“Under the Rose” is a term that dates to the Greek and Roman era, and is used to denote a private room, such as a confessional or chamber, where decisions of state were made in secret. Historically, such rooms were designated with the image of the rose over the door or on the ceiling. It is a term that is still used today by covert security operations.

The patterned imagery in the work is drawn from several sources. Much of it was taken directly from patterns documented during visits to Islamic architectural sites in India and southern Spain. The prominent fuselage rose pattern was taken from European confessionals dating to the Middle Ages. The work also uses patterns from the headscarves of Somali school girls in Minneapolis and fragments of contemporary
desert camouflage patterns used by United States forces in Afghanistan.

A principle interest for me in the work is how the development and design of these drone technologies align with some of our core values as Americans: our love of machines and trust in technology and our can-do spirit, in the moral superiority of ingenuity and a belief in the progress these technologies bring. All of these the products of one nation under God.

These machines also feel strangely deistic to me. The drones are silent and unassailable. They target individuals precisely. They are invisible, undetectable, known only by inference.

This work explores the ways in which these qualities align with concepts of deity, an alignment that can make it easy for us to assume the sanctions and righteousness of deity as well. All of this feeds a mythology of bloodless warfare that surrounds these machines, a mythology that influences our decisions, making our collective actions a bit easier to bear, making the questions a bit easier to brush off. To be clear,
the work is not attempting an easy critique of these machines or of current policy in those regions, but instead asks questions about the degree to which the technology and its iconography comfort us in these conflicts and whether this phenomenon is unique to our current perspective.

I am reminded of the Cedar Riverside area of Minneapolis, a place about twenty minutes from where I live. It is home to one of the largest populations of Somalis in the United States. Ashley Zapata, one of the students who worked on this project with me, found patterns for the work in the headscarves of Somali schoolgirls she was working with in this community. Over the past several years, more than twenty Somali men from Minneapolis have traveled to Mogadishu to join jihad under a brutal religious leader. More have left in recent months to join ISIS. Most of these young men have been killed.

In this immigrant community, I wonder how many degrees of separation there are between some of those young men and the girls whom Ashley worked with? My guess is that most of the girls had some connection to at least one of them. I wonder what those girls think of American ingenuity. I wonder how easy it is for them to make fine distinctions between an American god and an American military, a distinction that comforts me.

One of the curious axioms about making art is that those directions that fill us with anxiety are usually the ones that are the most rewarding. I frequently tell my students that they should listen to their anxiety. It is a beacon telling them where to go. I believe that this is true because those subjects that cause anxiety are ultimately those that are closer to us, closer to the bone. They are pointing toward unresolved conflict, or perhaps more often, unresolvable conflict.

I think that this is also true in matters of faith, and by extension, matters of the church. As I said, I don’t have easy answers for the problems I just described. But I believe that questions that are the most problematic for us as a community, the ones that cause us the most anxiety, are likely pointing us somewhere important.

In The Prophetic Imagination, Walter Brueggemann asserts that the Messianic voices of prophecy in the Bible have traditionally been used to engage static systems of belief and power. Those voices speak in counterpoise by offering symbols of alternative opinions and fears, and facilitating the reorganization of values according to the freedoms found in Christian faith. Under the Rose attempts to speak within that tradition, not offering simplistic analysis and solutions, but asking questions about the character of these conflicts and the nature of the power we bring to bear on them.

Kenneth Steinbach is Professor of Art at Bethel University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. More of his work can be viewed at www.kennethsteinbach.com.
EASTER

Always, if nothing more, your flexible lips.
In the summer, trimming leaves, stripping twigs.

Cutting bark from the curly birch. Sucking on cloudberry.
Gnawing blood red currants; you’re a woodland browser.

You eat all night. You have to. Absently and fully aware.
Foraging in open spaces, set to run at the smallest sound.

You know winter is coming and because of
your cloven hooves, long legs, you will not be able to sleep.

O (but if you are alive) you will be used: bones and sinews,
meat and hide. Each part sustenance, element, life.

Shelter from the cold, for we who are vulnerable as
freight trains, automobiles.

At dawn, you’ll swim underwater. Submerge your head,
cover your sharper points. And it’s easy to pretend

dreaming these dives, tangled in lilies, that you are sterile,
shy, harmless in the holiest sense.

Your crown is released and it’s dusk. Mice chew the velvet—
dogs beneath the table, hoping for that

blessed crumb there’s no substitute for;
nothing else comes close.

Then suddenly, predictably, the wake-up call.
The changing of leaves, seasonal rut.

Let there be no mistake, solitary friend,
Beginning and the End, you are a bull moose in fall.

(I no longer wonder your face is long,
dewlap hangs free like an only son.)

Bethany Bowman
Some life insurance policies bet against your dying in an accidental way wholly disconnected from your normal occupation—killed by an unknown assailant, freakishly electrocuted, or stumbling from the back of a moving train—by making these the grounds for twice the payout, twice the reward: in short, a “double indemnity.” This premise was the basis for the classic film noir, directed by Billy Wilder (1946) with screenwriting by Raymond Chandler and based on James M. Cain’s novella, in which the sinister wiles of a greedy wife (Barbara Stanwyck) ensnare an insurance salesman (Fred MacMurray) in a scheme to kill her husband. Made to look like a common accident, the murder will pay double indemnity. Insurance fraud and its comeuppance become a rich metaphor for the individual’s grasping beyond the acceptable limits of the American Dream, and Double Indemnity tells us that our desires must be tempered according to the common good.

Keeping the odds in their favor, an insurance company might bet another way, against your success, by supposing that your care, your skill, and your intentions are no match for the natural instability of a product—eggs will crack, celluloid deteriorates, and paper crumbles with age. The “inherent vice” exclusion, commonly used in marine law, though just as essential in library and cinematic archives, keeps a company safe against payouts for uncontrollable self-destruction. In Thomas Pynchon’s excellent novel Inherent Vice (2009) and Paul Thomas Anderson’s equally excellent new film adaptation, the collapse of 1960s radical idealism and the triumph of late capitalism have made American life in 1970 completely unstable. As in the America of Wilder, Cain, and Chandler, we are all, according to Pynchon and Anderson, inherently vicious.

Inherent Vice adopts the mode of hardboiled noir, with familiar figures that include a dogged, down-on-his-luck shamus, an authoritarian cop, a slinky femme fatale, and a web of intrigue more tangled than any right-minded person could sort out. When William Faulkner was adapting The Big Sleep for the screen, he contacted the novel’s author Raymond Chandler to confess that he couldn’t solve one of the story’s murders. Chandler purportedly admitted that he couldn’t either. This insoluble, shaggy-dog logic is taken as a kind of gospel in Pynchon’s novel, and though Anderson shaves away several layers of plot complication and a host of additional characters, the film often remains as befuddling as its source material. What was in classic noir the reveling in a moody style wrought by cynicism becomes for Pynchon a moral claim, an indictment of the corruption and neo-fascism of establishment culture and a lament for the drug-addled failure of the hippie revolution.

Instead of fedoras, trench coats, low-key lighting, and shadows, Anderson gives us shaggy hair, embroidered tunics, sun-bleached rooms, and fog. The setting is Gordita Beach, California, a fictional town presumably based on Manhattan Beach where Pynchon is believed to have lived in the late 1960s. That town name—slangy Spanish for “little fatty”—is the first of literally dozens of goofy, ambiguously punny names that fill Inherent Vice, much like they do every Pynchon novel. Lifted from Henry Fielding’s eighteenth-century fiction and transplanted into the twentieth, this naming device gives an arch surrealism to the proceedings. The private eye, Larry “Doc” Sportello...
(Joaquin Phoenix), is a permanently stoned doper who meets clients in the spare room of a clinic, typically trading tokes with them as he scratches stray words in his notebook. The cop is Christian Bjornsen (Josh Brolin), a lug-gish LAPD detective called “Bigfoot” due to his signature move with suspects’ doorframes, who forges an unlikely bond with Doc, both abusive and dependent. The case is set in motion, per the genre’s requirements, by the appearance of a gorgeous, dangerous woman in need. Leggy, and noticeably taller than Doc, Shasta Fay Hepworth (Katherine Waterston, in a breakout role), who was briefly Doc’s “old lady,” is usually clad in nothing but bikini bottoms and a faded Country Joe & the Fish t-shirt. The shirt references a group remembered, if at all, for their songs against the Vietnam War. Doc’s fuzzy memories of his halcyon days with Shasta—barefoot in the rain, looking for another dope score, feeling ever so briefly alive—are, like the shirt, just another fading memory of vibrant promises that never panned out. She has gone on to worse things: some skeezy tryst with a destructive real-estate mogul named Mickey Wolfmann (Eric Roberts) whose wife Sloane (Serena Scott Thomas) and lover Riggs Warbling (Andrew Simpson) have approached Shasta to get in on a scam against Mickey. Shasta needs help, and, for her, Doc plunges into an underworld teeming with interconnected groups including neo-Nazis, Black Panthers, drug cartels, the LAPD, right-wing vigilantes, the FBI, and a swarm of junkies, quacks, snitches, hookers, and hoods—all played by a star-studded cast that includes Maya Rudolph, Martin Short, Reese Witherspoon, Benicio del Toro, and (for once, not the most stoned-looking person in the cast) Owen Wilson. As in many of Pynchon’s masterpieces, the ambiguities, uncertainties, coincidences, and plot wrinkles may be stimulated less by real external factors than by endemic paranoia and THC.

Anyone going to Anderson’s film expecting a conventional mystery story or a rambunctious 1970s period piece like American Hustle is likely to be disappointed. Those mind-twisting plot convolutions and myriad characters are part of the issue, but perhaps more off-putting is the way Anderson dwells in the strange mood he finds through adapting Pynchon’s dialogue so faithfully while never allowing the tone to become campy. It is not that we don’t get some resolution in the caper, and it is not that the art direction fails to deliver a wealth of hilariously hideous costumes, crazy hair, and—a signature of the novel—organic-meets-psychedelic food. There are even a few riveting sequences set to the likes of vintage Neil Young and Jonny Greenwood originals. But, unlike Anderson’s Boogie Nights, where bravura techniques and garish images could sustain us, or unlike the Coens’ The Big Lebowski—the clear spiritual ancestor of Inherent Vice—where sheer quirkiness and quotability provide a lift, Anderson’s film places more demands upon the viewer to find pleasure in feeling lost.

One of Doc’s only true allies is his lawyer Sauncho Smilax, Esq. (del Toro), whose specialty in marine law is a running gag that connects him with the “inherent vice” of the title. The pair survey a mysterious boat that may be connected to the elusive Golden Fang.
organization, which itself may be a Chinese crime syndicate or a government-backed heroin operation or a conglomerate of shady dentists. Hits from a particularly potent strain of weed and lunch beginning with "tequila zombies" only heighten Doc's paranoia around one of Pynchon's perennial questions: are the patterns we find in the world actually there, or are they a matter of our mind's devising? The unsettling mood of the entire film urges its viewers into a similar state of questioning, a mind-fogging unease for the sober.

With *Inherent Vice*, Paul Thomas Anderson gives us a view from the underside, where the loser outsiders are the last best hope for a better world, and the outlook is bleak.

Anderson is the first filmmaker to attempt a Pynchon adaptation, and that he succeeds as well as he does is a remarkable achievement given the seeming inadaptability of the novels. Pynchon's oeuvre can be divided along lines of difficulty. Michiko Kakutani said that *Inherent Vice* counted as "Pynchon Lite," and this novel, along with *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Vineland* (1990), are clearly more accessible than his massive monster-pieces like *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Mason & Dixon* (1997), and *Against the Day* (2006), all of which have been deemed by turns masterful, impenetrable, and exhausting. *Inherent Vice* shares with early Pynchon Lite works the California locale and mystery novel structure, but it succeeds more than the others at satisfying readers' expectations for interesting characterization and plot resolution while still exploring Pynchon's pet interests in conspiracy theories, quantum physics, and Z-grade pop culture. The National Book Award-winning *Gravity's Rainbow* is unquestionably a more substantial novel, but *Inherent Vice* yields its pleasures more immediately and is, for my money, the best introduction to Pynchon's work.

If anyone were equipped to do this adaptation, Paul Thomas Anderson seems the likeliest choice. His films have often exploited noirish styles with unusual settings, from his first feature *Hard Eight* (1996), a relatively conventional crime caper about casino hustlers, to his most recent film *The Master* (2012), in which an alcoholic veteran (again, Joaquin Phoenix) returns from combat in the Second World War and involves himself in a suspicious new "religion" called The Cause. *Boogie Nights* (1997), Anderson's first major hit, has been frequently mentioned as a sibling to *Inherent Vice*, with its seedy 1970s underworld—the porn industry, in this case—and splashy vision of the American Dream gone wrong. These films, along with *Magnolia* (1999) and *There Will Be Blood* (2007), are rich, deeply critical explorations of treasured American values like believing in your dreams and success coming from hard work. The vicious Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) in *There Will Be Blood* is nothing if not committed to entrepreneurial excellence, and his pillaging for oil wealth puts him in league with other leaders of American industry. With *Inherent Vice*, Anderson gives us a view from the underside, where the loser outsiders are the last best hope for a better world, and the outlook is bleak. The epigraph to Pynchon's novel, which also appears after the end credits in Anderson's film, is a statement from the 1968 Paris riots: "Under the paving-stones, the beach!" Doc's beach house, established immediately in the opening shot, is a last-ditch refuge, a place where utter failure might just be the key to some secret success in the longed-for collapse of industrial power.

Unlike much of Anderson's work which revels in attention-grabbing film techniques, *Inherent Vice* is more restrained and far more talky. Most scenes involve two people in dialogue, and the skillfulness of the filmmaking appears in the many details that fill each shot, the little actions of characters in soft-focus or paraphernalia in the set. Some critics have noted that multiple viewings are deeply reward-
ing in order to catch these details, and this seems likely, not just because there are many elements in each shot but because of the way Anderson frames his two-person exchanges. The film's final shot is a long take on two of our characters, providing what is as close as we get to a conclusive ending, and each of their faces reflects a journey of emotions too complex to follow simultaneously. The strange tone achieved through this technique is reminiscent of his film *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), which made inscrutable, conflicted emotions the central motif. Throughout his filmography to date, Anderson finds ways to make studio-backed, star-driven movies with an astonishing complexity and unconventionality.

In the *Chicago Reader*, Ben Sachs observed that throughout the film the stoner culture all seems washed up and tattered, while "straight" society like the cops, FBI agents, and DA's office has a steely air of clear triumph. Doc's sometimes girlfriend, Deputy DA Penny Kimball (Witherspoon, in a witty casting decision that reunites the duo from *Walk the Line*), is appealing for her ability to cross over into Doc's world. Her tidy hair, crisp suit, and desk beneath a grinning photo of Nixon, pits her mainstream self against her attraction to the pizza, reefers, and dirty feet of Doc's beach place. This transgression is also what makes Bigfoot something more than a simple nemesis for Doc. His façade shows more cracks, such as his love affair with frozen chocolate bananas reminiscent of his deceased partner, his tumblers of Scotch poured by his eight-year-old son, his bullying of Japanese chefs to make him pancakes, and a late scene that brings new gusto to the concept of marijuana "munchies." For the most part, the straights have won, even if the conspiracies turn out to be delusions and the drug culture mostly devastation; the hope for fundamental change is all but vanished. There are little glimmers, like a reunion between ex-junkie lovers and the addition of Joanna Newsom as a winsome narrator, but the shifting facial expressions in the last shot leave it up to the individual viewer to determine the film's optimism. Thomas Jones, reviewing the novel in the *London Review of Books*, noted that

Charles Andrews is Associate Professor of English at Whitworth University.
Hilarious History
James McBride’s The Good Lord Bird
Robert Elder

Most Americans have heard John Brown’s name or know something about the attack on Harper’s Ferry that made him famous. They may have seen John Steuart Curry’s mural “Tragic Prelude,” which Curry painted for the Kansas statehouse, in which a wild-eyed Brown with a flowing beard, arms outstretched, grasps a rifle in one hand and a Bible in the other. Yet I think it is fair to say that even those quite familiar with Brown have never encountered him as he is portrayed in James McBride’s novel The Good Lord Bird, which won the National Book Award in 2013. McBride’s historical and irreverently hilarious novel follows the adventures of Henry Shackleford, a twelve-year-old slave in the Kansas Territory when the novel begins, as he is sucked along in the wake of the abolitionist firebrand who invaded Virginia in 1859 in a failed attempt to end the institution of slavery. McBride’s novel is notable not only for its rollicking narrative and youthful black narrator, but also for its depictions of Brown and of slavery. To my knowledge, it is the only attempt by a novelist to portray Brown from the perspective of one of the people he tried to free.

McBride’s book is part of a larger resurgence of interest in Brown surrounding the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War, and his image has been undergoing something of a renovation in recent years. In Midnight Rising (2011), Tony Horowitz argues that Brown never seriously thought he would succeed in sparking a slave rebellion, but planned his martyrdom with shrewd calculation to provoke the war he thought was necessary to end slavery. In 2006, David S. Reynolds published his massive biography of Brown, John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights. Reynolds goes to great lengths to prove that Brown was not only sane, but morally justified in light of the atrocities committed by pro-slavery supporters and the atrocity of slavery itself. Just this year, after the publication of McBride’s novel, theologian Ted A. Smith proposed in Weird John Brown that Brown’s actions should be interpreted, and pardoned, as a singular act of “divine violence” that served to expose the evils of slavery in Brown’s time and still defies our attempts to pass moral judgement. Smith’s book is perhaps the most innovative and eloquent answer to the poet Stephen Vincent Benet’s question, posed in 1928, “You can weigh John Brown’s body well enough, but how and in what balance weigh John Brown?”

All of this hand wringing about Brown makes it a guilty pleasure to read McBride’s depiction of him, which reminds us that it may be easier to remember John Brown than it was to live with him. Henry Shackleford first meets John Brown in a barber shop in Osawatomie, a small town on the Kansas-Missouri Border. In 1856, the territory was descending into the chaos that would become known as “Bleeding Kansas,” an orgy of
violence that was ostensibly about whether the territory would enter the Union as a slave or free state. According to Henry, his mother is half white. His father is an enslaved barber who belongs to the local merchant Dutch Henry. Brown enters the barbershop and summarily "frees" Henry and his father (when Henry's father hesitates, Brown snaps, "We've no time to rationalize your thoughts of mental dependency, sir"), kidnapping Henry and in the process mistaking him for a girl. Brown's mistaking Henry for "Henrietta" sets up the central dynamic of the novel. The irony, of course, is that Brown is so set on freeing "the slaves" that he doesn't bother with details such as whether Henry is a boy or girl or whether he wants to be free or not. In fact, Henry spends most of the rest of the novel dressed as a girl and trying to escape Brown, not slavery.

Through Henry's eyes, we get to know John Brown as a wildly idealistic religious fanatic who could be both kind and brutal by turns. Brown spouts bible verses in all situations and at the most inopportune times. "In all my 111 years," recalls Henry looking back, "I never knowed a man who could spout the Bible off better than old John Brown:" His prayers could go on for hours. Brown's fanaticism is funny under normal circumstances, but McBride shows how the same abstract obsession with slavery and the obliviousness to particular details that caused Brown to mistake Henry for a girl could be terrifying as well. In the real-life 1856 Pottawatomie Massacre in Kansas, Brown and his sons hacked five proslavery settlers to death with broadswords. In McBride's novel, Henry tells how Brown and his followers are lost, wandering through the Kansas wilderness when they come upon a random cabin in a pro-slavery community. Brown decides that this is where they will strike a blow for freedom, and when asked why he replies, "I can smell slavery within it." In an instant, and without changing a bit, the bumbling abolitionist is transformed into a brutal psychopath, a transition that shows the heart of our dilemma, and Henry's, in trying to explain John Brown.

Henry's view of slavery is one of the most interesting parts of McBride's novel. Slavery is just a fact of life for Henry. He doesn't think slaveholders are particularly bad or evil people. Certainly they are no worse than other people, white or black. During the fight in the barbershop between Brown and Dutch Henry, Henry says, "Now, I ought to say right here that my sympathies was with Dutch. He weren't a bad feller. Fact is, he took good care of me, Pa, my aunt and uncle, and several Indian squaws, which he used for rootin' tootin' purpose." After listing all the different things that Dutch had to take care of, Henry says, "Fact is, looking back, Dutch Henry was something of a slave himself."

McBride's depiction of John Brown reminds us that it may be easier to remember him than it was to live with him.

The institution of slavery is treated throughout the novel as a thoroughly human institution that could be brutal or relatively benign depending on the people involved. Black and white, slave and free are not the most meaningful divisions in Henry's world. Instead, Henry narrates virtue and duplicity in both white and black characters, slaves and masters. This is perhaps the most subtle but central way in which the novel disagrees with John Brown himself, who thought the institution of slavery so evil that he devoted his life to ending it, and thought that slaveholders were so evil that God had appointed him as an instrument to punish them. In contrast, at one point Henry observes, "Colored turned tables on one another all the time in them days, just like white folks. What difference does it make? One treachery ain't no bigger than the other. The white man put his treachery on paper. Niggers put theirs in their mouths. It's still the same evil." In an interview about the book, McBride described his novel's humor as an "alternate way in" to talking about the historical reality of difficult topics like slavery, which he described as "a web of relationships, rather than the stereotypical thing of a white man whipping a slave to death" (PBS NewsHour, December 2, 2013).

This is a provocative statement, but not a naïve one. McBride is no newcomer to the complexities of race in America. A previous memoir, The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother
(Penguin, 1995), told his story of growing up in the mid-twentieth-century United States as the child of an interracial marriage. McBride’s desire to capture the complexities of slavery is perhaps a reflection of this experience, and certainly the voice of Henry Shackleford allows him to say things that would be difficult to voice outside the pages of the novel. Without humor and the youthful innocence that Henry brings to his story, it is difficult to acknowledge, for instance, that there were conscientious slaveholders, that not all slaves were revolutionaries, or that, as Henry observes, he never really knew hardship and hunger until he was “freed” by John Brown.

At the same time, McBride’s novel appears at a moment when historians are reemphasizing the brutality of slavery in the United States. In his just-published The Half Has Never Been Told (Basic, 2014), historian Edward Baptist documents the massive increases in efficiency that masters wrung out of slaves in American cotton fields in the Deep South over the first half of the nineteenth century, mainly through methods that Baptist insists can only be called torture. Thus, while Henry’s experience of slavery is entirely plausible, other experiences of slavery are mostly off the page in McBride’s novel. Humor as an “alternate way in” to history has its limits.

In fact, McBride seems to realize those limits; there are one or two places in the novel where a darker vision of slavery shows through the cracks in Henry’s narrative. After escaping Brown for the first time and fleeing from Kansas to Missouri, a slave state, Henry encounters Sibonia, a female slave who seems to be modeled after the real-life slave rebel Nat Turner, who in 1831 led a failed insurrection in Virginia that led to the deaths of fifty-odd whites and hundreds of blacks. In contrast to Brown, Sibonia only pretends to be insane, and during their first meeting she drops her pretense with Henry. Henry recalls, “Her face was serious. Deadly. Her eyes glaring at me was strong and calm as the clean barrel of a double-barreled shotgun boring down at my face.” Sibonia is eventually found out and hung before she can put her plan into action, but she dies defiantly, telling the next slave in line to the gallows to “die like a man.” Sibonia’s desperation and grim resolve are evidence of a side of slavery that young Henry has not seen and that exists mostly offstage in McBride’s novel.

As he attempts to do with slavery, McBride also takes the flat historical figure of Brown and creates a full, rich, funny character that corresponds with the historical persona of America’s original terrorist in unexpected, irreverent, but delightfully believable ways. The descriptions often border on ridicule, but as the novel draws to a close there is also an affection for the “old man” that lies just beneath the surface. On the morning of the raid, as the wagons carrying Brown as his men roll toward Harper’s Ferry and into history, Henry delivers McBride’s best shot at explaining John Brown. Having spent most of the novel believing Brown is insane, in the climactic moment Henry is overawed by Brown’s commitment to his ideals. “The Old Man was a lunatic,” he recalls, “but he was a good, kind lunatic, and he couldn’t no more be a sane man in his transactions with his fellow white man than you and I can bark like a dog, for he didn’t speak their language. He was a Bible man. A God man. Crazy as a bedbug. Pure to the truth, which will drive any man off his rocker. But at least he knew he was crazy. At least he knewed who he was. That’s more than I could say for myself.”

After reading this novel, it remains unclear whether humor is the best way to understand the historical John Brown, let alone slavery. Even as an “alternate way in,” humor can only be a beginning in the task of understanding the past. But this may not be what McBride was after in his retelling of Brown’s story. Humor and history are best understood as parallel ways of getting at the inexpressible complexity of the human condition. Humor may not be a great way to understand history, but it is often the only way to get at particular experiences of being human. As an attempt to understand the historical John Brown, The Good Lord Bird does not succeed any better than previous attempts, but by using Brown’s story to humorously explore the human condition, in which the sublime and the ridiculous, the sacred and the profane, often exist in such close proximity, McBride succeeds wonderfully.

Robert Elder is Assistant Professor of History at Valparaiso University.
Meditating On the Saints
Wherever They Are.

Brad Fruhauff

Jake Oresick begins the poem that gives Mary Ann B. Miller’s collection, St. Peter’s B-List, its title with a vision of a dingy, back-alley bar in heaven:

I sometimes think
About the nightlife in heaven,
And I wonder if there isn’t
A dark spot on the East Side
Where on weekends Eva Cassidy sings
To dimly-lit tables in the clouds.

This perhaps somewhat precious image (one thinks of early scenes from Mad Men or most of Inside Llewyn Davis, nostalgic images about which we hardly care if they ever actually existed or not) sets up a poem that draws together Winston Churchill, King David, and Michelangelo, among others, as members of a rag-tag band of strivers who have done some good despite being broken people—the B-list, the ones you call when your headliners drop out. If this one poem (or at least its title) can serve as a metaphor for the whole collection, it is not because the A-listers didn’t show up. To the contrary, of the just over one hundred poems in the collection, over forty reference a saint in their titles, and at least another twenty refer to a saint or saintliness with some form of the word “saint” within the poem itself. This shouldn’t be too surprising for a book whose subtitle is “Contemporary Poems Inspired by the Saints,” but what makes this a book about the B-list is the way the big guns show up, or the way the rest of the poems imply the saintliness of the non-canonical person (or even action). These poems aren’t hagiography; they aren’t idealizations like Macy’s Christmas windows. They are more like passers’ meditations on those windows, seeing the impossible world within with our cold, gray world superimposed over it on the glass, wondering how to bridge the distance between the two.

As a Protestant unfamiliar with Catholic doctrines of sainthood beyond the Catholic Encyclopedia, I do not consider myself the primary audience for this book. However, approaching it with an open mind, a love of poetry, and an interest in learning more about how Catholic poets imagine their relationships to the saints, I found nothing in this book to exclude me or keep me at a distance. In fact, there is a helpful appendix at the back that provides brief sketches of all the saints mentioned in the poems. (One wonders how many Catholics will themselves be thankful for this supplement; have you ever heard of the bearded princess, St. Wilgefortis? For that matter, why haven’t we all heard of her? It’s a tripped-out story.)

More importantly, much of the tone and subject matter of these poems will be quite familiar.
to any religious believer in the modern age (I'm thinking in particular of the work we print in *Relief*, but it could go for *Image*, *Ruminate*, and *The Cresset*, too, I expect). Perhaps it should not surprise us that Protestant and Catholic writers alike share spiritual experiences such as the struggle between belief and doubt, the attempt to reconcile sacred and profane, and the confrontation between holiness and one's own guilt. However, if we follow the late Richard John Neuhaus in believing that Protestants and Catholics simply mean something different when they use the word *church*, or if we consider the simplistic distinction sometimes made between Catholics who emphasize God's presence in the world and Protestants who emphasize God's absence, then we might well expect different forms of poetry. But beyond the interest in saints, the striking similarities between the two traditions stood out to me as much as any differences. It could be the case that we are truly seeing not only more ecumenism but a dialectic pull of each tradition toward one another in some particulars. Or it could be that secularity—in Charles Taylor's sense of a condition of holding all beliefs contingently—puts the kind of pressures on both camps that draw out a certain kind of poetry in response. In the remainder of this review, I want to consider this phenomenon at least in terms of what this single volume taught me about what editor Miller identifies as an "essentially Catholic" attitude: a "belief in and hope for... eventual union with God" (xix)—an attitude Protestants may agree to call "small-c catholic."

First, the "Catholic" poets in this volume have similar struggles as I do with living out their faith: Jim Daniels rues an act of cruelty that wounded the spirit of a coworker; C. Dale Young tries to sort out the degree of sin for youthful theatricals imitating the real thing; Kelli Russell Agodon looks for a saint for her anxiety; Susanna Rich visits a church on the anniversary of her father's death and wonders, "How can I find my father's Jesus in me?" Rich's sense that a previous generation's faith was somehow easier is very familiar to me. If Taylor is right, then belief may have been easier in the recent past, at least a little bit, as we have travelled a path of increasing fragility of faith. We feel nowadays like Lorraine Healy, who heaves an ambivalent sigh at her mother's "docile certainty."

Faith matters for these poets, but in an interesting way it seems to rarely be a problem in the way I think of it being in more typically "Protestant" poems, and here I do think the different emphases on presence and absence start to figure. Very few of these poems wonder, like Rich's, where God or his saints are. Rather, they often quite confidently invoke a saint's aid, or narrate her story, or transpose him to a contemporary setting where he can get up to his old tricks; saints and the presence of God are almost literally everywhere in these poems.

I certainly felt like I began to appreciate better the role of the saints in the Catholic imagination. Saints serve in these poems like weird uncles or pious older sisters, people who show you the way and whom you think about with joy in good times and for strength in bad, but whom you don't necessarily want to imitate in all respects (Srrta. Wilgefortis's beard comes to mind). They are the ones who have gone before us and suffered injustice, oppression, or insignificance, but made the hard choices for faith rather than comfort. Even Healy, who wants to be dismissive of her mother's faith, invokes St. Rita via her mother in an ironic joke at her own expense. The saints carry power despite oneself.

Should you read this book? If you are looking for poetry that is pleasant to the eye and ear and that puts many aspects of faith before you in serious and thoughtful ways, then yes. With just a few caveats. First, so many poems on saints do start to wear on one. I did feel like there were relatively few basic moves: transpose the saint to the present to "make it strange," reflect on a saint's story as it may relate to one's present, confess one's sins in a way that invokes the saint and sometimes makes the sin seem venial, and maybe a few more. Those are great moves, but with the exception of a few poets like Paul Mariani, Kathleen Rooney, or Laurie Byro, I didn't feel like many people found ways of making their own voices distinct within those moves. Many of them competently and even beautifully adopt
the familiar lyric voice, either elevating the mundane to its divine significance or bringing the comfortable reader coldly down to reality. Mariani does both at the same time. Rooney can put a smirk on your face just before she slaps it off. Byro can hold two truths together in a way that makes you squirm. For these voices alone the collection has real value, but do not expect to see a great diversity of poetic form or much experimentation.

For some readers, this book will serve like a devotional. You could easily pray your way through it for half a year, looking to these poems to guide you toward the holy. For others, it will serve as a document of what it feels like to seek the face of God through the stories of his faithful followers in the early twenty-first century. Either way, it is a helpful volume for surveying, evaluating, and experiencing faith in poetry.

Brad Fruhauff is Editor in Chief of Relief and Assistant Professor of English at Trinity International University.

DIANA'S GRANDMOTHER, AT THE WOODEN SHOE TULIP FESTIVAL IN WOODBURN, OREGON,

stands by the pink tractor
in the middle of Princess Irenes.

Says, some got pink
in their hearts,

says, forgive the dog!
he likes to run
around and make
a mess of things.

Says, it's like God had
a box of crayons and nothing
better to do, and see

here, if
you suffer

the beauty of just one
flower, you'll know
the whole field,

asks, which one is your favorite?

Michael Schmidt
We Need to Talk
About National Conversations
Joseph Schattauer Paillé

We must begin with a candid conversation on the state of race relations today and the implications of Americans of so many different races living and working together as we approach a new century. We must be honest with each other. We have talked at each other and about each other for a long time. It’s high time we all began talking with each other.

President Bill Clinton
June 14, 1997

W
e need to talk. Or so we have been told. These words, spoken during a commencement speech given by our nation’s forty-second president, are now nearly twenty years old. At the time, the words felt bold and inspirational. Today, they feel played-out, mundane, maybe even trite. Spend ten minutes watching cable news and you will surely see an endless cycle of “Breaking News” graphics followed by a Republican or Democratic strategist calling for a new national conversation. In 2014, we not only continued our national conversation on race but also began new chapters in our conversations about women’s rights, Islam, free speech, gun control, health care, and poverty, just to name a few. We have even been asked to open up a national conversation on the state of political discourse, as if the way to address the failures of our national conversations is to have a national conversation about them.

One windy spring day in 2013, I joined the students and faculty of Princeton Seminary for prayer and reflection after the killing of Trayvon Martin. One professor read a list of slain unarmed black men and women, pausing after the name of each to say, “We’ve been here before.” The phrase had a haunting subtext: “We’ll be here again.” Surely enough, 2014 ended with more black bodies left in the streets and more calls for a national conversation on race.

Too often, the church has responded to these issues of national concern by echoing the call for national conversations. To be sure, calling for a national conversation is never a bad choice. (Who would say that we do not need to talk about gun violence?) Yet nearly two decades after President Clinton’s appeal for a national conversation on race, the church must ask if such appeals are still effective. Words that were once hopeful and challenging have lost their prophetic edge. Calling for a national conversation seems to be the new equivalent of calling something “interesting.” It rings hollow, nothing more than a way to stall for time or to try to run out the clock on the news cycle. If the church is to play a role in shaping public discourse, it must both identify the shortcomings of our current discourse while also offering new alternatives. There is a future for national conversations and a place for the church in guiding them, but they will ask us all to think creatively, locally, and humbly.

Life Together

Emmaus Dialogue Center looks out on a leafy urban park in Oslo’s hip Grünerløkka neighborhood. Though often seen as a pioneer of secularism and tolerance, Norway has struggled with skepticism and even outright hostility toward immigrants’ religious beliefs. In 1991, Emmaus undertook an unorthodox approach to bridge the divide between immigrants and native Norwegians. Instead of beginning with structured dialogue, Emmaus hosted meditation sessions for Christians and non-Christians...
alike. Instead of conversation, Emmaus began with silence. Underlying that approach was the idea that people cannot come together in conversation until they have shared a common experience. Honest and vulnerable dialogue is a byproduct of personal engagement.

While meditation sessions may not work in every community, Emmaus's approach highlights a key consideration missing from our calls for national conversations. Our conversations are always enriched by a history of meaningful engagement. It is helpful to remember here that the word "conversation" comes from the Latin conversor, meaning to abide or live with. Trust in communities is built not by structured dialogue but by the myriad of small and seemingly insignificant interactions we have every day. We cannot begin the hard work of intentional conversation until we build a foundation of common experience.

Churches come together for meaningful conversation, yet too often these conversations occur without a meaningful base of common experience. For example, many churches come together around Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend to discuss issues of race and class in America. At their best, these events can cross the racial and class divides that too often divide our churches. Similarly, pulpit exchanges are often lifted up as a way to make up for the lack of diversity among clergy. Yet these singular efforts cannot reach their full potential as long as they only allow engagement built around a particular issue. Before we can have gainful conversations, we need meaningful engagement. Churches in neighborhoods of shifting demographics are well-positioned for this kind of engagement. Partnerships with secular or non-religious groups, such as youth programs and outreach centers, have the potential to give rise to fruitful conversation. It is often when we are not talking at all that we lay the groundwork for insightful conversations.

Opting In, Tuning Out

Part of the problem with national conversations is that they are, by their nature, national. How to have a conversation with over three hundred million people? One answer should come to mind: the Internet. To be sure, the Internet has opened up new possibilities for dialogue and social change. Any questions about whether the Internet and social media play a significant role in public discourse should have been settled by the Arab Spring. Yet it remains unclear whether social media can improve the quality of our discourse, particularly around issues of national concern. As Chris Anderson noted in

Trust in communities is built not by structured dialogue but by the myriad of small and seemingly insignificant interactions we have every day.

The Long Tail (Hyperion, 2006), the Internet has given us a new wealth of information, but that new information is exchanged among smaller groups of people. Mass media has been replaced by niche interests. Previously unheard voices now have a platform thanks to countless blogs, podcasts, and self-published books. Yet organizing this information is a challenge. Given access to hundreds of newspapers, thousands of podcasts, and millions of blogs, how is one to choose what to read, what to listen to, and what to watch? Enter social media.

Social media has given us the ability to organize that wealth of information, but it has simultaneously pushed us toward an "opt-in" discourse. Served with an array of voices from around the country and the world, we choose who to "follow" and who to ignore. We have no choice; no one can read five hundred million tweets every day. But in organizing that information, something is lost. It is possible to have a conversation with people from around the world, and never hear an opinion you disagree with.

A better alternative would be to leave behind the hope of national conversations and start thinking smaller. Where calls
for national conversation have become stale, our calls for conversation in our neighborhoods and communities may still bear fruit. Working in our communities offers a way past the “opt-in” dialogue that has come to define our national conversations. Instead of selecting voices from around the country to engage with, we may find greater reward in engaging everyone in our community. No doubt, such conversations will challenge us, forcing us to be vulnerable and honest. Yet it is these smaller interactions that have the potential to make a larger impact.

It is true that our communities are still too often divided on the basis of race, class, and political ideology. Too often, we “opt-in” when choosing to live and worship with people who think like us, talk like us, and vote like us. Yet faith leaders can play a role in bridging the gaps, bringing communities together for honest conversation. Likewise, while denominational structures are often criticized for being excessively bureaucratic, they are well placed to bring different communities together. Bringing those groups together will not be easy; it will mean willingness from faith leaders to open up conversations with communities they have not engaged in the past. But it is these smaller conversations that have the potential to lead to bigger change.

**Prophetic and Pragmatic**

Too often in the wake of national tragedies, the voice of the church echoes that of our broader culture. Yet the shortcomings of our calls for national conversation are an opportunity for the church to reclaim its prophetic voice by showing another way forward. Faith leaders can help build the groundwork for intentional conversation by providing space for diverse groups to come together for community service or informal banter. We can take the focus off of national conversation and deepen our engagement in our neighborhoods, especially our neighbors with whom we disagree. Moving past calls for national conversation will not be easy, but it will lead us toward a more just and peaceful world.

We have been here before. The church can help make sure we do not come back here again.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé is Vicar at St. Peter’s Church in New York.
“Peace in Our Time”
Confronting the Challenge from Russia

H. David Baer

This past February, Angela Merkel, François Hollande, Vladimir Putin, and Petro Poroshenko assembled hurriedly in Minsk, Belarus, to try to negotiate yet another Ukrainian ceasefire. The previous agreement, negotiated only five months before, had become obsolete after Russian separatists occupied a large swath of Eastern Ukraine. The prospects of succeeding in Minsk were exceedingly slim, but Europe’s leaders, deeply committed to the view that only diplomacy can bring peace, were determined to do everything possible to negotiate a solution to the Ukraine crisis. Their valiant efforts culminated in an all-night session which, to everyone’s relief, produced a comprehensive ceasefire agreement. The agreement was signed; immediately afterward fighting in Ukraine intensified. Russian separatists began assaulting Debaltseve, capturing the city only ten days after the ceasefire went into effect.

The utter failure of the Minsk Agreement, not to mention the ineffectiveness of economic sanctions and the impotence of diplomatic measures to influence Russian behavior, have reopened questions about the relationship between peace and power, questions which Western leaders have wanted to avoid. Soft power so far has proved singularly ineffective in stopping Russian aggression. That unpleasant truth raises the possibility that soft power alone may not be enough to secure peace in Europe. The question of peace in Europe has again become a question about how to handle Russia. To do so, one must also understand it, and, unfortunately, that is not an easy task. The country’s intentions are opaquely intertwined with the machinations of its mafioso kingpin leader, Vladimir Putin, whose own motivations appear largely personal. Western analysts are thus left to guess what Russia is up to. Their interpretations conflict, but in fact every interpretation points unwittingly to the return of a smaller, but still quite dangerous Cold War, and hence the need to employ hard power in defense of peace.

One common explanation of Russia’s renewed belligerence would see the invasion of Ukraine as a pent-up response to a series of Western provocations. The most blatant of these was NATO expansion. Russia was invaded twice in the past two centuries (first by Napoleon, then by Hitler), and inevitably perceived NATO’s growth as threatening. Russia sees much of Eastern Europe, especially the Baltic states, but also Poland and Romania (not to mention Serbia and Bulgaria), as belonging naturally to its sphere of influence, as Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin agreed at Yalta. Thus it is Western encroachments on Russia’s historic entitlements that have elicited a forceful response.

On this view, the cause of the Ukrainian crisis is located in Russia’s delayed response to the collapse of the Cold War order. Since that response was provoked by Western arrogance, this account of Russian behavior also excuses it. And yet if the apology be correct, Russia’s foreign policy is aiming to reestablish the defunct political order of Yalta. Such an ambition is deeply hostile to the peoples of Europe. A return to Yalta would mean dismantling the European Union and relinquishing twenty-five years’ worth of gains in democratic integration. Insofar as Russia seeks to dismantle the current European political order, it must be resisted and deterred by credible threats of commensurate Western response to acts of Russian aggression.

Yet the “return to Yalta” thesis, if containing elements of truth, fails fully to convince, because Russia’s interests have become linked to Europe’s over the past twenty-five years. The Russian
The reckless quality to Russia's recent belligerence has led others to look for the sources of the Ukraine crisis in Russia's growing domestic troubles and Putin's increasingly brittle hold on power. Putin has transformed Russia into a kleptocratic mafia state with the worst wealth inequality in the world. Thirty-five percent of the country's wealth is held by 110 billionaires, oligarchs bound to Putin through an extensive web of corruption (Taylor 2013). Massive Russian corruption is a drag on Russia's economy (a problem now exacerbated by falling oil prices and Western sanctions), and the masses, growing poorer (a recent study suggests 83 percent of Russians hold less than $10,000 in wealth), are becoming dissatisfied with Putin's leadership (Breslow 2015). Putin, however, can never relinquish power because, like every mafia boss, he is thoroughly implicated in a network of crime. Not only has he benefited from financial corruption (no one knows the extent of his wealth), but also he has certainly had a hand in the numerous assassinations of his critics and enemies. Many suspect that Putin may also have had a hand in the 1999 Russian apartment bombings, blamed at the time on Chechen terrorists, which help bring Putin to power. If even half of these suspicions about what Putin has done are true, he cannot relinquish power without placing himself at personal risk. Putin's political successor, with access to both the state's secrets and its powers, might turn against him. On this second view, therefore, the crisis in Ukraine has been orchestrated by Putin to distract from Russia's domestic problems. The strategy is only as reckless as Putin's hold on power is desperate.

And polls show Putin's strategy has enjoyed success. His approval rating since annexing Crimea has soared as high as 84 percent. (Washington Post, September 9, 2014). But the polls also suggest that the success of the strategy may be tenuous and could prove short-lived. Most Russians are unaware that Russian troops are in Ukraine, and a sizable percentage of the population opposes direct involvement by the Russian military (Levada Center 2015). Moreover, support for the annexation of Crimea does not appear to have altered overall perceptions concerning Russia's domestic problems (Snegovaya 2015). Should falling oil prices and Western sanctions continue to debilitate Russia's economy, one suspects the "Crimea effect" may wear off and Putin will need to look for new distractions to help him retain power.

The second interpretation of the situation in Russia, more plausible than the first, is significantly more troubling. It suggests a country led by a tyrant who has painted himself into a corner and therefore is becoming reckless. A tyrant preoccupied with survival necessarily thinks short term; he cannot focus on his country's long-range interests. Indeed, since his personal reign is largely incompatible with his country's long-term interests, he cannot focus on those. According to this view, therefore, Putin's recklessness is likely to increase as Russia's domestic crisis grows more severe. Even if in the long run Putin cannot succeed in his aims (as eminently reasonable Western leaders seem to believe), that won't matter much if in the short run Putin inflicts all the damage he can on Europe. Putin can exacerbate the EU's internal problems by lending financial support to upsurging right-wing parties within it. He can provoke crises in the countries along Russia's borders, particularly the Baltic states, whose security directly implicates NATO's credibility. He has already demonstrated disregard for international borders and his readiness to go to war in Europe. And he has at his disposal a nuclear arsenal, a fact...
about which he has recently taken to boasting.

The dangers and challenges for Western leaders confronting a tyrant with nuclear weapons in Europe are certainly very great. One thing, however, should be clear; you cannot stop a flailing tyrant by ignoring his recklessness. To do that would be to create the illusion of success, which in turn would encourage greater recklessness as Russia’s domestic troubles deepen. If unchecked, Putin’s recklessness could eventually precipitate a violent confrontation with Europe, one more damaging than anything experienced on the continent for more than half a century.

The best strategy for protecting peace in Europe today may be a return to some form of containment. Putin’s reckless impulses must be contained, both through the imposition of real costs on his violations of the peace and by communicating clear and credible limits on Western tolerance for aggression. Establishing credible limits presupposes a willingness to match Russian escalations with commensurate countermeasures. Should Putin come to believe the costs of his foreign excursions are too great (and so far the costs he has incurred have been relatively low), he will look to retain power with cheaper domestic maneuvers. A policy of containment, once credibly in place, will allow the West to wait Putin out in a cold war of attrition. He will not last as long as the Soviet Union; events will escape his control and he will fall, perhaps through a coup or popular uprising. Until that time, however, in this second Cold War, the goal of Western policy should be to contain the debris from Putin’s impending explosion, so as to preserve the democratic gains in Europe of the last quarter century.

H. David Baer is Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Texas Lutheran University.

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Hymn Brackets

Paul Koch

In 2011, students at Luther Seminary in St. Paul organized a hymn bracket, similar to the kind we see every year for NCAA March Madness. Just like the basketball tournament, the hymn bracket included sixty-four entries. A hymn required so many nominations to make the tournament, and then hymns were paired against each other, with students voting on their favorites. In the first round, “A Mighty Fortress” squared off against “Ah, Holy Jesus.” In the Final Four, “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” faced “Be Thou My Vision,” and “Beautiful Savior” took on “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.”

In the end, “Be Thou My Vision” claimed the top prize. The bracket was all for the sake of fun, but I couldn’t help noticing how poorly Lutheran hymns had fared. “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” was thumped by “Blessed Assurance,” with 74 percent of voters preferring Fanny Crosby to Martin Luther. The King of Chorales, “Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying,” got hammered by “Silent Night,” which picked up 76 percent of voters. “Thy Holy Wings” took the worst beating of the tournament, with 84 percent choosing “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” A few Lutheran hymns squeaked into the second round, but only “Beautiful Savior” made it into the Sweet Sixteen, and then lost in the Final Four.

For some time now, I’ve suspected that Lutheran congregations aren’t that familiar with or enamored of Lutheran hymns—beyond a few such as “A Mighty Fortress”—and the hymn bracket provided a bit of confirmation. The tournament was hardly a scientific, comprehensive measurement of today’s hymn-singing, but Luther Seminary continues to be the largest seminary of the largest Lutheran denomination in our country. And their student body digs “Be Thou My Vision.”

When I ask my own parishioners about their favorite hymns, or when I’ve asked colleagues about their congregations’ favorites, the answers usually include “Amazing Grace,” “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” “How Great Thou Art,” “I Love to Tell the Story,” and “Lift High the Cross.” Those hymns were written by evangelical Anglicans and members of the Plymouth Brethren and the Swedish Mission Covenant Church. I imagine the favorites among Lutherans would not differ much from those named by members of other denominations. On one hand, it demonstrates the ecumenical nature of hymnody. Any Christian confession would be impoverished if its members only sang hymns by fellow members. Hymn singing is one of the facets of church life in which ecumenism happens almost effortlessly. Our local ministerial group works hard to promote its ecumenical services on Good Friday and Thanksgiving, but I don’t have to twist anyone’s arm for another round of “Amazing Grace.”

On the other hand, it seems we’re missing something. Is it truly ecumenical if we’re not singing Paul Gerhardt alongside Isaac Watts? I’ve observed this scarcity of Lutheran hymns not only in congregations, but in Bible camps, conferences, synod assemblies, and other places where Lutherans gather. It hardly needs to be mentioned that the scarcity is an outright famine in so-called “contemporary” worship services. Why the scarcity? It surely isn’t for lack of material. Is it something about the history of American Lutheranism in which the transmission of European hymns was hindered by the presence of readily available English hymns written by Anglicans and Methodists? Or is there something about Lutheran hymnody that doesn’t fit our current ecclesiastical and spiritual agendas?

In 2017 we will be celebrating the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. It seems as good a time as any to ask what it means to be Lutheran, and if we are the “singing church” then it would be good to know if our Lutheran confession makes a difference in the hymns we write and in the hymns we sing. Is there something distinctly Lutheran about hymns by Lutheran hymnwriters? Here’s a way of finding out: I offer a proposal to churches as they
prepare for 2017. First, they could look through their worship bulletins from the past year, noting the hymns they sang, and review how many of them were written by Lutheran authors. Hymnals such as Lutheran Book of Worship and Evangelical Lutheran Worship have hymnal companions which give backgrounds on their hymns and authors. (Lutheran Service Book editors are still completing their own companion volume.) Hymnary.org has histories of most every hymn in a hymnal. Again, hymnody is a remarkably ecumenical phenomenon, and Lutheran congregations should not be concerned that they are singing hymns by Methodists. But it might be telling... are they also singing hymns by Lutherans? How often? If a person in the congregation or a committee has the time, it might be worth asking which Lutheran hymns they are singing. What time periods are represented? What ethnicities? German? Norwegian? Slovak? Tanzanian? Are there periods and ethnicities they might try learning more about and singing more often?

Next, I would propose that congregations spend 2016, in the year leading up to the big anniversary, singing a Lutheran hymn each week. Granted, the question of pedigree is complicated, but the process of asking what qualifies would be educational. I would imagine congregations will indeed find something distinct and valuable about Lutheran hymnwriters. Most importantly, they will find an emphasis on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Is this lacking in other hymn traditions? No, but other traditions show a willingness to obscure it. “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!” and “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” are well known to Lutheran churches, but they were written by ministers of the Anglican and Scottish Free Churches. They speak of God’s majesty, but not of his condescension in Christ. Paul Gerhardt, the Sweet Singer of Lutheranism, however, gives us “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth,” which is forthright about the suffering of our Lord.

Lutheran hymns are specific about who our redeemer is and what he has done for us. By contrast, beloved hymns from outside the Lutheran stream are vague. “Amazing Grace” speaks of God’s salvation, but never mentions the name of Jesus Christ. “Be Thou My Vision” suffers in the same way. “I Love to Tell the Story,” like a tease, never actually tells the story. We hear of Jesus’ love, but not the specific way in which Jesus showed his love on the cross. Lutheran hymns developed in an organic relationship with the liturgy, the lectionary, and the catechism. They are not generic praise songs, but magnify specific themes of scripture and doctrine.

Lutheran hymns developed in an organic relationship with the liturgy, the lectionary, and the catechism. They are not generic praise songs, but magnify specific themes of scripture and doctrine, from Luther’s “To Jordan Came the Christ Our Lord” to Jaroslav Vajda’s “Up through Endless Ranks of Angels.” Likewise, they are straightforward in confessing sin—“my life became a living hell,” we sing in “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice”—but also bold in deriding sin on account of Christ. Sing “Awake, My Heart, with Gladness” to learn how a Christian speaks—and even laughs—confidently against sin, death, and the devil. Sing “God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It” or “Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared” to know the joy of God’s saving work in the sacraments.

If a congregation accepts the invitation of singing a Lutheran hymn each week, I would suggest they aim to sing a diversity of Lutheran hymns, taking into account various time periods and ethnicities. They will certainly want to become familiar with newer hymnwriters such as Martin Franzmann, Stephen Starke, and Susan Palo Cherwien. Again, the hymnal companions are helpful in providing geographical and chronological indexes. Such diversity will be challenging. We are still waiting for more English translations from the Slovak tradition, although...
Vajda has given us a good start. Similarly, translations from Scandinavian writers are still catching up with their German counterparts, but Gracia Grindal’s recent volume *Hymns and Spiritual Songs from the North* (Triune, 2012) takes a large step in that direction.

The early German chorales present obstacles for some congregations, but their obstacles are simultaneously their strength: to wit, their syncopated rhythm, their length, and their doctrinal content. Carl Schalk observed that the immigrants who formed the Missouri Synod brought with them hymnbooks from Germany that had benefited from the revival of rhythmic chorale singing in their homeland, led especially by Friedrich Layriz. Subsequently, Missouri Synod Lutherans have done well at singing chorales with their original syncopated rhythms. It is an old debate, whether Lutheran chorales are best sung in their original, rugged form or in their isometric form, in which the syncopated rhythms have been evened into quarter notes. (A quick glance at “A Mighty Fortress” will highlight the difference, as LBW, ELW, and LSB all contain both versions.) Congregations would benefit from learning to sing these melodies in their original form. The rhythmic chorales are certainly more interesting, but more importantly they embody the lively theology of justification by faith alone and the proclamation that Christ has triumphed over sin, death, and the devil. Perhaps rhythmic melodies are less devotional, and for that reason the isometric forms have been more amenable to Pietists, but if so, rhythmic forms are more in keeping with a theology centered on the living voice of the Gospel, that is, less prayer-like, more preaching-like. Learning these rhythmic melodies takes effort in congregations where they are unfamiliar, but they are worth the time.

The length and doctrinal content of Lutheran chorales can also be off-putting for congregations. On Christmas Eve, many worshipers expect to sing a few verses of “Silent Night,” not fifteen verses of “From Heaven Above.” But lengthy hymns are not intended to be sung all in one shot, one verse the same as the next. Luther wrote his Christmas hymn so that the verses would be shared by choirs and congregation, children and adults taking turns. It is a Christmas pageant in music. When singing “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice,” half should be sung before the sermon, and half after, with children, men, and women alternating verses. These hymns are to be enjoyed, not forced, and there is enough material for creativity and fun. It is an old tradition that the organ even take a verse and interpret the words with improvisation and instrumentation.

Are some Lutheran hymns heavy in content? Perhaps. “Salvation unto Us Has Come” feels more like a confirmation class than a church picnic, but the faith has to be taught, not merely felt, and if we are going to teach it, why not put it to music?

Robin Leaver has written about the catechetical nature of Lutheran chorales, pointing out that they both teach and have to be taught. Chorales aren’t the kind of texts and melodies that you pick up on one hearing, which explains the steady stream of resources aimed at teaching this tradition. The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau issued a recording on vinyl in 1961, *Through the Church Year with the Best in Lutheran Hymns*, and then reissued it on CD forty years later. A decade ago, Thrivent sent out a five-disc set titled *Celebrating the Musical Heritage of the Lutheran Church* to churches across the country. More recently, the Good Shepherd Institute in Ft. Wayne created a DVD study of Lutheran music called *Singing the Faith*.

A cynic might regard all these media productions as useless repristinating. If it requires this much education, maybe we are trying to rescue a tradition that is doomed to stay in the past, but the tradition has always needed this kind of education. The ALPB wasn’t the first to recognize this; Martin Luther himself did. Luther didn’t just stuff a bunch of hymns into a hymnal and then wait for everyone to start singing them. He recognized the need for teaching. His first collaboration with Johann Walter was a hymnal intended for choirs, so that people could spend time learning the music and then augment hymn-singing in worship. Luther stressed the need for musical education among children and expected them to learn hymns at school. In my own experience, it continues to be the case that
children are the most excited about learning chorales, despite the chorales’ reputation for being difficult. Chorales, especially in their rhythmic form, are lively and full of vivid texts about Jesus Christ. This tradition isn’t doomed to stay in the past. It only stays there when pastors, musicians, and congregations insist on burying it. Give it to a child, however, and just see how buoyant it is.

Singing a Lutheran hymn a week would not be to the exclusion of hymns from other confessions. Using only Lutheran hymns would not be a very Lutheran move. Luther was discerning, but also diverse, as he drew from various traditions. But if we sing at least one a week, at some point in the service—whether it is the Hymn of the Day, or the Invocation, or during distribution of the Lord’s Supper—perhaps we will come to appreciate what this tradition offers. If we spend time learning these songs, teaching them in Sunday school, VBS, and confirmation, learning various arrangements in our choirs, and ultimately singing them in worship services, perhaps we will be ready, not only for 2017, not only for the next March Madness Hymn Bracket, but ready to proclaim the vital and lively doctrine of justification by faith alone, take it to our hearts, and sing it for our children.†

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

MY JERICHO

Each hurt, a stone; each imperfection, mortar for the walls. They rise up like Babel, to the sky, surrounding my heart like barbed wire fences.

I pile on more mortar, lug more stones; I try to make a garden out of prison walls. This stone facade is me—it’s not! but here I am alone inside my Jericho.

The raindrops fall like cannonballs, breaking down the walls. They crumble, like crackers underfoot. My stronghold decimated, I stand vulnerable yet free.

The walls masquerading as safety, really a cage. It wasn’t me; the light shines better through a broken wall, anyway

Whitney L. Schwartz
Depression

Tom Willadsen

The thing about episodic depression is that it comes and goes. It's like the vaudeville joke: Man walks into his doctor's office and describes his symptoms. Doctor asks, "Have you ever had this before?" "Yes." "You've got it again. $10."

And it's like Dan Fogelberg's experience of running into his old girlfriend at the grocery store: "Just for a moment I was back at school... and felt that old, familiar pain."

When my last episode of depression hit, it was a replay of the dips I'd experienced in second grade, ninth grade, and college. For the last of those I employed some self-medication strategies: Pepsi, decongestants, conversations with two trusted friends, and humor. The turning point came one Sunday when my friend from across the hall walked into my room, looked at the clock and said, "It's 12:01 here. It's 11:58 on my side of the hall."

"It's Monday here also," I replied. "Dude, you just crossed the International Date Line... and you're late for philosophy."

It was a completely stupid joke that mushroomed. By evening we had a strip of masking tape running down the center of the hallway. We were a bunch of liberal arts majors, so we wrote "International Date Line" in about eight languages on the tape. Classmates would step on either side of the line saying, "Sunday. Monday. Sunday. Monday." We placed signs at the end of the hallway indicating "The Well of the Past" and "The Well of the Future," which converged at our version of the IDL. For a day and a half, we were united by something that was completely silly, and for some reason, that helped me. The tide of this episode of depression turned; I started going to class again.

When I slid into my most recent episode three years ago, I knew this too would pass. Except this time, it didn't. Instead of the three to four week troughs of "old, familiar pain," this one went on for months and months.

I lost my appetite; then I lost twenty pounds.

I am a strong extrovert; I found that times I spent around people, even people I did not know, were like vacations off Depression Island. When I was alone, I sank back into a black hole.

After four months, I started taking St. John's Wort. My brother had suggested it, and it seemed like a less dramatic response than getting on actual anti-depressants. I did not want the stigma of taking anti-depressants. I have preached sermons at funerals of people who committed suicide and said, "Depression is an illness that kills in the same way as cancer and heart disease." I was afraid to take my own advice.

I had gone to counseling a few years before and found that the one counselor in my area who was acceptable to my insurance plan was twenty-five miles away and average.

In some ways, an average counselor is worse than a bad one. After two sessions with a bad counselor, I'm saying, "I'm never seeing that knot head again!" and I look for another counselor. Of course, a good counselor is good. I find with an average counselor I'm saying, "Maybe, I just haven't clicked with him yet. I'll give it a few more sessions." Then the six in-take sessions are used up, and all you've done is spin your wheels. I decided to skip counseling.

So I sat in the living room in the dark for hours after everyone else was asleep, looking out at the night. Thinking and not thinking. Drinking and not drinking sherry.

A few months into this one I noticed that all my children's sermons were ways of helping our little ones experience and trust the reality that God loves them. After the third one, I realized that I needed to hear and trust that message more than anyone else. As far as I knew this was the only manifestation of this episode that anyone could notice.

Spending time with my sons was the only thing I looked forward to. The day before Easter, I looked at my younger son, who was six at the time, and asked, "David, why do I love you so much?"

"Because you do!" was his immediate, joy-filling response. I continue to use this litany with David,
even though, now at age ten, he finds it tedious and protests, "Daddy, you always ask me that!"

At about month ten, I drafted an essay and sent it off to a friend who edits my columns. He wrote back, "It reminds me of things I wrote in my pre-medicated days."

I felt like I'd stepped on a rake. Was my depression visible to others? I started to wonder.

I reached out to a trusted colleague, the older sister I never had. She said, "I can see how much pain you are in." I had not thought of depression as painful until then. Difficult, dark, yes, but not painful. Then she asked whether I'd thought about hurting myself. I hadn't, but the question got my attention. It was the second rake to smack me between the eyes in less than a week.

These two friends gave me the push I needed to talk to my doctor and give counseling another try. I was surprised that a new counselor, acceptable to my insurance provider, had moved to town. I was pleased that he was well above average. I used my six sessions and still carry some of the advice he offered.

I got in to see my physician as soon as I could. On July 1, I started taking a prescription anti-depressant. And being my mother's child, I am delighted to report that my first six months were samples! Free happy pills, what a country!

I did not feel any different at first. The tome that came with my free tablets said, "Several weeks may pass before this medicine reaches its full effect." The list of potential side effects included "nausea, dry mouth, weight loss or gain" and many, many more.

Before I felt any different, I became more patient with my sons. I found I could roll with things, not correct them instantly or say, "Not now, Dad's having a hard time."

Sunday, July 20 I planned to lead worship, then drive to Louisville for a week-long, intensive class. Before worship that morning I was walking through the coffee-hour room, chatting with the deacons as they were getting the coffee set up, and I found myself laughing with them about something. The laughter felt different. "I'm back," I said out loud.

And that is how it feels, to be "back." Not euphoric, not happy, not elated, but back to me.

I had been reluctant to start taking anti-depressants. I feared I would lose my unique perspective on life; that my sense of humor, which has helped me through so many difficult times, would atrophy from lack of need. What if my writing, a new self-medication strategy, lost its edge once my serotonin level stabilized? And, for the record, I'd spent nearly a complete year not being overweight. Maybe there was a health benefit to my depression that I was about to lose.

The starkest, though not the most significant, change is that I can no longer stand the music of Patsy Cline. There have been times when I have sought solace in country music. Other times, I now realize, I have needed solace because of country music. I am the rare intellectual who appreciates without reflexively mocking country music. And for years Patsy Cline's voice, and her ability "to cry on both sides of the microphone" as one critic described, have moved me. Now, whenever I hear her I go all Dr. Phil on her.

"How's that workin' out for you, doormat?" I ask the speakers in my car when Ms. Cline confesses she's crazy.

"That's right, girl, you are crazy to let yourself get trashed by that pinhead another time! Move on! Don't go back to him, you deserve better!" But all Patsy can say anymore is everything she recorded before that plane crash in 1963, songs of loyalty promised after betrayal. Perhaps that's all a woman from Winchester, Virginia with a golden voice could record fifty years ago. I simply have no more patience with that kind of nonsense.

I feel like I'm back to me since that summer day. It is a good feeling. I find that I recommend anti-depressants to parishioners with an authority and conviction I did not have before. I remember, kind of, what my pre-medicated days were like. As one friend described his life before it was chemically improved, "On my meds I am funnier, you are more interesting, and I don't want to kill the stupid people." I would only add that one possible side effect, which the literature is unlikely to mention, is Acute Cline Revulsion. I can live with it. 

The Reverend Thomas C. Willadsen is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He gave the 2013 Bibfeldt Lecture at the University of Chicago Divinity School.
Hitchin' a Ride

Paul Willis

One Saturday afternoon during the spring of my freshman year at Wheaton, I sat in the college library while the sun shone and the day waned, trying to catch up on my homework. It had been a long winter in the dreary suburbs of Chicago and I was restless. In the next carrel over was a fellow freshman named Scott Louizeaux—equally restless, I could tell, from the sewing-machine bounce of his leg.

That's when I had an idea.

"Hey, Scott," I said. "I've got a really good friend from home who's at Valparaiso University. Just over the state line. Couldn't be more than sixty miles as the crow flies. I bet we could hitchhike there by dark. Whaddya say?"

"I say let's do it," Scott said.

I was surprised that he didn't need more persuading, but now that Scott had agreed to the plan, I felt it would be impolite to abandon it. So we dumped our books, found our jackets, and rustled up a highway map of the area. A direct route would take us through Chicago Heights on the South Side, but that meant nothing to us. I came from a small town in Oregon, and Scott was an eager missionary kid from Panama, a couple of young white boys who were basically not from here. Chicago Heights sounded like any other American suburb, maybe more upscale than most.

We walked past the edge of our red-brick college town, thumbs out, into a swath of farmland. The birds were singing, the trees were greening, the air was breezing, and we congratulated ourselves on leaving the library behind. Before long, a station wagon pulled over, and a middle-aged white fellow—very tidy in appearance—invited us along with him. He was doing some errands, happy to help us on our way, and spoke about getting home to his wife in time for dinner and then getting ready for Sunday school the following morning. By the time our roads diverged and he let us out, Scott and I were filled with pity for his unadventurous life.

Still in farmland, we walked along in the now latenight afternoon and were soon rewarded with another ride, this one in a dark, two-door sedan. A pair of jolly Hispanic men in dirt-stained clothes occupied the front seat, and Scott and I crawled in the back. Note to future hitchhikers: think twice before you get in the back of a two-door sedan. For after we had tucked ourselves in and were underway, we began to realize our chaperones were a bit sloppy, talking louder than need be and gesturing emphatically. Alcohol was in the air. How much they'd had, we couldn't tell.

The farmland gave way, and we seemed to be getting into the South Side of Chicago, driving now on city streets, but our driver was still going at highway speeds. Scott and I exchanged a very grim glance and hung on to the armrests. Since both doors were in the front, there was no chance of abandoning ship, even at a stoplight.

So at last I leaned forward and said, "You can let us out right here, actually." I tried to sound cheerful about it.

The driver turned completely around, taking his eyes off the road. "Don't worry, gringo!" he shouted, waving his arm magnanimously. "We get you there!"

Then he drove even faster, and started to weave in and out of city traffic. Suddenly we were missing our tidy man from the farmlands. Before long, however, there were red and blue flashing lights right behind us, sirens too. Our driver, bless his suddenly law-abiding heart, pulled the sedan to the curb, and a pair of policemen hauled us onto the sidewalk. White policemen. Irish, maybe. They shoved the two Hispanic guys down onto the hood of the car. Then one of the officers cocked his beefy head our way, eyebrows raised.

"And you?" he said.

"Um, we were just hitchhiking," I replied. "Can we just leave?"

The cop looked us up and down, as if trying to decide whether to book us for that very offense. Then he said, "Get out of here."

So we did. It was getting toward dusk by now, and we walked for a long time. According to a sign we passed, we were finally in Chicago Heights. For...

The streets became narrow, and as night came on, we noticed lots of African American men standing in the dark of the doorways on the sidewalk. Some had vacant, glassy eyes. Others gave us a hard stare as we passed by, as if we didn't belong here, as if we were trespassing on their turf. Then some of them started to flip us the bird and tell us white boys what we could go do to ourselves. Their muttering joined in a hectic chorus, doorway after doorway. It may have been as harmless as the infield chatter on a Little-League baseball diamond, but to us it sounded like the buzz of rattlesnakes on a desert trail. Now, of course, we really missed our tidy man from the farmlands. Getting ready for Sunday school sounded like a great idea, a privilege, a luxury.

And then, thanks be, a black van pulled up to the curb and its door slid open, releasing an almost visceral blast of hard rock. A gaggle of faces urged us in. White faces, young faces, just like ours. No doubt about it; we were saved.

Without a moment’s hesitation, Scott and I dove inside onto a shag rug in the back. The door closed. No windows. The bass pumping through the speakers into our ears. A bit claustrophobic, but who cared? We sprawled on that shag rug in relief, and the van took off, coursing through the narrow streets.

After a little while, though, we noticed that our genial hosts were not paying us much attention. All five or six of them were leaning together around the console at the front, discussing something pretty intently. One of them glanced back at us from time to time, as if trying to decide what we were worth.

Then he decided to clue us in.

“This guy from another gang,” he said, “he killed one of our guys last week. So we're figuring out how to shoot one of their guys. Tonight.”

I saw Scott’s eyes grow wide. I’m sure mine did, too. But we both nodded back politely as if to say, Hey, well, if we have any good ideas, we’ll just pitch in with the planning, okay? Maybe put us on the refreshments committee?

They must have sensed right then that we wouldn't be much help, so they dumped us at the next corner.

By now it was completely dark.

We were still in Chicago Heights.

And a youth pastor of our own now-tainted race, angel of mercy that he was, spotted us trembling on that corner and drove us all the way out of town to the Indiana cornfields. There we waited at a McDonald’s and very meekly called my friend to pick us up. Eventually—midnight, maybe—we made it to the celestial city of Valparaiso.

It may have been as harmless as the infield chatter on a Little-League baseball diamond, but to us it sounded like the buzz of rattlesnakes on a desert trail.

So, what is the moral to this story? That it's better to stay in the library on a Saturday afternoon? That if you are going to hitchhike, you should, like the Music Man, at least know the territory? That drunk drivers are likely to be generous, and that generous people can kill you? That just when you think it’s people of another race who might hurt you, you find out it's people of your own race who might be the most lethal of all? That God sent that youth pastor to save our skins so that we might be preserved until this very day to do his bidding?

It could be any of these things, or it could be none of them. In the midst of the murderous violence that greeted the Civil Rights movement, when asked to sum up the core of the gospel, Will Campbell famously said, “We're all bastards, but God loves us anyway.” But to sum up that afternoon and evening with Scott—that strange cocktail of innocence, prejudice, paranoia, and, perhaps, actual threat—I'm tempted simply to say, “We were both stupid, but we got lucky.” Divine luck.

Paul Willis is Professor of English at Westmont College and has recently served as poet laureate for the city of Santa Barbara.
DECOY

The eye on a moth's wing
stares down the sun.
Don't speak to me of storms.
Be like that eye: small and single,
and do not blink.

Do you think that's foolish?
You who know all about solar flares.
You who half expect the lizard sun
to flick its tongue
and snag some loafing planet.

Your eyes are always scanning
for trouble. Can you close them?
Can you paint a decoy on your sleeve
and flutter here and there
without thought of dying stars,
or the latest hurricane, whose eye
swirls around your own?
That's right—paint an eye.
Make it fierce, make it bloody.
The reeling world will orbit.

Then go about your business
drifting from meadow to meadow.
Even the birds won't touch you.
Their mother's made them promise never
to eat anything that was staring at them.

Richard Schiffman
Submission Guidelines

What We Publish: The Cresset publishes essays, reviews, and poetry, not fiction. Essays that we publish generally are not opinion pieces but expository, personal, or exploratory essays. We will, on occasion, consider interviews or selected other genres. Almost any subject is possible. We are highly selective about personal essays of faith experience and about homilies. The editor reviews all manuscripts and, when necessary, solicits opinions from members of an Editorial Board, consisting of faculty members at Valparaiso University.

Guidelines for Authors: 1. Our readership is educated, most with some church connection, most frequently Lutheran. Articles should be aimed at general readers interested in religious matters. 2. The Cresset is not a theological journal, but a journal addressing matters of import to those with some degree of theological interest and commitment. Authors are encouraged to reflect upon the religious implications of their subject. 3. Style and spelling are governed, in most cases, by The Chicago Manual of Style and Webster’s New International Dictionary. 4. We do accept unsolicited manuscripts; however, before submitting a manuscript, you may want to contact the editor at cresset@valpo.edu about the suitability of your topic for the journal. Our review columns (film, popular culture, music, and so forth) are usually supplied by regular columnists. 5. The preferred method of submission is in Microsoft Word for Windows format. Email your file to cresset@valpo.edu. Or you may send your manuscript via USPS to: The Editor, The Cresset, Valparaiso University, 1300 Chapel Drive, Valparaiso, IN 46383. 6. Poetry submissions should be sent via USPS. Poetry submissions via email will not be accepted. 7. The use of notes is discouraged. Notes of supporting citations should be placed in parentheses in the text, listing: last name of the author, year of publication, and page numbers where appropriate, e.g., (Wright 1934, 232). 8. In a separate section entitled “Works Cited,” list alphabetically by author (and, within author, by year of publication) all items that are cited in the text. Provide complete bibliographical information, including author’s first name, publisher, and place and date of publication. Examples:


ON THE POETS

Susanna Childress has published two books of poetry: Jagged with Love, winner of the 2005 Brittingham Prize, and Entering the House of Awe, winner of the 2012 Society of Midland Authors Award. She also writes short fiction and creative nonfiction.

Karl Plank’s poems have been published or are forthcoming in journals including Beloit Poetry Journal, New Madrid, Anglican Theological Review, Spiritus, Still, and featured on Poetry Daily. He is the J.W. Cannon Professor of Religion at Davidson College.

Bethany Bowman’s poems have recently appeared in The Comstock Review, Art House America, Ascent, Rock & Sling, and The Cresset.

Michael Schmidt is an MFA candidate at Eastern Washington University. He is grateful to be alive. He misses the ocean.

Whitney L. Schwartz is the author of Grace Like Rain and Mona Lisa: Carlingford Chronicles Book 1. Her short story Remember Where Your Home Is was chosen as a semi-finalist for the 2014 William Van Dyke Short Story Prize.

Richard Schiffman is an environmental journalist, poet, and author of two biographies. His poems have been published in the New Ohio Review, the Christian Science Monitor, the New York Times and many other publications.