



The Five Lessons of Bernhard Christensen

A JOURNAL ON VOCATION, AUGSBURG COLLEGE, SPRING 2010

TILL & KEEP



Autumn, Betsy Popelka, Watercolor, 2006

Table of Contents

Till&Keep is a journal published by Exploring Our Gifts at Augsburg College, a program for the theological exploration of vocation jointly funded by the College and the Lilly Endowment, Inc. It is made by and for members of Augsburg and the greater academic community who are interested in exploring vocation and the interplay between faith and learning. For more information on the journal and other programs sponsored by Exploring Our Gifts, contact the editor, Diane Glorvigen, at glorvige@augsborg.edu.

The Five Lessons of Bernhard Christensen

- 1 The Five Lessons
- 2 Bernhard Christensen: An Informal Sketch, Bradley P. Holt
- 7 Christian Faith Liberates Minds and Lives, David L. Tiede
- 11 Reconsidering Diversity, Mary Elise Lowe
- 15 Risky Speech—Gifted Friendships, Sonja Hagander
- 20 The Love of Christ Draws Us to God, Mark D. Tranvik
- 23 To Give and Receive Mercy, Paul C. Pribbenow

Interview

- 26 An Augsburg Treasure: Phil Quanbeck I, Interviewed by Mark D. Tranvik and Philip Quanbeck II

Chapel Talk

- 32 Almost Paradise? Not!, Russell Kleckley

Story of Call

- 35 “Piti Piti Na Rive,” Margaret Trost

Book Reviews

- 39 The Father’s Grace: The Heart of Christianity, Emily Wiles
- 41 Christian Political Vocation: A Proactive Prophetic Stance, Sylvia C. Bull

Vocation at Augsburg College

- 43 Exploring Our Gifts Projects
- 45 Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”

—*Genesis 2:15*

The name of the journal, *Till & Keep*, echoes God’s purpose in placing humanity in the garden of Eden. It reflects a central theme of vocation—the call to service in God’s world.

Mark Tranvik, director, Exploring Our Gifts

Diane Glorvigen, editor

Betsey Norgard, production editor

Jen Nagorski, graphic design

The Five Lessons of Bernhard M. Christensen

PRESIDENT OF AUGSBURG COLLEGE AND SEMINARY FROM 1938 TO 1962

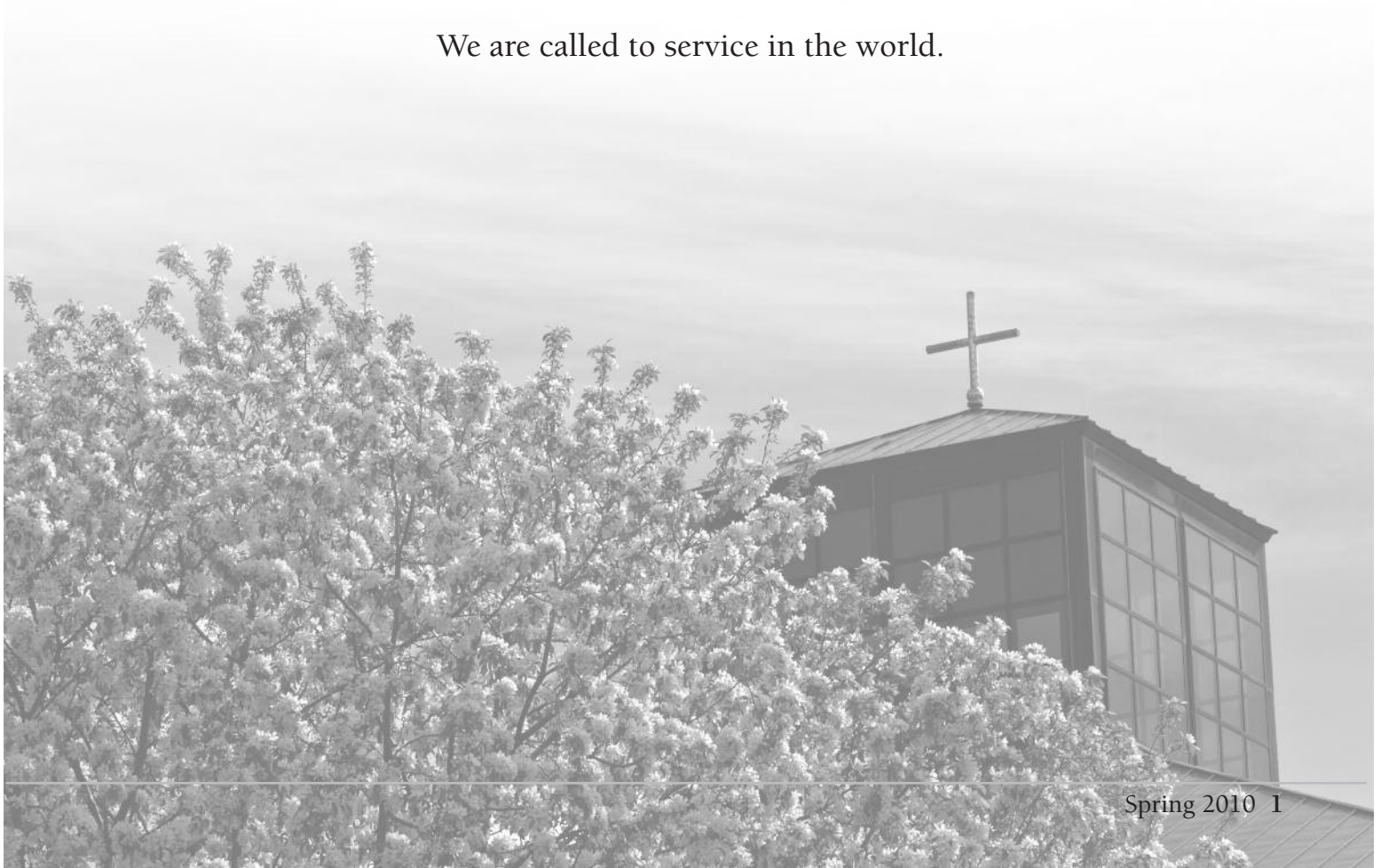
Christian faith liberates minds and lives.

Diversity strengthens vital communities.

Interfaith friendships enrich learning.

The love of Christ draws us to God.

We are called to service in the world.



Bernhard Christensen: An Informal Sketch

BRADLEY P. HOLT

This introduction to Bernhard Christensen, his life and thought, is intended to give perspective to the following articles on the five themes developed recently to summarize his influence. The story of his life, the living person, has a fullness that no list of points can summarize, just as Christian doctrines cannot replace the narratives of the Bible. Unfortunately much research is still needed to produce a definitive account of his life journey, and this article will be able to present only a sketch rather than a portrait.

A Wisconsin boy of Danish background, Christensen was born in 1901. After his childhood education, he enrolled in the Augsburg Academy, part of the three levels of Augsburg education at the time. When he moved to the big city of Minneapolis, he kept a diary and careful accounts of his meager funds. Some 70 years later his wife was to fascinate Augsburg homecoming crowds with her affectionate recounting of his adventures.

He attended Augsburg College and Seminary under the presidency of George Sverdrup, who recognized his ability and became an important mentor. Later Christensen wrote of Sverdrup's devotion to the theme of truth and freedom, which became central to Christensen's own convictions.

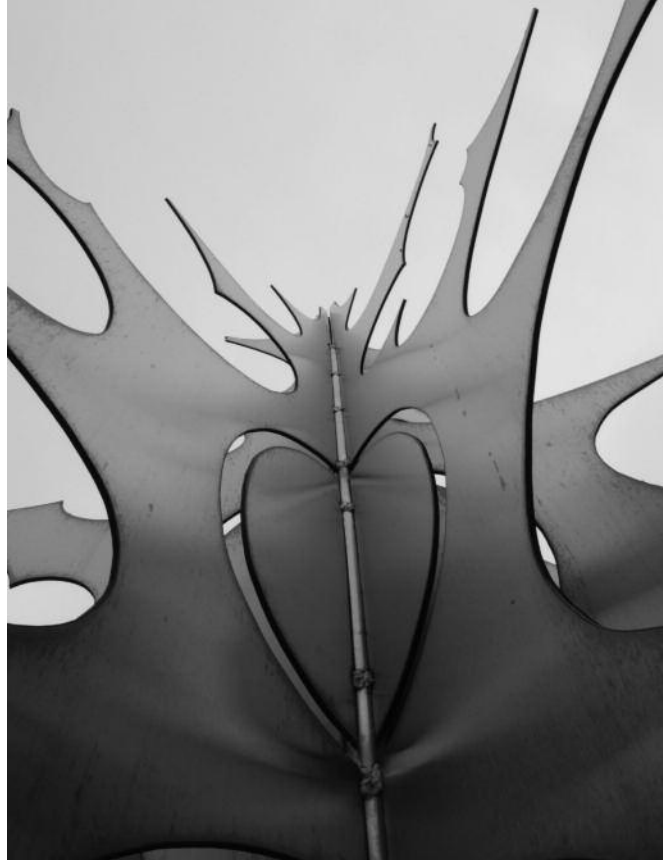
It is a little known fact that Dr. Christensen was never Reverend Christensen. He was not formally ordained after seminary, which would have required a call to a congregation. Rather, he spent a year teaching at Oak Grove School in Fargo, N.Dak., and then combined advanced study with part-time pastoral work.

This study took him far afield from the Midwest and must have been a major factor in the breadth of vision he later demonstrated. He studied at Princeton and Columbia, then studied in Europe while doing research for his doctoral dissertation. He was fluent in German and Norwegian. The dissertation in systematic theology dealt with the latest trends among German and Scandinavian faculties. His doctorate was granted by the Hartford Seminary in 1929.

During the years from 1925–31 he served as an associate of Trinity Lutheran Church in Brooklyn where he met the love of his life, Lilly Gunderson. Although she was 10 years his junior, he waited until she had

completed her advanced education to marry her. Christensen returned to Augsburg to teach theology and philosophy in 1934. Finally, however, they did marry in 1935, having waited an extra year for her graduate study at Harvard's Radcliffe College. She took not only his family

Photo by Stephen Gelfre



The Burning Bush stands on the quadrangle of Augsburg's campus. Commissioned by Bernhard Christensen, the sculpture was created by Augsburg art professor Norm Holen in 1983 and dedicated when the College Center was renamed Christensen Center in 1989. Inspired by the Old Testament story of God speaking to Moses, *The Burning Bush* is the symbol of Augsburg's Christensen Endowment.

name, but also the first name that he thought best described her: Gracia. They liked to walk in the rain and to read poetry together. All of this was in the context of a faith that lay at the core of their values. They saw themselves as a team that would work for the Kingdom of God.

This team arrived in Minneapolis by car after a stay in Chicago. The new husband was a bit embarrassed by the small, muddy campus to which he was bringing a New York woman with a new master's degree in English. The pair admired Christian pacifist and social activist Toyohiko Kagawa of Japan, who lived in the slums of Kobe to identify with the poor, so they lived at first in a small apartment south of downtown, seeking to emulate his example.

It is significant that Christensen turned away from Fundamentalism even when he might have been tempted to adopt it for employment reasons. When he was about to become a professor at Augsburg College and Seminary, someone questioned his orthodoxy. They said that he had become a Modernist, as he had been studying the new biblical criticism on the East Coast. Christensen wrote to the board a thoughtful essay about his view of the Bible, clearly distinguishing his position from that of either Modernists or Fundamentalists. That posture, which was open to the current research but was not ready to discard the beliefs of the Christian tradition, was to be very significant for the future. It illustrated his belief that the engagement of Christian faith with all of the world's learning was a fruitful dialogue and the main business of Christian education. It was too easy to huddle in a sect of the pious or to throw over the basics of the faith in light of science. It was the task of the twentieth-century Christian to explore the world of learning freely.

Sverdrup died in 1937, and Bernhard Christensen was chosen to succeed him in 1938, at about the same time as the building of Memorial Hall. He led the College and Seminary during the difficult years of World War II and the return of the veterans in the postwar period.

One of Christensen's great achievements was assembling the faculty that led to the accreditation of the College by the North Central Association. He was the chief recruiting

officer at that time, and he looked near and far for persons who shared his academic ideals. Among the great professors were Joel Torstenson, Courtland Agre, John Holum, Mario Colacci, Ted Hanwick, Paul Sonnack, Philip Quanbeck, Gerald Thorson, Anne Pederson, William Halverson, and Leland Sateren. They lifted the College's academic level and gave life to the vision of a dialogue between Christian faith and all the disciplines. He liked to repeat College slogans—"In life, the highest aim is Truth," "The Truth will set you free," and "Education for Service."

He and Mrs. Christensen sponsored a number of prayer and Bible study groups in their home over the years and showed hospitality to great and small. Students were constant guests. Without reimbursement, they made their house the center of the College's welcome to visitors, including famous scholars and dignitaries.

Since he was one of the most powerful and eloquent orators in the Lutheran Free Church, Christensen was in constant demand for speaking engagements. He once said that he liked nothing better than a good speech. He gave some significant ones in his day, and he was said to have once preached a sermon with 27 points! In addition to his campus responsibilities, Christensen frequently traveled on weekends to speak at congregations of the Lutheran Free Church, many of which were in the Norwegian immigrant communities that dotted the Great Northern Railroad route between Minnesota and Seattle. Whenever he spoke, he was also on the lookout for potential Augsburg students. He had a prodigious memory for people's names and their family relationships, and he put this skill into service for recruiting.

Another of his off-campus responsibilities was serving as chair of Mayor Hubert Humphrey's Human Rights Commission. This commission helped to defend the rights of Jews and African-Americans.

In all of this, his main goal was the Kingdom of God in actual Christian living. He emphasized that Augsburg was about the whole person, not just the intellect. His devotion to Christian education was his way of serving the Gospel, the most effective way he knew to use his gifts for the Kingdom of God. That vision of Christian education included the tension between the freedom of the liberal



Christensen outside Augsburg's science building



Christensen as "servant of all"

arts and the revelation received through the Bible. In an address entitled "The Educational Program of Augsburg College," he wrote,

The major goal of the college must be to give to its students both an understanding of the meaning of human freedom, and an experience of the same ... It is recognized, of course, that a tension exists between Christianity, with its faith in a revelation of Truth given through a historical process and culminating in a historical Person, and the liberal arts tradition, with its devotion to an increasing quest for truth through human reason and experience ... The very idea of the coming of the Truth into history in the person of Christ involves a paradox and necessitates faith and there is no way of escaping this paradox without denying the essence of Christianity. The Christian College must not avoid this tension: that is, it must not scale down or minimize, and certainly not try to explain away, the incisive demands of either thought or faith. The student himself must face the dangers involved in an honest confrontation of both.¹

Other college presidents often went on fundraising visits with Christensen, and he became friends with them. He developed especially close friendships with James Shannon at the College of St. Thomas² and Edgar Carlson at Gustavus Adolphus College. They reported that his constant question was "What have you been reading lately?" Bernhard Christensen—fundraiser that he was—was constantly reading himself. He set an excellent example of lifelong learning.

Christensen's theology of the Christian life was, in the words of his close friend and colleague, church historian Paul Sonnack, "personal but not private."³ He was not carried by the Enlightenment into individualism nor by formalism into narrowness. He did believe in the Lutheran Free Church theme of "living congregations"—a theme that implied the vital participation of the laity. This personal appropriation of the faith he later called Christian spirituality.

¹ This quotation is taken from an undated, typewritten document sent to the author by Christensen.

² The College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn. became the University of St. Thomas in 1990.

³ Paul G. Sonnack, "A Perspective on Dr. Bernhard M. Christensen" (address, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minn., date unknown).



Gracia and Bernhard Christensen in later life

An important transition came in 1962 when Dr. Christensen retired from the presidency. He had been suffering for some time from arthritis. He was forced to live with pain; heart trouble; and declining use of his hands, feet, and eyes. He served on the faculty of Luther Seminary for a few years and had the opportunity for limited travel to Norway, England, Israel, and Mexico. What caught his imagination wherever he traveled were movements for the renewal of the church and Christian discipleship.

Bernhard Christensen was acquainted with grief. Not only did he face the loss of his health during productive years, but in 1967 Naomi, a beloved daughter of Bernhard and Gracia, an artist and poet, was taken in death by lupus. He agonized over the question, why could not he have been the one to die instead of the young woman?

Although he was a man of many parts—for he loved poetry and music, he delighted in good conversation, and he took great pleasure in a good book—most of all he prized vital renewal in the Christian life. He was encouraged by the emergence of the Roman Catholic Charismatic Renewal, though he was not often well enough to attend the prayer

meetings. He patiently allowed many to pray for his healing, with little physical result.

Christensen wrote a great deal during his lifetime, only a little of it in the form of books, such as *Fire Upon the Earth* and *He Who Has No Sword*. But possibly his best book was written late in life. With the help of his wife, Gracia, he wrote *The Inward Pilgrimage: Spiritual Classics from Augustine to Bonhoeffer*.⁴ First published in 1976, it was given a new edition in 1996. This book points to some of the main themes of Christensen's convictions: Christian life is the main focus, with contributions from many traditions, and education in the form of books. This part of the epilogue embodies these themes:

And almost as wonderful as the nearness of God is the vivid sense of an encompassing fellowship of those, from all the Christian ages, who have lived and worked as good friends of God Within this goodly fellowship we share the crust of the desert fathers; we laugh and sing with St. Francis and his Little Poor Men; ... we glory with Martin Luther in the freedom of the justified Christian;

⁴ (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996).

with John Woolman we bear the burdens of poverty and slavery; with Brother Lawrence in his kitchen we meet God among the pots and kettles ... The riches of all are ours and we are Christ's and Christ is God's.

Yet our final goal can never be our own spiritual enrichment or enjoyment. The great spiritual writers all clearly teach that the coming of the kingdom takes priority over the attainment of even the finest of our individual aims. Life for each Christian is to be found, not by saving and perfecting it, but by losing it on behalf of the kingdom.⁵

Christensen's legacy of learning, faith, hard work, and devotion to truth and freedom gives us a vivid guide for our present thinking about the mission and practice of Augsburg College. One interpretation of that legacy is the list of five themes to which this issue of *Till & Keep* is devoted.

Bradley P. Holt is a professor of religion at Augsburg College. He attended Augsburg during Christensen's last years as president of Augsburg, and he was a student of both Mrs. Christensen and Dr. Christensen in different settings. After graduating in 1963, he earned degrees at Luther Seminary and Yale University. Over the years he has kept in close touch with the Christensen family, through the death of Mrs. Christensen in 2009 and up to the present.

⁵ Ibid., 151-52.

Christian Faith Liberates Minds and Lives

DAVID L. TIEDE

Learning from a Master Teacher

Bernhard Christensen became my teacher after his years as president at Augsburg. On his invitation, I found him seated with his gnarled, arthritic hands folded on the table. His mind was alive, seeking clarity on complicated topics. “Tell me about your doctoral studies!” “How do you think the seminary can use critical methods of interpretation?” “What do you know of the prayers of the first Christians?” He didn’t jump from one topic to another. He followed each question through, quickly exposed the large gaps in this young professor’s understanding, then he moved on. The experience was humbling and exhilarating. His infirm body held the magnificent mind and deep spirit of a master teacher. A few years later, he introduced us at Trinity Lutheran Congregation to the Christian spiritual classics, leading to his book, *The Inward Pilgrimage*.¹

Coming to Augsburg in 2005 for a five-year term as the Bernhard M. Christensen Professor was also humbling and exhilarating. Philip Quanbeck II, Mark Tranvik, John Knight,² and I pored over Christensen’s legacy, which had been loyally preserved by the Christensen Endowment Committee. We formed a “pact” to distill the “lessons from Bernhard M. Christensen” to keep this wisdom alive for Augsburg’s dynamic future. Christensen was ahead of us in his awareness of the large challenges facing Christian higher education. In his history of Augsburg’s first century, Carl H. Chrislock quoted from Christensen’s 1956 report to the Lutheran Free Church:

We find ourselves living in the midst of many conflicting theories of what higher education, including Christian higher education should be. It is not easy to chart and carry through a clear course which does

full justice both to the ideals of educational freedom upon which Augsburg has in the past prided itself and to the principle of whole-hearted dedication to Christ and the Scriptures upon which alone, we are convinced, the edifices of true Christian freedom can be securely built.³

Hear three rich themes of freedom: 1) “the Lutheran Free Church” with its zeal for free and independent congregations as the form of God’s church in the new land; 2) “the ideals of educational freedom” as the pride of Augsburg; and 3) “true Christian freedom” built upon the foundations of Christ and the Scriptures. So what does it mean, going forward, to learn the first Christensen lesson? Christian faith liberates minds and lives!

Learning by Heart, Mind, and Strength

The Christensen “lessons” are more discerned wisdom than propositions. They won’t be formally “adopted” by the faculty or the regents. The lessons remain works in process, alive to deliberation, seeking to mark Augsburg’s distinctive strengths. Their profound Christian character inescapably makes some non-Christian students, faculty, and staff wonder if they are included. But Christensen’s wisdom means that Augsburg defends the freedoms of **all** not *in spite of* but *because of* its Lutheran Christian identity.

In early versions, this first lesson began with a definite article, “*The* Christian faith liberates minds and lives.” In some traditions, the emphasis would then fall on faith as “right beliefs.” Well and good, and in accord with “the faith once entrusted to all the saints,” as identified in Jude 3. But in Augsburg’s Pauline and Lutheran heritage of Christian freedom, faith is more profoundly appreciated as “trust.” The

¹ *The Inward Pilgrimage: Spiritual Classics from Augustine to Bonhoeffer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976).

² Philip Quanbeck II is the chair of the Religion Department, Mark Tranvik is a professor of religion, and at the time of these meetings John Knight was the associate director of the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning.

³ *From Fjord to Freeway* (Minneapolis: Augsburg College, 1969), 222.

lesson is stronger without the definite article, marking Christian “trust” as confidence in a relationship. True liberation comes with trusting God’s love in Christ and thereby becoming empowered to make the world more trustworthy. “For freedom Christ has set us free,” proclaimed the Apostle Paul,⁴ and God’s whole law is summed up in a single command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁵

The educational consequences of this conviction are substantial both in preserving “academic freedom” and in dignifying the work of inquiring minds as a “calling.” Christensen’s confidence that “the edifices of true Christian freedom can be securely built” upon “the principle of whole-hearted dedication to Christ and the Scriptures”⁶ will seem incredible to many secular academics and implausible to some Christians.

What if you read the Scriptures, as many people do, to be in profound conflict with current science in biology, chemistry, and physics or as the ultimate rule book for the social sciences? Then you are likely to think the Bible will constrain “the ideals of educational freedom,” not liberate the mind. And what if you thought God was reduced away by the rationalisms of the modern world, as novices in secularism often do? Then you may be surprised and liberated to discover later that you can still believe in the purposes of your life and work as divine callings. The struggles have changed since the days of Bernhard Christensen, but his lessons continue to empower freedom of thought.

When accused of not honoring the “verbal inspiration of the scriptures,” a young Christensen demonstrated the liberation of mind that required decades of debate in many other Lutheran colleges and seminaries. On November 29, 1928, after returning from Berlin, he wrote prophetically to Augsburg’s president, George Sverdrup:

In the scientific study of theology I do not believe that we can avoid a consideration of the historico-critical research that has been carried out in the last hundred years. These critical studies I do not look upon as

hindrances, but rather as helps, to the true understanding of the Scripture. In general—though by no means in detail—I believe that the methods and results of historical criticism must be accepted if we are to have a theological message for those of our people who think earnestly and deeply.⁷

This courage of “faith seeking understanding” was not easy in Christensen’s era “in the midst of many conflicting theories of what higher education, including Christian higher education should be.” Augsburg is bold in the theological exploration of vocation, emphasizing the

calling of the College to equip its graduates for service to the neighbor. But nobody promises having a vocation will be easy, for the graduates or for the College. It is easier to speak of “the ideals of educational freedom upon which Augsburg has in the past prided itself” than to exercise this freedom in contemporary higher education.

Research-based doctoral education has advanced academic quality in higher education with emphasis on specialization within disciplines. Faculty with callings in



Church in Ireland, Curt Paulsen, Digital Print, 2009

⁴ Galatians 5:1

⁵ Galatians 5:14

⁶ Carl H. Chrislock, *From Fjord to Freeway* (Minneapolis: Augsburg College, 1969), 222.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

undergraduate teaching, however, contend in the arenas of the academic guilds for their appointments and advancements based on research expertise, while also striving to attend to student learning and community engagement. Instead of narrowing the discussion, as Christian higher education is suspected of doing, this faith that liberates minds and lives requires great “bandwidth” in faculty knowledge, interpretation, and wisdom. Education of this character fuels the torch of the liberal arts and sciences, committed not only to technical competency, but to learning for liberation of minds, bodies, and spirits.

“Vocation” is no mere “idea,” or even less in post-modern vernacular, “a notion.” The Latin verb for “vocation” (*vocare*) and the Greek for “calling” (*kallein*) both express confidence that God entrusts people with meaningful roles and responsibilities. Life is not merely one dumb thing after another, then you die. Vocation is a conviction, a trust in God’s care for people, institutions, and the world. To use a three-dollar word, vocation is a hermeneutic, a faith interpreting life as liberated to make the world more trustworthy.

Jesus Means Freedom

Even Augsburg’s seal—*Through Truth to Freedom*—is more than an academic slogan. It is based in a distinctive knowledge, announced and embodied by Jesus in the Gospel according to John: “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free!”⁸ The fourth evangelist reports Jesus’ words were offensive for his contemporaries who insisted “We have never been slaves to anyone!”⁹ Self-assured moderns who see themselves as masters of their own destiny will also likely be irritated at the suggestion that Christian faith could in any way liberate their minds and lives.

Christensen’s first lesson is strong medicine for what ails humanity in its entanglement with systems and

powers whose reality most people would rather deny. To use another three-dollar term, this is the *theological anthropology* of Christian faith. Centuries of reflection have belabored how compromised human beings actually are in our agency, often just looking out for “number one,” while claiming generous motivations. Truth be told, we seldom want to hear about being liberated *from* anything. But the Augsburg seal identifies Jesus as the embodiment of this truth that is inconvenient to the self-satisfied and brings liberation from self-interested complicities for those who know their need.

How about being liberated *for* vocations of service to the neighbor and the world? What kind of news does this sound like to us? Christensen’s first lesson is just beginning.

One of Christensen’s chapters on the spiritual classics deals with Martin Luther’s treatise on “The Freedom of the Christian.” He highlights Luther’s famous dictum that “A Christian is lord of all, completely free of everything. A Christian is a servant of all, completely attentive to the needs of all.”¹⁰ Luther’s vision of liberated service will sound peculiar in modern political speech where freedom is an inalienable right and liberation means social equalization.¹¹ While always advocating democratic liberties and social justice, Christensen illumines human freedom to enact God’s love for the world. In doing good works in gratitude to God, “we can truly be effective in behalf of our neighbors.”

But that confidence sharpens the question of our human agency. No longer needing to justify ourselves, we are truly liberated to do good for others and the world. We *can* be effective, but Christians have no guarantee that what we do *will* produce the most beneficial results. What actions, policies, and engagements will truly, actually, and practically make the world more trustworthy?

⁸ 8:32

⁹ 8:33. See Ernst Kasemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, translated by Frank Clarke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

¹⁰ Bernhard M. Christensen, *The Inward Pilgrimage: An Introduction to Christian Spiritual Classics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1996), 53. This translation of Martin Luther’s dictum comes from Mark D. Tranvik’s new study edition of *The Freedom of a Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 50.

¹¹ It is worth noting that Paul’s vision of Christlike service as Jesus’ use of divine power was itself a critique of the domination that was the political theology of the Roman Empire (see Philippians 2:6-11).

No longer needing to justify ourselves, we are truly liberated to do good for others and the world.

At Augsburg, President Pribbenow¹² picks up the challenge with his theme, “We believe we are called to serve our neighbors!” President Frame’s¹³ theme of “Access to Excellence” also set the bar high for the results by which the College will be measured. And Christensen’s lessons require the strongest intelligences of mind, heart, and body, not *in spite of* but *because* Christian faith liberates minds and lives for effective service to the neighbor and the world.

The excellence of Christian higher education will be measured by its capacity to equip leaders for the dramatic challenges in the 21st century. These leaders will need high competencies to navigate a world of many cultures and religions amid global economics and digital communications. They will also need to be deeply centered in their callings as agents of God’s love and care to make the world a more trustworthy place, especially for the most vulnerable. Equipping such competent and courageous leaders requires disciplining all the strengths of the humanities, arts, and sciences to serve this excellence.

Christensen’s lesson of liberation marks him as a master teacher. His vision of measuring educational excellence by both its intellectual quality and its vocational clarity reveals his own mental prowess and spiritual power. He was, however, the first to note that he was but a learner himself, a disciple of the greatest master teacher: “Of all the teachers and leaders ... on earth, Jesus Christ alone plumbed the full depth of humanity’s problem and dared proclaim an adequate solution.”¹⁴

Christensen understood that the full range of human liberation rests in and is empowered by God’s love for the world. In responding to a question about the great learning of God’s law, Jesus articulated the breadth and depth of Christian higher education. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁵

David L. Tiede is the Bernhard M. Christensen Professor of Religion and Vocation at Augsburg College. From 1987 to 2005, he was the president of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has degrees from St. Olaf College (BA), Luther Seminary (MDiv), and Harvard University (PhD). He combines a deep interest in the Bible and the world of the New Testament with a love for the mission of the church.

¹² Paul C. Pribbenow, president of Augsburg College from 2006 to the present

¹³ William V. Frame, president of Augsburg College from 1997 - 2006

¹⁴ *Fire Upon the Earth* (Minneapolis: Lutheran Free Church Publishing, 1941), 11.

¹⁵ Matthew 22:34-40

Reconsidering Diversity

MARY ELISE LOWE

When Bernhard M. Christensen was president of Augsburg College, most students were descendants of European Lutheran Christians. In recent decades, the College has changed dramatically and now includes students, staff, and faculty from around the world, from different cultures, and various religious traditions. Last fall the College's incoming day student population was 38% students of color.¹ President Christensen's goal of interfaith friendships and a diverse community is still being vigorously pursued and was re-affirmed in the document, *Augsburg 2004: Extending the Vision*, which includes the following commitment: "Augsburg's conception of diversity is remarkably broad. It includes people from a variety of cultural, racial, religious, and socio-economic groups."² One need only walk around campus to see how far the College has come toward achieving this vision.

The Limits of Diversity

I have been teaching at Augsburg for seven years, and I celebrate the increasing multiculturalism of the College. Like other faculty I regularly participate in diversity training and try to create courses that welcome students from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. As my students encounter the Bible and new beliefs, we regularly discuss interfaith dialogue, women in religious leadership, and issues of race and social justice. Yet over the years I have come to realize that many students possess an uneven understanding of diversity. On one hand, students often tell me that they came to Augsburg because of its diverse population, so they don't need to talk about diversity. On the other hand, their class comments and written work often reveal an uncritical understanding of race, gender, immigration, and other faith traditions.

For example, in a recent conversation about prayer in school, several students said they resented the way

some of their high school classmates had been excused from class for religious activities, while they as Christians were expected to remain. And in a reflection paper, a student described how she and her family believe that the collapse of the I-35W bridge into the Mississippi River in August 2007 was triggered when a god from their tradition became angered by youth from another immigrant community with a different faith. There seems to be an inconsistency between what some students say about diversity and what their classroom reflections reveal about their attitudes towards people with traditions and beliefs different from their own.

Perhaps part of this disconnect is caused by the limits of the diversity model itself. According to this model, diversity often amounts to nothing more than a conscious effort by a dominant group to recruit people from underrepresented religious, ethnic, gender, or cultural groups. While this is a worthy goal, it does not require a critical analysis of power, nor does it call those with power to recognize and acknowledge their privilege. Merely welcoming new people to campus may not be enough. Native American social change advocate Patricia St. Onge has written extensively on diversity and multicultural competency and recognizes that diversity "does not always lead to deeper respect for and incorporation of the needs, assets, and viewpoints of diverse communities."³ Even though we study and work together, we may not come to really know one another or become aware of one another's struggles. We need a more rigorous and interactive model of diversity that calls each of us to tell our own stories—be they of privilege or struggle—and to deeply listen to and learn from the richness, challenges, and legacies of other cultures and faiths.

President Paul Pribbenow frequently reminds us that Augsburg is diverse not in spite of but *because* of its

¹ "Augsburg College Fall 2009 Enrollment Profile: Tenth Day Census Data," (Minneapolis: Augsburg College, 2009).

² Mark Engebretson and Joan Griffin, *Augsburg 2004: Extending the Vision* (Minneapolis: Augsburg College, 1998), 20.

³ St. Onge, Patricia, et al., *Embracing Cultural Competency: A Roadmap for Nonprofit Capacity Builders*, (St. Paul: Fieldstone Alliance, 2009), 24.

Lutheran heritage. As a theologian, I often draw on texts from the past to help face contemporary challenges. And although Martin Luther may seem a surprising ally in considering diversity, I believe insights from his theology can strengthen our efforts to build a more multicultural campus community. Allow me to suggest four resources in his thought that can help us move closer to our goal of increased cultural and racial competency, religious sensitivity, and celebration of difference.

Diversity and the Neighbor

Why do we pursue intentional diversity at Augsburg? According to *Augsburg 2004*, we extend a welcome to people from a range of communities in order to reflect God's love for all, model the principles of equality and liberty upon which the US was built, and foster dialectical conversations that create unique opportunities for learning.⁴ In their web article "Why Does Diversity Matter at College Anyway?" educators Lynn

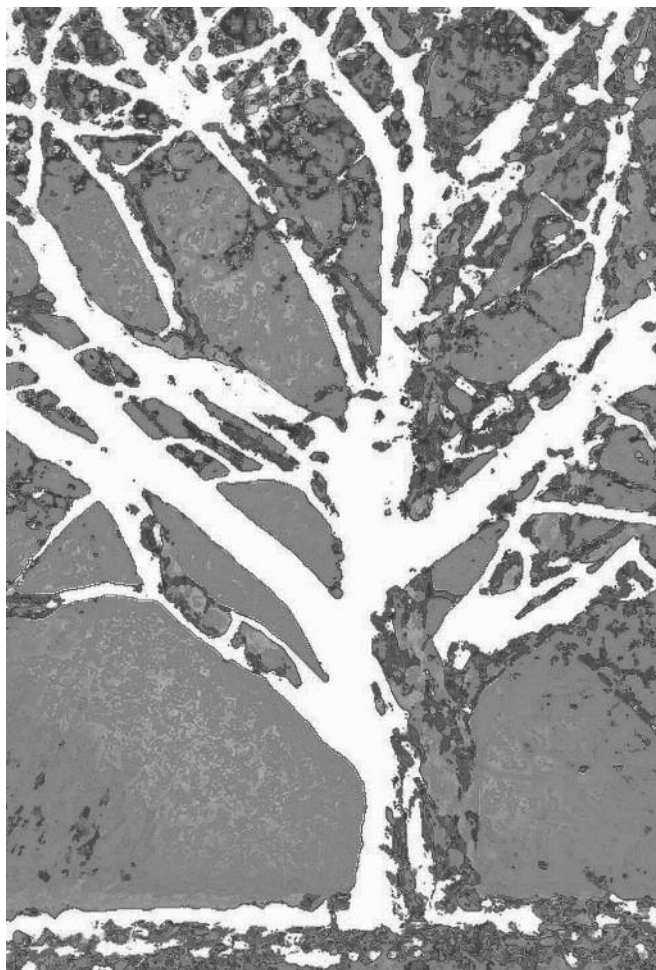
F. Jacobs and Jeremy S. Hyman suggest that greater diversity helps students "expand worldliness, prepare for future careers, and expand social development."⁵ These are adequate reasons, but they are primarily utilitarian and individualistic. One of Luther's core commitments was that everything we do should be for the service and benefit of the neighbor. In his treatise, "The Freedom of a Christian," Luther wrote, "I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor ... I will do nothing in this life except what is

profitable, necessary, and life-giving for my neighbor."⁶ If we are guided by Luther's concern for the other, then pursuing diversity and listening to and knowing one another is not done for our own personal development, but for the sake of those whose voices need to be heard,

whose stories need to be celebrated, and whose truths need to be spoken.

Diversity and Kenosis

One of the main weaknesses with the diversity model is that it often masks power imbalances and does not challenge those in the dominant cultural group to recognize how they benefit from existing racial, cultural, and religious inequalities at the College and the broader society. *Augsburg 2004* states that "American society has favored some people (e.g., white people) to the disadvantage, even oppression, of others," but it does not ask those with power to acknowledge their influence and give up power for the sake of the neighbor.⁷



Arboretum Tree, Curt Paulsen, Digital Print, 2009

When reflecting on the work and mission of Jesus, Luther paid close attention to the power that Jesus Christ gave up in his ministry of reconciliation. Philippians 2 is central to Luther's view of power because it explains how the Son of God gave up power when he became human and serves as example of how those with power should forsake it for the benefit of others. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but

⁴ *Augsburg 2004*, 20 and 24.

⁵ Lynn F. Jacobs and Jeremy S. Hyman, "Why Does Diversity Matter at College Anyway?" *U.S. News and World Report*, <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/professors-guide/2009/08/12/why-does-diversity-matter-at-college-anyway.html>.

⁶ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, trans. Mark Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 82.

⁷ *Augsburg 2004*, 21.

emptied himself [kenosis], taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself.”⁸ Luther did not focus on the way the divine Son gave up heavenly power, but rather on how Jesus of Nazareth constantly gave up *earthly* power to serve those around him. Luther wrote, “Accordingly, ‘the form of a servant’ implies the assumption of the attitude and bearing of a servant in relation to others.”⁹ Luther saw this giving-up-of-power most clearly when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”¹⁰ Perhaps those of us with power—because of our race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, or gender—can learn from the kenotic ministry of Jesus and give up this power for the sake of our neighbors who have been traditionally disenfranchised from higher education.

Diversity and *Coram Deo*

Another shortcoming with the diversity model is that too often it encourages us to see one another only as members of a particular racial, religious, or cultural group. We don’t encounter one another as unique individuals with specific stories, gifts, and vocations. Once again, Luther may be of some assistance. He was well aware of the human tendency to use others as a means to an end. And he warned Christians about the danger of doing good works for others in order to earn God’s grace. Luther believed that humans should be viewed first and foremost as creatures before God, or *coram Deo*.¹¹ He argued that we should always see others as individuals created by God and standing before God in all their particularity. “Humanity’s

fundamental situation is defined by its existence before God (*coram Deo*) and, secondarily, by its existence before God and others in society (*coram hominibus*) ... Before others in society (*coram hominibus*), one then becomes utterly receptive to the needs and wounds of the neighbor.”¹²

Viewing another as an individual before God—rather than merely a member of a particular group—deepens

Viewing another
as an individual
before God ...
deepens my
openness and
obligation to
that person.

my openness and obligation to that person. “In the presence of another I am in some way claimed by him, while he is also claimed by me. It is true both that he is in my presence and I am in his presence.”¹³ *Coram Deo* means that we are obligated to our neighbors in a specific time, place, and cultural context precisely because they are first regarded by God.

Diversity and Paradox

Another insight from the

Lutheran tradition that can strengthen our diversity work is the acceptance of paradox. This was recognized by the authors of *Augsburg 2004* who wrote, “Indeed [Augsburg’s] Lutheran heritage stresses paradox—the realization that deep truths about God’s relation to human beings and the rest of creation cannot always be packaged as facile sound bites. Augsburg’s model of education ... recognizes the complexity of many issues of both faith and human life.”¹⁴ This Lutheran acceptance of living in the midst of paradox can also help us move towards an authentically diverse community at the College. Paradox here has its roots in Luther’s claim that humans are simultaneously saints and sinners who are bound to serve the neighbor, yet free from the works

⁸ Philippians 2:7-8

⁹ Martin Luther, “Sermon on Philippians 2: 5-11 for Palm Sunday,” *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. VII, trans. John Nicholas Lenker, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 2000), 171.

¹⁰ John 13:14-15

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960 and St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), LW 10: 418, see also LW 11: 252.

¹² Deanna A. Thompson, *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 19.

¹³ Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 195.

¹⁴ *Augsburg 2004*, 7.

of the law. Perhaps this emphasis on productive tension can help inform our classroom discussions and college policies. I see how hard it is for my students to have honest discussions about gender, race, disability, nationalism, and religion, so I try to model an acceptance of paradox in the classroom. I help students express their views, see how their beliefs grow out of their own stories, listen to the experiences of others, and be open to the possibility that their views may change. Living in a paradox-friendly community means that we each must accept responsibility for our participation in systems of privilege and exploitation, recognize that differences cannot always be resolved in the classroom, and understand that honesty is more important than agreement.

It may seem surprising to use Lutheran theology to argue for a more personally rigorous and socially complex approach to diversity at the College, and I am aware of the paradoxical character of this strategy. I hope this proposal sparks a deeper dialogue about diversity in which Augsburg staff, faculty, and students can honestly name their realities and draw on the richness and particularity of their own religious and cultural traditions to help us create a more welcoming and intellectually rich community.

Mary Elise Lowe is an assistant professor of religion at Augsburg College. She has degrees from Pacific Lutheran University, (BA), Luther Seminary (MDiv) and The Graduate Theological Union (PhD).

Risky Speech—Gifted Friendships

SONJA HAGANDER

The Augsburg community was shocked to learn of the brutal murder of one of our students. It was a weekday morning in September 2008 when Ahmednur Ali was shot and killed while on his way to volunteer at the nearby Brian Coyle Community Center. It is our practice as a College to gather in the chapel on the news of the death of a student—to pray, support one another, cry, and provide safe space for the entire community. How might we now, as Christian pastors, provide that space for the campus in light of the death of our friend Ali—a practicing Muslim? What would we say? What would we pray? How might we gather with the cross of Christ present in the space, amidst reporters and cameras and, most importantly, a grieving community?

In our brief chapel planning time before the service, my friend Mohamed Sallam, director of Pan-Afrikan Student Services, was gracious enough to join us. We all sat together in the space as colleagues in grief and people of faith, even though our faith traditions were different. I experienced the feeling of “standing on holy ground” as we prayed—Christians and Muslims together—for the day. Mohamed says that “before we gathered as a community, four or five agents of the College gathered to ponder where we thought the conversation should go. What this event provided us with was an opportunity to do what was right. Had we gone about our business without stopping to think, I am not sure that anyone would have made a fuss. However, since as a College we decided to pursue the most appropriate course of action, we not only did the right thing, but we also became friends in the process.”

During the 20-minute service the president gave an overview of what had happened in Ali’s death, we shared a public prayer for comfort, and Mohamed explained part of the Islamic tradition around death

and shared some insights into Ali’s life and contribution to Augsburg as a student. We sang songs from the Taizé community such as “Wait for the Lord,” “Stay with Us,” and “Bless the Lord My Soul.”¹ We, as a community—no matter what our individual faiths—shared our grief, our pain at the injustice of such a death, and our concern for Ali’s family.

Mohamed notes that our location in the Augsburg community brings particular gifts and challenges when he says, “It would have been convenient if we were in some other place where Muslims and non-Muslims know one another better. But, I am not interested in convenience. I can say honestly that after that gathering, my coworkers earned my friendship and I hope that I have earned theirs.”

As a pastor I ask myself, “How do I care for members of my community in crisis?” What does it mean for me and others to be actively engaged with populations in whose religions I have little theological expertise?² How do I give pastoral care to all students (faculty and staff, too), no matter what their beliefs, especially in terms of trauma, rights of passage, familial relationships, personal development, and their pursuit of meaningful life? I am drawn to these questions because of our students, Augsburg’s unique geographical location, and my own friendships.

I found her or she found me in the library stacks about a decade ago. She, a new faculty member and a Jew—and I, a pastor and a Lutheran Christian. I was pleased to welcome her to campus and be received by her warmth, and Barbara Lehmann was happy to make my acquaintance. The friendship grew over Asian food in Dinkytown, the planning of interfaith services, campus meetings, and the natural inclination to reach out to one another immediately following September 11, 2001. By that time we had developed a deep sense

¹ The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic community in France. Taizé music emphasizes repetition of short phrases, often taken from scripture, set to simple melodies.

² Augsburg College sits in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, amidst the largest population of Somali Muslims outside Somalia. We have, in our College community, a broad spectrum of faith traditions.

of mutual trust. In my office, she and I and another faculty member, a Muslim, met over a period of time, hoping to model a peace-filled response to the horrible occasion of 9/11. Over the years, she has deeply respected my preaching of Christ crucified and risen and my commitment to the broad themes of new life that arises out of death through baptism. I have come to her for friendship, and she has celebrated the birth of my two children and advised and lifted me up as a new parent. I have learned from her a deep commitment to ritual and the cycle of life. She has taught me about our shared grief, and her Jewish practice of *shivah* now informs my own grief practices and pastoral care on campus. We have pondered the book of Job together and wondered about its consequences and God's actions in our own lives. I have learned about the importance of the specificity of the chosen people and the vitality of the land associated with modern-day Judaism. In her grace she has allowed me to make mistakes about how I understood Judaism. She has gently taught me about how she has interpreted and lived out her faith. We, as friends, have created a safe space in which to learn from each other. We do not avoid religion; instead, it is a core component of our friendship.³

My friend tells me, "I find gifts in interfaith relationships ... I can learn about different ways of prayer, thinking about the Bible, interpretation of texts. I find that we have different rituals of celebrating lifecycle events—births,

deaths, weddings, or divorces ... it helps me deepen my understanding of myself by seeing my culture in relationship with others."



Bridge Walk, Curt Paulsen, Digital Print, 2009

It is important to note that on the Augsburg campus, Christians are the majority, so even though this essay is about interfaith relationships, it is written within that context. My friend Barbara perceptively notes that her religion suggests that "our purpose is to heal the brokenness of this world," and that it "obligates us to treat the stranger with kindness and graciousness." She reminds me that in being a member of a religious minority, one cannot help but interact with people of other faiths. But she believes that mere contact is not enough—that being in this position "compels us to do more." She actively engages with others, and in so doing she shows them that "stereotypes of Jews may need to be updated (or maybe

confirmed) through knowing me." In other words, friendships take place in public.

As a member of the Augsburg community, I personally have been blessed and enriched by my colleagues and students who come from a variety of faith traditions. For several years the College has made both formal and informal attempts at interfaith dialogue.⁴ For example, in 2008, Campus Ministry sponsored an interfaith dialogue on "Creation: The Common Story" led by Abrahamic faith leaders.⁵ Last year we hosted another such dialogue on

³ In his challenging article "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions," Gavin D'Costa cheers on the honoring of particular truth claims. He argues that there is "no high ground in the pluralist position, for in principle its logic is no different from the exclusivist position. The only difference is in terms of truth claims and the criteria for truth employed by the practitioners." *Religious Studies* 32 (June 1996): 225.

⁴ Over the years formal dialogues, events, and worship services have occurred alongside a myriad of friendships, relationships, and even pastoral care across faith traditions on this campus. It goes without saying that one essay barely "scratches the surface" of the depth of friendships shared through the years on this campus.

⁵ Lectures and interfaith worship took place in the Hoversten Chapel at Augsburg on March 3-4, 2008. The panelists included Dr. Hatem al-Haj, Islamic scholar and pediatrician; Rabbi Lynn Liberman, Beth Jacob Congregation in Mendota Heights, Minn.; and Mark Throntvick, professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

“Death, Grief, and the End of Life,” attending not only to broad themes but responding to the deaths of six students in 2008-2009.

This interfaith commitment has an institutional history. As I understand, Augsburg’s sixth president, Bernhard Christensen, not only valued scholarship, studied scripture at a deep level, and cultivated his interests in critical theory, but he also broke new ground by reaching out to other religious groups. It is important to note that while the idea that “interfaith friendships enrich learning” is a part of Christensen’s legacy, this emphasis is more gleaned than a direct gift from him. Christensen was very interested in ecumenical dialogue, which was considered the leading edge of Christian thought during his time.⁶ For instance, he attended the very first gathering of the World Council of Churches in 1948 (Amsterdam). He also strongly advocated that the Lutheran Free Church (LFC) join the American Lutheran Church (ALC). And though it might not even be considered noteworthy today, Christensen was a radical in that he befriended Catholic and Orthodox Christians. This behavior was especially significant given Christensen’s context—a position of distinction in the LFC, which was a small, pious denomination. And so, we might extrapolate from Christensen’s attitudes toward other Christians that, if he were with us today, he would feel similarly toward persons from other faith traditions. One may also conclude from Christensen’s work with Hubert H. Humphrey on the Human Rights Commission that he was very much committed to combating discrimination against Jewish-Americans and African-Americans in the Twin Cities during the 1960s. Alongside this, Christensen was a strong supporter of Christian missions to people of other religions. According to Brad Holt, Christensen “had the courage to go beyond what was conventional in exploring the faith of the other.”

Vital to our interfaith endeavors on campus is that they be both personal and public. The idea that friendships are personal is incontestable, but the idea that friendships are public may be a challenging

notion for some. Certainly, people do not always assume that matters of faith are public matters, yet I would argue they are, and as I understand the Christensen legacy, the public nature of faith was instinctive for him. Paul Sonnack, professor emeritus, explained the connection Christensen drew between personal faith and the community:

There is another important dimension to Dr. Christensen’s understanding of religion as primarily personal. To put it bluntly, he was convinced that the personal is never simply to be equated with the individual. There is a strong inclination, particularly in a society like ours where rampant individualism prevails in both religion and secular arenas, to make that mistaken equation. For Christensen, that which is personal *necessarily includes the dimension of community*. A person is never only a discrete individual who lives in isolation from other individuals. What is constitutive of personhood is precisely relationship with other persons, and it is that relationship which forms and shapes human community.”⁷

The Gospel of John is a communal gospel. Ever since I entered the ministry, my journey through John has significantly informed my work as a pastor on campus. In June 1995, this passage from John was read at my service of ordination:

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.⁸

⁶ Conversation with Brad Holt, Augsburg College Religion Department, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 20, 2009.

⁷ Paul G. Sonnack, “A Perspective on Dr. Bernhard M. Christensen” (address, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minn., date unknown), 3.

⁸ John 15:15-17

It seems to me that the Gospel of John has several key themes that may nourish interfaith friendships and enrich learning on campus—love, friendship, free speech, and public space. Because of these elements, I believe this gospel can provide a roadmap (though not necessarily the only roadmap) for further interfaith endeavors at the College.⁹

The connection between love and friendship portrayed in John has intrigued me because of its implications for interfaith conversation. This gospel uses the two Greek words *agape* and *filia* when referring to love and friendship, respectively, although *agape* appears more than twice as many times as the other. After the Lazarus story,¹⁰ the text gradually blends the two terms, and by the end of John the words become completely transposable. It is in the *conversation* between Peter and Jesus that both words are used repeatedly and interchangeably. The repetition shouts to the reader to “take notice!” What does this repetition and collapsing of terms mean for us as readers, and moreover, as members of our diverse community?

For one, we are encouraged to think about how God’s sending the Son relates to friendship. The death of Jesus seems to make friendship between God and humanity possible. God’s love for the world (*agape*) is present prior to Jesus’ presence and death and glory; *but it seems that through Jesus’ glorification we become friends with God*. John broadens the notion of love to include love as friendship. We cannot miss the point that *we are friends because we are drawn up into the very life of God*. This is not a life of domination, for we are no longer as servants, but a life of freedom and friendship. Glorification is not for the sake of

itself, but for the sake of community, and this creates in us a sense of freedom. This has significance in terms of our interfaith setting on campus. One might dare say that to enter into interfaith friendships and commitments is to *enter into friendship with God!*

The invitation to friendship in the Gospel of John also challenges one to explore and reflect on the role of conversation and language in the gospel. The gospel writer emphasizes—even delights—in the theme of speaking and speech. We see this in the very first verse: “In the

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”¹¹ God is not cause; God is speech. The word *parresia*, which means “plainness of speech, outspokenness, or frankness”¹² provides an avenue into this discussion. The word is used nine times in John; the only other time it is used in the four gospels is in Mark—once. This number alone draws our attention. In John’s gospel we find a direct connection between speech and openness.

Significant for John is that *God is a speech-bringer*. Jesus’ voice, not work, draws people into God. From the mouth

of Jesus, the idea of speaking plainly is directly connected to friendship; speech is transparent to thought. This is also a model for the language of interfaith friendship—where one speaks in a free, unguarded manner. John models for us the public nature of conversation, a quality that applies particularly to interfaith conversations and relationships since they not only occur on a personal level but also extend into our public lives on campus. One notices early in the narrative that Jesus’ speaking openly is radical. In fact, it gets him killed. We read, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him!”¹³ The danger of openness is frequently repeated in John. There is risk in conversation

... to enter into interfaith friendships and commitments is to enter into friendship with God!

⁹ It could be fruitful to embed this conversation in overarching qualities like “hospitality” or “justice” found in many of the major religions of the world. And other writings have done this. I wonder, is it possible, for me, as a Christian, to embed these kinds of relationships in even the specificity of a gospel text?

¹⁰ John 11:1-57

¹¹ John 1:1

¹² Walter Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 630.

¹³ John 7:25-26a

when it takes place in public, even when Jesus is the one who sets the stage.

A variety of voices enter into this conversation space in this gospel. John includes confused disciples, voices from the margins, faithful confessions, and angry crowds—just to name a few. Emphasizing the speakers reveals the power and dialogical nature of the relationships, and this in turn encourages members of a community to enter into space with one another, to create in conversation something new. When we follow the conversation modeling in John, we are able to listen to the many voices of others with confidence, in a space where all voices are free—no shame, no dominance, no muting. As in the text, we become participants in the conversation, not simply spectators.

In John's gospel, the narrator weaves all these terms together—speech, love as *agape*, love as *filia*—to emphasize their interconnectedness and open our minds to imagine God's presence in the world in a new, radical way. In John, God's power is channeled into making all things open. The future that arises from the present is not one of dominance, but of communication. Being in conversation means that both God and we risk change. How much are we willing to risk? To receive? No matter the answer, the Gospel of John gives me as a pastor, and all of us as conversation partners, room to breathe. How risky—and yet how freeing.

Friends, colleagues, students, and scripture have all shaped my understanding of how interfaith

friendships enrich learning. Over the years, insights from these various sources have organized themselves into themes. I offer them now in the form of resolutions:

- That we allow and nurture a *deep love for one another*, keeping in mind that interfaith friendships might entail suffering on behalf of one another.
- That we assume the *freedom to speak without shame*.
- That we *speak from our relationships* with other human beings, not only from doctrine or a formal set of beliefs. Participation in the conversation is as vital as the end result of the conversation.
- That we hold these friendships to be personal, even though they exist in the *public space*.
- That we allow ourselves to *risk*—to make mistakes, to be changed, to challenge, even to offend.
- That we recognize that we are in the *presence of God* as we participate in interfaith conversations.

May this collective wisdom nourish our efforts—no matter what our individual faiths—to come together in true community at Augsburg College.

Sonja Hagander is the associate college pastor at Augsburg. She earned a BA from Concordia College in Moorhead, an MDiv from Luther Seminary, and an MSc from the University of Edinburgh. She is married to Jonathan Gusdal '84, and they have two children.

The Love of Christ Draws Us to God

MARK D. TRANVIK

The fourth lesson of President Bernhard Christensen's legacy, "The love of Christ draws us to God," can be understood as an affirmation of justification by faith alone. In other words, our relationship to God is not determined by our works, status, or experiences but is grounded solely in the mercy of Christ, whose death and resurrection have united us with the Father. That rather formal theological language has always been at the heart of the Lutheran tradition (article four of the Augsburg Confession¹). Justification by faith has both a personal and public dimension, which makes it a powerful resource for those reflecting on the identity and future of a Lutheran institution.

The personal dimension of justification is illustrated beautifully in the phrasing of the Christensen lesson. "The love of Christ draws us to God" recalls John 6:44 where Jesus says that "no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him ...". The language of being drawn or pulled is highly relational and almost intimate. It is not coercive, manipulative, or mechanical. Rather, this phrase evokes an experience of love, where the beloved is enticed or perhaps even overwhelmed by the lover. The mystical tradition of the Christian church often spoke in such terms, and it is not an accident that Bernhard Christensen was attracted to this dimension of faith. His most popular book, *The Inward Pilgrimage: Spiritual Classics from Augustine to Bonhoeffer*, provides an overview of the piety of many major figures in the Christian faith.² As Christensen rightly notes, Martin Luther himself was squarely within this tradition, particularly in his view that the "wedding ring of faith" linked Christ and the sinner in a heavenly and mystical matrimony. As Luther describes it in *The Freedom of a Christian*,

Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation while the soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let



Church Door in Norway, Curt Paulsen, Digital Print, 2009

faith enter the picture and sins, death, and damnation are Christ's while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's. For if Christ is a bridegroom he must take upon himself that which are his bride's, and he in turn bestows on her all that is his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of his bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?³

Care should be taken so that this love is not sentimentalized. Talk of weddings and marriages tempt one to think that Luther is speaking of a highly emotional affair of the heart. But there is something surprising and even unromantic about this love. It comes in the form of a great exchange where Christ takes upon himself the world's shame and rebellion. And it drives him to a cross

¹ The Augsburg Confession is a document of the Lutheran Reformation that was presented at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 and continues to serve as a declaration of faith in the Lutheran Church.

² Bernhard Christensen, *The Inward Pilgrimage: Spiritual Classics from Augustine to Bonhoeffer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1976).

³ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), translated and introduced by Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 62.

where he is murdered. In other words, the love which draws us to God comes to us through a crucifixion. Our life of faith is born in the midst of a horrible death. If we speak of this love tenderly (as we should), then it must also be kept in mind that it was won at a great cost.

Furthermore, this love comes completely as a gift. Sometimes Christians who lift up the teaching on justification by faith stop short of its full implications. Room is left for the recipient of this love to “open the door” for Christ or to “accept the invitation” of Jesus. But this love of Christ is not waiting for us to act. Rather its power overwhelms us and sweeps us off our feet. If human love has the capability to make us weak-kneed, how much more powerful is the force of divine love? Bernhard Christensen recognized that faith was a gift. He was fond of using Francis Thompson’s poem “The Hound of Heaven,” which recounts a soul who not only does not seek God but rather flees his love and grace. But, as Christensen notes, Christ’s love is relentless and his pursuit of the sinner ends with the latter being overwhelmed and cradled in God’s mercy.⁴

And finally a word of caution in connection with the personal dimension of justification. Within the Christian tradition there has been a persistent tendency to spiritualize and privatize this teaching. In other words, God’s powerful and freeing Word of grace

**Like a river spilling over
its banks, God’s love
moves through us and
beyond us into the world
of family, community,
nation, and globe.**

has been interpreted as something that happens wholly within the individual. Justification by faith becomes an interior affair, completely severed from the outside world. In this view, God is primarily concerned with the saving of souls and has little interest in society or culture. But what a curious view of God this is! It suggests that God is no longer connected with his creation and has let it run on its own, save for the episodic activity of “regenerated” Christians. However, this perspective is alien to the view of justification being highlighted here. Rather, it reflects an unhealthy pietism that views faith as largely an otherworldly matter.

It should be stressed that God’s justifying word never finds people in the abstract. It always strikes in the midst of a particular vocation or calling. It is the worshipper, student, parent, or citizen who hears the Gospel. It is never separated from the worldly situation of the recipient. While God’s grace is radically independent of our activity, it always finds us in the midst of some worldly calling. Another way to put it is to say that justification and vocation must be distinguished but that it is not possible to separate them. A quote from Luther might be helpful at this point:

Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.⁵

We now turn to the public dimension of justification, which should be understood within the rubric of vocation. In other words, the love that draws us to Christ turns us “inside out” in service to our communities. We now have callings, beginning with

⁴ Bernhard Christensen, *Fire Upon the Earth* (Minneapolis: Lutheran Free Church Publishing, 1941), 102-03.

⁵ Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans” (1522, revised 1546) in *Martin Luther’s Basic Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 101.

the personal realm and moving out into the ever-expanding spheres of neighborhood, city, country, and world. Here is where this particular theme loops in with other themes of the Christensen legacy, particularly the call to serve the neighbor in God's world. These vocations in no way merit God's love or favor. That would deny the truth of justification. However, the great love expressed in Christ does not remain bottled up within us. Like a river spilling over its banks, God's love moves through us and beyond us into the world of family, community, nation, and globe.

But before we talk about our range of callings, it might be useful to underline a fruit of faith that undergirds Christian vocation: the importance of humility. The very truth of justification entails the understanding that we do not save ourselves. Accordingly, one who is centered on this belief is necessarily humble. This means that the community one serves is composed of neighbors and not "insiders" and "outsiders." It also entails a generous construal of the Christian faith where it is crucial to listen to opposing points of view and be willing to admit that one might be wrong. This should not be mistaken for reticence or a modesty practiced in the name of good manners. Rather it underlines that this calling is undertaken by those who are aware they are unworthy servants.

As we consider the vocation, or how justification gets lived out in the world, it is important to start with the material immediately at hand—us! A proper sense of vocation begins with the self. For example, college is a time of great change, development, and reflection on the future for students. A school centered on vocation will want to make sure that they not only ask questions such as "What should I do?" or "How much will that pay?" but also to consider issues like "What are my gifts?" and "What are the needs of the community?" It will also pass on to students the practices of the Christian heritage (prayer, mentoring, etc.) that have helped nurture this personal sense of calling.

Beyond the personal is the realm of the interpersonal. Here we are speaking of family relationships and friendships. We are freed by Christ to genuinely care for those close to

us, even when they are troublesome or annoying. Most of our time is spent in the midst of those we love. It takes time, nurturing, and patience for these relationships to flourish (and even then they sometimes fail to thrive!). But our sense of calling should never be limited to the world of work or role as citizens in society. We need to underline the importance of vocation for the people with whom we regularly rub elbows.

Also important is the linkage of a Lutheran understanding of vocation with the political realm. Augsburg's president, Paul Pribbenow, stresses that the College seeks to be "a laboratory for modeling and imparting the skills of citizenship ..." ⁶ The Lutheran stress on calling results in a passionate engagement with the world (politics in this view is not a dirty word—it is yet another realm of service to neighbor) that at the same time avoids the vice of zealotry. This is a much-needed perspective in our culture. Faith's intersection in the political realm often results in polarized positions where opposing perspectives are demonized rather than thoughtfully considered. However, a sense of vocation grounded in the Lutheran tradition allows for the emergence of true citizens. It promotes involvement in the public sphere (after all, it is God's world, and neighbors need to be served!) while simultaneously displaying the leaven of genuine humility mentioned earlier.

In summary, justification has a private and a public dimension. The lovely phrase "the love of Christ draws us to God" is grounded in the story of how Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on account of our sin and raised for our justification. This great act of love and mercy propels its recipients into their world of callings, where they are humble instruments of divine compassion and service.

Mark D. Tranvik is an associate professor of religion at Augsburg College, the director of *Exploring Our Gifts*, and a senior fellow for the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning. He earned a BA from Luther College, an MDiv from Yale University, and a ThD from Luther Seminary.

⁶ "Dual Citizenship: Reflections on Educating Citizens at Augsburg College" (address, ELCA Vocation Conference at Luther College on July 31, 2008).

To Give and Receive Mercy

PAUL C. PRIBBENOW

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy...” (Matthew 5:7)

That the theological concept of vocation has become central to Augsburg’s academic mission—all undergraduates at Augsburg must complete two courses specifically focused on the idea and practice of vocation—is certainly testament to our many institutional ancestors who believed deeply that the Lutheran idea of vocation should inspire education for service in the world, no matter the particular career path chosen. For Bernhard Christensen, Augsburg’s sixth president, there was an even more compelling reason for making vocation central to Augsburg’s work, for it was his abiding belief that faith and learning are inextricably bound up, not simply for academic purposes, but for the sake of God’s world. Vocation—grounded in Christian faith and shaped by a liberal arts education—is the gift of a gracious God that propels us to do God’s work in the world. Christensen’s deep commitments to education, the church, and the world shaped his entire career at Augsburg and have left us a legacy that is at the center of our work in the 21st century—the legacy of helping our students discern and follow their vocations in and for God’s world.

As a theological ethicist, I have long found great inspiration in the Beatitudes as found in the Gospel of Matthew. As the American novelist Mary Gordon has recently written in reflection on these verses: “To say yes: for this I will try and change my life. And more: without this I would not know who I am.”¹ In other words, the Beatitudes offer not simply rules for a good life; they are a way of describing who I am, who I am called to be. And, as Gordon further suggests, who I am and who I am called to be by the Beatitudes is very much tied to the sort of world Jesus

intends for his followers to create—“a world that is safer and more generous.”²

I was recently asked to offer devotions as part of a series on the Beatitudes. Randomly assigned to Matthew 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy,” I was intrigued to find that of the nine Beatitudes in Matthew, verse seven is the only one where you receive the same as you give. Being merciful begets mercy. If you’re poor in spirit, you get the kingdom. If you mourn, you are comforted. If you’re meek, you inherit the earth. But if you’re merciful, it’s right back at you. I suppose we could be a bit disappointed by that equation—it doesn’t seem quite fair given some of the other returns. Instead of being disappointed, though, I want to suggest that this is actually the beatitude that best defines what it means to live as faithful people in the world. The mutual dynamic of giving and receiving mercy is at the heart of the called life that we enjoy as people of God, the body of Christ, here and now in the midst of this neighborhood, city, and world. To give and receive mercy are what it means to live our vocations in God’s world.

There is precedent for this claim about giving and receiving mercy. Religious historian Martin Marty was once asked what the distinctive mark of the Lutheran church is, to which he replied, simply, “Acts of mercy.”³ Martin Luther himself used the word “neighbor” more than many other important Lutheran words in his voluminous writings and made giving and receiving mercy a hallmark of his ethics.⁴ There is clear evidence that this commitment to giving and receiving mercy is a hallmark of Lutheran Christians—witness

¹ Mary Gordon, *Reading Jesus: A Writer’s Encounter with the Gospels* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009), 87.

² *Ibid.*, 84.

³ Martin E. Marty, personal correspondence.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1955). A search of the online version of Luther’s *Works* (in English) shows that neighbor (or similar words) appears some 2,200 times, more than justification or faith, though far behind righteousness (5,700). On Luther’s ethics, see Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

our legacies of education, health care, and social service institutions, not to mention the abiding hospitality and service offered by Lutheran individuals and congregations around the world.⁵

We might have reason to pause here, however. Those who know anything about what Lutherans claim about being justified by faith alone might think that our two Lutheran Martins are missing something. Why all this talk about mercy and neighbor when the central theological claim of our tradition is that we can't earn our salvation—that good works don't merit redemption? But the fact is that it is precisely because we can't earn it that we have been freed to live as merciful people in the world, knowing that mercy begets mercy. That is the foundation of healthy and just and faithful lives together in the world. God is in charge, God has a plan, and God's plan is that faithful people will care for the earth and for each other with mutual mercy. God calls us to serve God's world.

Theologically, Luther said it this way in his treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian* (as translated by our own Professor Mark Tranvik):

"From faith there flows a love and joy in the Lord. From love there proceeds a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves the neighbor and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss."⁶ In other words, for Luther, our faith itself calls us out of ourselves and into love of the world, where what we know and do are always

about serving our neighbor without account of our own standing. We give and receive mercy.



Cathedral of Trees, Curt Paulsen, Digital Print, 2006

... our faith itself calls
us out of ourselves and
into love of the world ...

own lives ... and I could go on and on. It's certainly in the specifics of how we practice hospitality, but it's also in the attitude and spirit we bring to what it means to be a welcoming community. And genuine hospitality offers mercy so that it might know the mercy that comes from engagement with others. If it was just about welcoming

I am of the opinion that this simple verse from Matthew could be Augsburg's motto because we do most certainly know what it means to give and receive mercy—to live our vocations in and for God's world.

Mercy is the hospitality and welcoming that the Augsburg community practices with neighbors, strangers, and each other. I am struck every day by the number of different ways members of the Augsburg community offer hospitality. From the diverse students, faculty, and staff who find a home at Augsburg ... to the faculty and staff who stand on corners to welcome our weekend students on the first Friday and Saturday of the trimester ... to the move-in ritual we have for first-year students coming to campus to live in the residence halls ... to the diverse neighbors who are welcomed on our campus to engage in important conversations for our neighborhood and world ... to the remarkable ways in which Augsburg graduates are practicing hospitality in their

⁵ As quoted from Gracia Grindal in *The Promise of Augsburg College*. DVD (Augsburg College, 2008).

⁶ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, trans. Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 83.

people ... well, then we might as well be a hotel. But if it's welcoming so that I might get to know you, learn from you, and work with you to make the world more hospitable, then it's about mutuality, about giving and receiving mercy.

Mercy is also the sort of educational experience we aspire to offer our students. I hear from so many of our students about the relationships they forge here with fellow students, with faculty members, and with those in the neighborhood and city who share their educational journeys. It is a hallmark of this place, I believe, to see education itself as a relationship that is marked by its giving and receiving. Parker Palmer has written of the central role of love—in both teaching and learning.⁷ A teacher loves his or her students—offers mercy—and the students return that love through engagement, questioning, growing in understanding, and going out to share what they have learned with others. The poet William Wordsworth has written these words, which are my own creed as an educator, “What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how.”⁸ That is a description of what happens on this campus each and every day as we engage each other as fellow teachers and learners, hungry for knowledge and skills and perspectives so that we might share what we learn with others. It's about giving and receiving and serving God's world.

And mercy is faith in action, the passion to do good not for any recognition or reward but because God calls us to love the world. Our institutional calling, which we currently articulate as “We believe we are called to serve our neighbor,” makes the claim that faith, learning, and service can never be separated because God intends that what we believe (the gift of faith) calls us to be educated (the privilege of an education) so that we might be of service (the obligation to make the world better for

all God's people). I have the privilege to learn about and witness the work of our students, faculty, and staff who are practicing mercy—both the giving and receiving of mercy—in the chapel, in the residence halls, in the classrooms, on playing fields, in the neighborhood, and around the world. I love to brag about our Campus Kitchen program, led by our students, which prepares and shares food in the neighborhood, grows food in our community garden, and buys food at our weekly farmer's market. It's all good work—it's merciful work—but it's not simply one-way service. Beth Florence, who graduated a couple of years ago, once told me that preparing and delivering meals was okay but not good enough for her. She needed and wanted to sit with the recipients of the meals, break bread together, and share each others' stories. She wanted food to be the occasion for giving and receiving mercy. Faith in action through learning and service for our neighbor and God's world.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. What abundant gifts we have been given from our gracious God—gifts of hospitality, education, and faith that is active in love. Gifts of wise and faithful leaders like Bernhard Christensen, whose legacy guides our abiding commitment to educating students for vocations that serve God's world. For these many gifts—in this, our 141st academic year at Augsburg—we proclaim for all the world to hear: Thanks be to God!

Paul C. Pribbenow is the 10th president of Augsburg College. He has degrees from Luther College (BA) and the University of Chicago (MA and PhD). His research interests include social ethics, philanthropy, and American public life.

⁷ Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education As a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 16.

⁸ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book Fourteenth (Public domain, 1888).



Phil Quanbeck teaching Augsburg students in an earlier era

An Augsburg Treasure: Phil Quanbeck I

A CONVERSATION WITH A CAMPUS LEGEND

Phil Quanbeck I taught in the Religion Department at Augsburg from 1957 to 1993. He was educated at Augsburg College (BA), Augsburg Seminary (BTh), and Princeton Theological Seminary (MTh and DTh). He is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and serves part time at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.

This conversation between Phil Quanbeck I (PQ), his son Phil Quanbeck II (PQII), and Mark D. Tranvik (MT) took place on January 7, 2010.

MT: Just a little of background for our readers, I know you grew up in a parsonage and heard lots of sermons. Can you talk about the transition from your home to being a student here at Augsburg?

PQ: Well, I don't remember a lot about my father's sermons ...

MT: Was he a good preacher?

PQ: Who knows? I asked my father to give a talk ... I was

the college pastor when I first came back to teach at Augsburg ... I asked my father to preach in chapel, and he wasn't all that old. He was probably in his late 60s or early 70s. He was doing an interim pastorate at Bethel Lutheran in Northfield. His neighbor was a St. Olaf professor, and he asked my dad if he was a little nervous about what he was going to say. My dad replied that he wasn't nervous but that Phil (meaning me) ought to be because who knows what the old man is going to say? I

thought that was pretty good ... my Dad had a good sense of humor.

MT: Was there ever any doubt you would go to Augsburg?

PQ: Oh, no. There wasn't. When I grew up, I didn't ever even think there was any other college. We were in the Lutheran Free Church, and the LFC preachers' kids went to Augsburg. The Strommens went to Augsburg—all four brothers. There were six siblings in my family, and we all went to Augsburg. That was just where I would go. It was also built into the psyche that you go to college. You didn't even think about not going to college. And I am grateful for that.

MT: What year did you graduate from Augsburg?

PQ: That's not a simple answer. I graduated from high school in June 1945. I went to the University of Minnesota summer school and I took two courses—psychology and ethics, and I don't think I had a clue what was going on in the ethics course! And after three years in college, I was three courses short of graduation, and I don't know where the suggestion came from, but someone suggested, "Why don't you apply to seminary?" I applied and was admitted. I finished those three additional courses when I was in the seminary.¹ Whereas my graduation class should have been 1949, I actually finished in January of 1950. My seminary graduation was 1951. I took three semesters to finish those three courses, and they were all in sociology. I took them all from Joel Torstenson.² I was very interested in pursuing graduate work in sociology—because of Joel—but I didn't do that.

MT: Why not?

PQ: I think John Stensvaag³ played a role in that, but I don't know just how.

MT: When you say "played a role" you mean ...

PQ: He probably said, "Don't do that."

MT: What was your undergraduate major?

PQ: Greek.

MT: So does that mean you were always interested in studying the Bible?

PQ: I think that I was interested in following in my dad's footsteps.

MT: So you had a strong sense you were going to be a pastor?

PQ: Yes, I think so.

MT: Since you were going to be a pastor, you knew that Greek would be excellent preparation ...

PQ: I am not sure it was all that rational ...

MT: What was your experience of the Religion Department at Augsburg? Did it shape your calling as an undergraduate?

PQ: I am not completely sure what shaped my sense of calling.

MT: Did John Stensvaag have an influence on you?

PQ: John Stensvaag and Bernhard Christensen. I remember attending bible camps and hearing presentations by Bernhard. Another thing that sticks in my mind is that I might have had a gift for public speaking. It's funny how you recall things. I remember in high school that I had a role reading from Paul Gallico's "The Snow Goose," and I recall receiving some praise for the way I read that. I am not sure how all these things fit together, but it's my hunch that a sense of calling was being shaped at that time.

MT: So you majored in Greek at Augsburg and then went to Augsburg Seminary in order to focus a little more on the Bible. How was the Bible being taught at the seminary?

PQ: I think it was taught with more awareness of historical criticism than Luther Seminary ... at least at that time. I could be wrong, but I think John Milton at Luther Seminary was still teaching that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. Stensvaag (my teacher) had been a student of the great scholar, William Fox Albright. Consequently, he knew and taught documentary theory and historical criticism. We didn't get this at college, but we certainly did at Augsburg Seminary.

MT: Did it excite you? What did it do to you when you became aware of those methods?

¹ When Phil Quanbeck I attended Augsburg, it was both a college and a seminary.

² Joel Torstenson was a professor of sociology at Augsburg College from 1947 to 1977. He founded the sociology and social work departments and the metro-urban studies program. He developed urban programs in Minneapolis that launched HECUA (the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs) and that laid the groundwork for the work of Augsburg's Center for Service, Work, and Learning, now the Strommen Career and Internship Center.

³ John Stensvaag (1911-87) was a religion professor at Augsburg College, Augsburg Seminary, and Luther Seminary.

PQ: I don't know what it did to me. Some would say I lost my faith!

MT: Did it challenge your faith?

PQ: It actually did not. I'm sure my father was actually theologically quite conservative, but he never made a point out of the authorship of the Bible. He might have thought very conservatively, but he never conveyed a fundamentalism to me or other members of the family. In that sense, I am really very indebted to him because he left me quite free. I wasn't bound to that point of view.

MT: So you probably got a sense of the importance of the text, but there wasn't a prescription about how to think about this text ...

PQ: I think that's true. Generally speaking, in the Lutheran Free Church there was pretty much a devotional reading of scripture, not a historical reading of scripture.

MT: What about the debate over the word "inerrant"? There was a lot of debate about whether or not to use that term to describe the Bible. Was the LFC caught up in this controversy?

PQ: There were some who were concerned about it. I remember one annual meeting where the rightness of the scripture was defended because Moses wrote it. That never appealed to me. And my dad never imposed that on us—for which I've been eternally grateful. In fact, I have had students say to me after they've had class with me that I saved them from fundamentalism. I think that's a worthy goal.

MT: It's a straitjacket you didn't have to struggle out of?

PQ: That's right. That's not to say I didn't struggle with the first chapters of Genesis. I'm sure people would ask about the cavemen when we talked about Adam and Eve. It took me some time before I was able to say freely that Adam and Eve were not real persons.

MT: Was that later rather than earlier?

PQ: Oh yes. I think that happened during my teaching career because that's when I had to deal with it. I remember getting a letter from a pastor in the old LFC who asked that question, were Adam and Eve real people?

I don't know how I responded to it, but ultimately I came to the view that you just can't take the text that way.

MT: After Augsburg Seminary you went into a parish. What about the decision to go to Princeton? How was that made? Was that the only choice for you?

PQ: It was the only place I applied.

MT: Why was that? And then what happened when you got there?

PQ: Well, it was like this. In 1952, Augsburg Seminary was given the opportunity to give one scholarship of \$1000. I think I went to Princeton because Warren⁴ had gone to Princeton. I talked with him, and I went there because Otto Piper⁵ was there. I didn't know anything about him, but Warren had studied under Otto Piper. So, in 1953 we drove out there.

MT: What was your impression of Princeton? Were you overwhelmed, surprised, or challenged when you went there?

PQ: I remember knocking on Otto Piper's door, and if you knew him, you would knock on his side door because that's where his office was. I said, "I'm Phil Quanbeck, and I'm from Minnesota." He said, "I know. All the Quanbecks are from Minnesota!" As I think back on it, I realize that I'm just so indebted to so many people.

MT: Say more about that.

PQ: In that first year, I think there were 17 Lutherans. We played basketball and I learned how to play handball. Otto Piper had tea every Friday afternoon, and I got acquainted with Bill Clausen—a Mennonite—and on the Friday after Thanksgiving he and I went to play handball instead of going to tea. So Piper called Dora⁶ and she came to the gym to get us, and we all went to tea. Great memories ...

MT: What was it about Piper? He was a mentor for you and so many ...

PQ: I was a teaching fellow for Otto, which meant I read some papers for him, but mostly I took his manuscripts and Dora typed them out for me! I think he was the most creative interpreter of biblical texts that I've ever come across. When I got back to Augsburg, I arranged to have

⁴ Warren Quanbeck, a distant relation, taught at Luther Seminary for many years.

⁵ Otto Piper (1891-1982) was a professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1937 to 1962. A native German, he was wounded in World War I. He and his wife, who was of Jewish descent, fled the Nazis in 1933. Piper advised many doctoral students, including Phil Quanbeck I.

⁶ Dora Frojen Quanbeck, the spouse of Phil Quanbeck I. Dora and Phil were married August 23, 1949.

Otto Piper come to speak. When I went back to Princeton to do exams and defend my dissertation, the Pipers had me for coffee. And it wasn't just Piper [who provided mentorship] ... there were others. John Stensvaag, as much as any of my teachers, prepared me for Princeton. He gave me the confidence that I knew as much about the Old Testament, for example, as my Luther Seminary instructors knew. But I didn't know anything about systematic theology or the New Testament! We had had New Testament courses in seminary, but my memory is that they were exceptionally routine.

MT: You talk about shaping forces in your life—your father, Stensvaag, and Piper ...

PQ: And Bernhard Christensen.

MT: Say more about his role.

PQ: Among other things, I remember that in my first year at Princeton Seminary, I had asked for a leave of absence from Bagley⁷ so that I could spend a year out at Princeton before returning to the parish. At some point in the middle of the year, Bernhard Christensen wrote and asked if I would be willing to complete my PhD and come back to teach at Augsburg. I

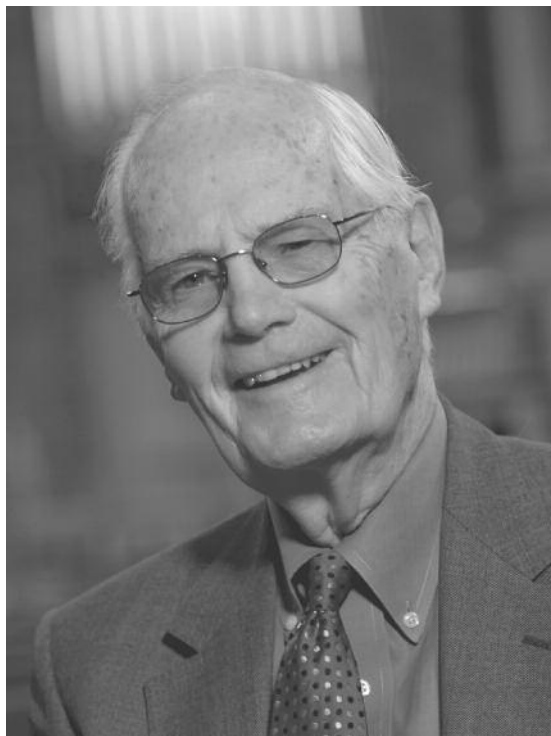
said that I would talk to my dad, and I remember that all my dad said was that it was a big decision! So I told the folks at Augsburg that I would be there if the congregations in Bagley would release me from my duties. Believe it or not, Bernhard Christensen and John Stensvaag both went up to Bagley to meet with the congregations to ask for my release. And they let me go.

MT: So it was not so much the content of Bernhard's teaching—although there was some of that, too—but the

kind of person he was? And he obviously saw a gift in you and was willing to recognize that and support you ...

PQ: I don't know what he saw. Of course, he had known me or was acquainted with me or my family from the time I was in high school.

Photo by Stephen Geffre



... I have always been interested in the role of the interpreter.

MT: People usually speak of him as being a powerful personality in the sense of being charismatic—that's probably not the right word—or in terms of exercising influence.

PQ: Well, you know, he had this incredible memory for names. Dora had a brother named Daniel who spent a year at Augsburg in 1941. When Dora came [to Augsburg] in 1945, she met Bernhard and he asked her how her brother Daniel was! This was four years later. I mean ... I could never do that.

MT: Going back to the Bible, I want to talk about the historical critical method and the role of the interpreter of the Bible. As you know, today there's been a backlash in some quarters against the historical/critical method. This comes not so much from the fundamentalists—although I'm sure you can find it there—but from people who are concerned that historical

criticism has inverted the relationship between the reader and the text. In other words, those tools give you an awful lot of control, and pretty soon you become the master of the text instead of really listening to the text and letting it have its way with you. What do you think?

PQ: Well, I have always been interested in the role of the interpreter. My dissertation was on the use of the Old Testament in the Damascus document compared with normative Judaism and the Synoptic Gospels. So I was very

⁷ At the time, Phil Quanbeck was a pastor at a church in Bagley, Minn.



Left to right: Phil Quanbeck I, Dora Quanbeck, granddaughter Kristen Eitheim, baby Evan, Scott Eitheim, Phil Quanbeck II, Ruth Johnson

much interested in the role of interpretation. Over the years, I have continued to be interested in the role of the language, and one of the really good books on this is George Caird's *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*.⁸ It makes you aware of the role of language and the beauty of some of the images. There are some incredible images in Job

MT: So the text goes to work on the interpreter ...?

PQ: I'd say that, but there's also a reciprocating relationship.

MT: Please talk about that.

PQ: ... between the person and the text. I used to say to my classes, if you can understand what I'm saying, it's not because I taught you the language or the vocabulary. That's what you bring with you, and when you come to a text, the text doesn't teach you what those words are saying. You bring to the text those meanings, so there is a reciprocating relationship between you and the text. For example, a student might say there's no social life on the campus, but someone else might point out that what he's really saying is that he hasn't had a date in a month! That's what I mean when I say there's a reciprocating relationship between the text and the interpreter. One should try to keep from imposing what you think on the text ... but that is difficult because you can't approach the text apart from what's in your head. You just *have* to do that. You have no alternative.

⁸ (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁹ Augsburg's chapel was located in Old Main for much of the first half of the 20th century.

¹⁰ James P. Shannon was the president of the College of St. Thomas (later to become the University of St. Thomas) in St. Paul, Minn. from 1956 to 1966. He was ordained a bishop for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in 1965, and he served in that position until 1968 when he resigned because of his opposition to papal policy.

PQII: Changing the topic, what was it like when you first walked into the classroom in the fall of 1957?

PQ: Well, I served as the college pastor, taught courses in the Religion Department, and taught New Testament in Augsburg Seminary. Staying a step ahead was a challenge. In the seminary I would lecture until I had run out of notes and then that was it!

PQII: Which courses did you teach in the seminary?

PQ: In the seminary, I taught the Gospel of John, and I'm sure I must have taught Romans. I taught preaching to juniors. I remember I had met with that class a couple of times and then I spoke in chapel—and I immediately thought I was doing everything wrong!

PQII: Were you still in the chapel in Old Main?⁹

PQ: Yes, there were some interesting experiences. Once Bernhard Christensen invited a major from the Salvation Army, and that's what I would call a "white knuckler"! He would shout and go back and forth, thrusting his hands in the air. [*He chuckles.*] I was just glad when it was over.

PQII: Where did Bernhard find these people?

PQ: He knew a lot of people. He would invite speakers from all over.

MT: There was a breadth to Bernhard's appreciation of the Christian communion—at least that's my impression ...

PQ: Absolutely, I'm sure some people didn't like it. I remember, we were invited to Bernhard's house and James Shannon¹⁰ was also a dinner guest. That's an indication of Bernhard's breadth. I told Shannon that it would be interesting to meet with some of his faculty, and—before you knew it—Bernhard made that happen.

PQII: Again, back to your teaching. When did you start teaching the course that came to be known as "Basic Bible"?

PQ: I think that was from the start.

PQII: Did you design it?

PQ: No, I'm sure we inherited it.

MT: It's interesting that one of the more popular courses now at Luther Seminary is Genesis to Revelation.

That is really another version of the Basic Bible course, right?

PQ: Well, you know, most seminary students don't know anything about the Bible.

MT: Was that true even back then?

PQ: Oh I think so. I didn't know very much about the Bible.

MT: Thanks for the conversation, and I'm struck by this notion that even though our memories are fallible, we can recall a lot of people who have had a hand in shaping us....

PQ: And both of you [*he points to his two interviewers*] have played such a role in peoples' lives. And I have, too. It is wonderful to be reminded of that. I think of this woman who came up to me after Advent Vespers and just thanked me, or a woman (a former student) I met at Costco who said with genuine affection how much she enjoyed my class. You know ... it's just marvelous

Phil Quanbeck I retired from Augsburg in 1993, and he currently resides in Edina, Minn. **Phil Quanbeck II** is an associate professor of religion at Augsburg, and for the past several years he has followed in his father's footsteps as the chair of the Religion Department. **Mark D. Tranvik** is an associate professor of religion at Augsburg, and in September 2010 he will become the chair of the Religion Department.

Almost Paradise? Not!

CHAPEL TALK, OCTOBER 29, 2009
RUSSELL KLECKLEY

One of the things you get from the list of songs dubbed the “Greatest Hits of the Reformation” in the chapel series of the past week¹ is a general idea that the presenters spent their youth in the 80s. In my case, I only wish that were so, since I confess that the music of my college years belongs to the decade of the 70s. I have a couple of other things to confess as well. I never even saw the movie from which “Almost Paradise” came. But I take some comfort in imagining that gives me at least one thing in common with most of people on the Augsburg campus under the age of, say, 40.

Can anyone name the movie? (*Footloose*) The singers? (Mike Reno of “Loverboy,” Ann Wilson of “Heart”). Here’s the other thing I have to confess: I never even particularly liked the song. But I like to think that Martin Luther would not have cared for it either. Can you imagine singing the words of “Almost Paradise” to the tune of “A Mighty Fortress”? And I think Luther would have found the lyrics annoying as well. One thing that this life is



Indiana Trees, Curt Paulsen, Digital Print, 2001

not, as Luther well knew, is paradise. Not even almost. But more about that in a few minutes.

So, the song title is something of an ironic choice. But so is the text from Luther that inspired the choice, given this week’s theme of “Greatest Hits of the Reformation.” In the year 1539, there was a re-release of a collection of some of Luther’s earlier works that came out under the title, “The Greatest Hits of Martin Luther.” That’s a very loose translation of the German; the actual title, as it reads in English, is *The Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings*.

Luther himself was not sold on the idea. In his estimation, his own greatest hits paled in comparison to the greatest hit of all, the Bible, and that was as it should be. In the preface to the collection, Luther wrote this:

I would have been quite content to see my books, one and all, remain in obscurity and go by the

¹ During the week of October 23-29, 2009, Augsburg College held a Reformation Week chapel series with the theme “Greatest Hits of the Reformation.” The chapel talks were as follows: Oct. 23 – “You Say You Want a Reformation” by Phil Adamo (History Department); Oct. 26 – “Still Sinning after All These Years” by Mark Tranvik (Religion Department); Oct. 27 – “I Fought the Law (and the Law Got Put in Its Place)” by Hans Wiersma (Religion Department); Oct. 28 – “Losing Our Religion” by Jacqueline deVries (History Department); Oct. 29 – “Almost Paradise (Not!)” by Russell Kleckley (Religion Department).

board ... It was also our intention and hope, when we ourselves began to translate the Bible into German, that there should be less writing, and instead more studying and the reading of Scripture ... [A]ccordingly there is good hope, once the overzealousness of this time has abated, that my books will not last long.²

Luther was hardly in the mold of the aging rock star here, hanging on for one more shot at fame and glory—he was all of about 56 at the time and 20 years removed from the 95 theses. And now, even 500 years after their first release, and much against Luther’s intention, we are still singing his songs, both literally in the case of “A Mighty Fortress,” and figuratively in the case of his theological work.

But as long as his writings were about to be re-released anyway, Luther used the preface to describe what he called “a correct way of studying theology.” He took this method, as he writes, from David in Psalm 119. It comes down to three rules, not stated anywhere in the Psalm explicitly but implied throughout. Then he expressed the three rules as three Latin words—*oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*. These rules make this preface even more ironic, since the popularity of these rules turned the preface into a “greatest hit” in its own right.

Rule #1: *Oratio* (prayer): When reading Scripture, Luther says, “Despair of your reason and understanding ...” Instead, “... kneel down in your little room and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that he through his dear Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding.” Notice here that prayer is not about finding the right feeling or even the right words, and reading Scripture is not a passive, intellectual exercise. Prayer is a posture of openness to the Word of God and Spirit of God. And that can be a dangerous thing, as we will soon see. The correct way to study theology is not just to read Scripture, but to pray Scripture.

Rule #2: *Meditatio* (meditation): “Secondly,” Luther writes, “you should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing oral speech and literal words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection.” What Luther means by meditation strikes me as akin to what musicians do with a piece of music. It isn’t played just once and cast aside, but rehearsed over and over again. Each note, each phrase gets played time and again until it is no longer a matter of what the musician does to the music, but how the music takes over the musician. You see the connection here with prayer. Meditation, too, is not passive reflection but

the commitment of the whole person until the text is not read but lived. And that brings us to the third rule.

The more faithfully you live, the more difficult it may become to live faithfully.

Rule #3: *Tentatio*: The problem with this word is that it does not translate well into German, so Luther uses the German word *Anfechtung*, which does not translate well into English, but often gets rendered as “temptation.” But there is a fine line between being tempted and being tested, and the testing side of the word is what Luther has in mind here. He calls it the “touchstone” of Scripture and

sees David as the example. Better to let Luther explain it in his own words: “Thus you see how David, in the Psalm mentioned, complains so about all kinds of enemies ... whom he must tolerate because he meditates, that is, because he is occupied with God’s Word.” And here is the lesson Luther draws—“For as soon as God’s Word takes root in you and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and will make a real doctor of you, and by his assaults” (that’s the word right there —*tentatio*, *Anfechtung*, assault by the devil) “... will teach you to seek and love God’s Word.”

Now, there’s a concept for you. The more faithfully you live, the more difficult it may become to live faithfully. Or to put it another way, the life of faith does not save us from the trials and tribulations of life—assaults by the devil, in Luther’s words. The life of faith exposes us all the more to the very things and powers of this world that attack the faith to which we cling.

² All citations from the preface of *The Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings* are taken from Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 63-68.

Now, you don't find that printed on too many seminary recruitment brochures. And you don't find it mentioned in too many church evangelism programs. But you find it often enough in the world. You find it everywhere in real life, without even looking for it. If Luther knew one thing from experience, it was that this world is not paradise—not even almost.

But that might also explain why this text, like others we have heard about this week, endures as a greatest hit of the Reformation. Like genuine love, which in real life aims at so much more than the excitement and sentimentality of today's top hits, the life of faith goes to the places where we experience life at its deepest. Like genuine love, the life of faith endures the tragedy as well as the joy of life. Like love, faith is easy in paradise. But the song that Luther sings is about faith *outside* the garden—where we live most of the time. When life takes us outside of paradise, where the journey is long and the path is difficult, we need more on our spiritual iPods than the song of the year. We need the music of the ages that sustains and endures.

To pray Scripture, *oratio*, and to meditate on Scripture, *meditatio*, is preparation for living inside the Scripture, *tentatio*—the touchstone where faith meets the real world. Do this, Luther concludes, “and it will be your experience

that the books of the fathers will taste stale and putrid to you by comparison. You will not only despise the books written by adversaries, but the longer you write and teach the less you will be pleased with yourself.” (He must have thrown in that last part for the faculty.) “When you have reached this point, then do not be afraid to hope that you have begun to become a real theologian.”

And then he concludes, “To sum up: Let us be proud and seek honor in the places where we can. But in this book [that is, in the 1539 collection of his greatest hits] the honor is God's alone, as it is said, [I Peter 5:5] ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble;’ to whom be glory, world without end.” To which Luther—and we along with him—add, “Amen.”

Russell Kleckley is an associate professor of religion at Augsburg College. He has a BA from Newberry College, an MDiv from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, an STM degree from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, and a Dr. theol. from the University of Munich.

This chapel talk, which Kleckley delivered on October 29, 2009, has been edited for publication.



Children enjoying a meal at St. Clare's rectory, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

"Piti Piti Na Rive"

MARGARET TROST

Ten years ago I traveled to Haiti for the first time. A family friend mentioned the trip in passing and invited me to come along. It was one of those moments when my heart said "yes" before my mind had time to catch up and talk me out of it. The trip included volunteering for two weeks at Mother Teresa's home for the destitute and the dying. This opportunity was so out of the blue that I thought it might be an answer to prayer, the push I needed to move me out of the swamp of grief I felt stuck in. The trip leader said it would be a powerful experience: "Their lives will transform you, Margaret." Oh, how I wanted transformation.

A year and a half earlier, on a warm September evening, just minutes after my husband and I pledged that we would slow down and make more time for each other, he died from a severe asthma attack—the first one in our 11-year marriage. He was 36. Our son, Luke, had just turned 5. I was 34. Never had I imagined that I'd be a widow in my mid-30s.

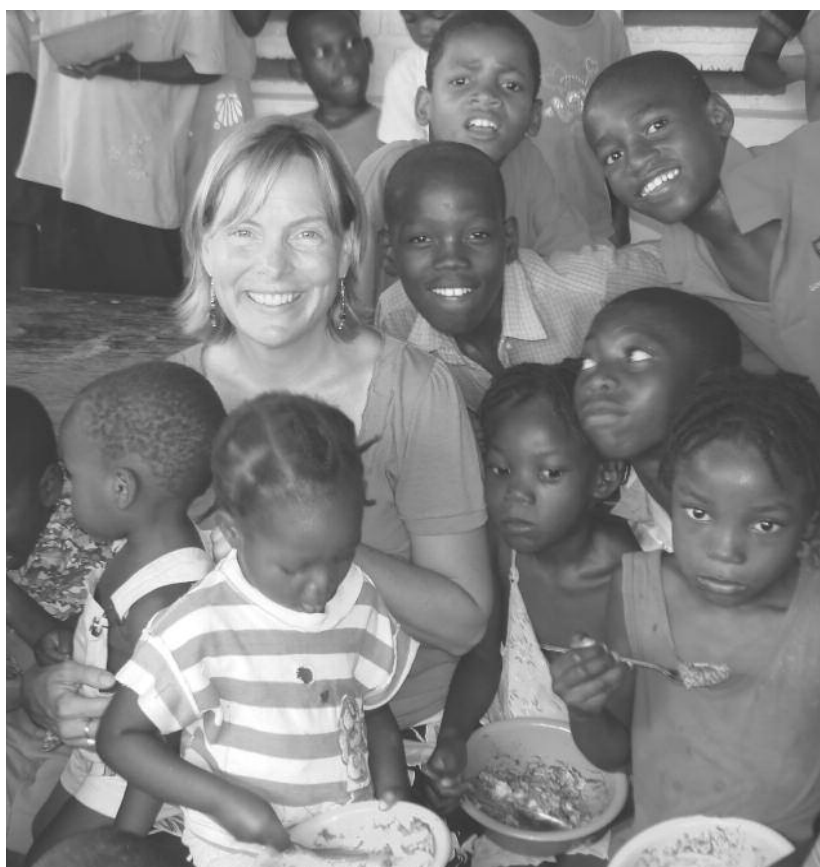
In the long, numbing days and months that followed, I searched for answers, trying to understand "why," to find meaning that could help me through the grief. The faith that had guided and nurtured me as a child—and that I hadn't spent much time deepening as a busy adult—

suddenly wasn't full enough to hold the pain in my heart. Even though I felt reassured of God's loving presence, I suffered at a level I'd never known before. I searched and prayed for strength and guidance that would pull me through. My son gave me a reason to get out of bed in the morning, but I sincerely questioned whether I'd ever live fully and find joy again.

I waited and listened intently for a response to my prayers. I looked for signs as I drove Luke to kindergarten. I paid attention to my dreams. I listened in the silence when I took breaks from working on my home-based business. I read spiritual books, wrote in journals, took long walks. Every day, I watched for something that might reveal God's plan for me. When the invitation to go to Haiti came, I thought it was a sign.

Jesus' teachings about love and compassion, food for the hungry, and justice for those who suffer had always inspired me. I knew that Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's most impoverished country, would teach and challenge me. Haitians had been used and mistreated by the world's powers and their country's elite for over two centuries. Historical, political, and economic injustice had created misery for the poor majority. Most Haitians struggled to live on less than two dollars per day, and most children didn't have the opportunity to go to school. Haiti had the worst health statistics in the Western world. By comparison, my life had been one of great privilege. I always had more than enough food to eat. I went to college and received a master's degree. I enjoyed my work, owned a home and car, had health insurance and money in my savings account. As the trip approached, I wondered and worried about how it would feel to be an overfed white

... an inner struggle erupted within me as I wrestled with my own comparative privilege ...



The author with children at the St. Clare's food program

American among people who struggle daily for food and clean water.

In January 2000, I left Luke with my parents and flew to Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, for what I thought would be a one-time visit. Within minutes of arriving, my heart broke open. I considered myself pretty well informed and had traveled to Nicaragua and Mexico, but nothing had prepared me for the poverty I saw. It wasn't isolated on one side of town, it spread out for miles and miles in all directions—rickety homes were packed next to each other without plumbing or electricity, hundreds of people lined the street hoping to sell a mango or piece of fabric so they could feed their families, piles of garbage five feet high baked in the sun, orphaned children ran to our van begging for food every time we stopped.

In the days that followed, an inner struggle erupted within me as I wrestled with my own comparative privilege (I still do, and probably always will, wrestle with this) and pondered how to respond. The fact that this level of poverty existed just a few hundred miles from Florida shocked me. Over the next two weeks, I spent my mornings with women dying of tuberculosis and AIDS. They didn't have doctors or medication. They couldn't afford to go to a hospital. Thankfully, the Sisters of Charity offered a loving environment for their final days. Most of the dying women were so young. I wondered who would take care of their children and why, in a world of computers and space shuttles, they didn't have access to medicine that would save their lives. I prayed for help but didn't think there was anything I could do. I was overwhelmed and discouraged—the problems were so huge, and in a few days I'd return to my home thousands of miles away.

One night, I met a Haitian priest, Father Gerry Jean-Juste, who served the St. Clare's Church community in the Tiplas Kazo neighborhood on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. He came to talk to our group about the Haitians' struggle for democracy and the faith that sustained them. I could see in his eyes great hope for the future. We learned that he was a spiritual leader for the poor, speaking courageously and powerfully over the years for social, political, and economic justice. During his talk, a member of our group asked about hunger in Haiti. Father Gerry quietly shared his vision for a food program for the children in his community. As he spoke, something inside me lit up. Even

though I lived so far away, didn't speak French or Creole, and didn't know what I could do from my home, I felt a stirring, a curiosity, a calling to be open and to believe in possibilities.

When I returned home a few days later, I couldn't stop thinking about Haiti. Images of the streets of Port-au-Prince, the women at the hospice, the orphaned children, and the meeting with Father Gerry played over and over in my mind. One day, I shared with my parents my desire to help Father Gerry. A few hours later, my father called back. He'd just been to his office and had opened the mail. His church conference had sent a grant for \$5,000 to a food pantry. As the conference president, he had just received a letter notifying him that the pantry had closed. The check was returned—unused. Since it was intended for hunger relief, he told me it could be redirected to Haiti. I listened with amazement and thought it must be a sign. A huge weight lifted off my heart and, elated, I danced around my kitchen. Five thousand dollars! We mailed the check to Father Gerry and waited. Three weeks later I received this email:

March 26, 2000

Dear Margaret,

The program is wonderful! I just want to let you know that it is working beautifully. From 200 participants last Sunday, it has doubled today. We have been called to a big assignment from God in feeding the hungry brothers and sisters. The news is being spread. Children and their needy parents are pouring on us. I use many volunteers. Many youngsters want to help. I am using the rectory quarters. I need more chairs, more tables, more food, more of everything. The supervisor of the program is a great woman who loves this volunteer task. There is great hope. Now I am exhausted. It is getting late. It is too much, too exciting to count and report all now. God certainly has talked to you today while we were implementing this great inspiration...

*Best regards to you and all,
Gerry*

The speed of the food program's birth astounded me. I'd been home from Haiti just two months. Father Gerry told me that food was being purchased from the local farmers'



Young girl and teenage boy at St. Clare's

market, helping to support the Haitian economy. The cost of each meal was about fifty cents. Inspired, I shared his e-mail with my friends, and a few checks started to arrive in my mailbox. Ten dollars, twenty-five dollars, one hundred dollars. I told each person that every dollar fed two children. I wasn't sure what I was getting into or where it would lead. Things seemed to have a life of their own, and I felt swept along for the ride. But my heart felt full and happy, and I realized the grief that had been with me for so long had lifted.

Shortly after the food program began, I decided to create a nonprofit organization called the What If? Foundation so that I could raise money to keep the meals going. Being a self-employed business woman, I used my home office and volunteered as the foundation's director. I felt this work was what my life had been leading me toward, and I threw myself into it. I started to spread the word about the St. Clare's food program with everyone I knew and sent the donations I received to Father Gerry.

Over the years, the What If? Foundation and the food program have grown. For the first four years, meals were served to 500 children once a week on Sundays. Today, meals are served to over 1,000 children five days every week. The foundation also pays for nearly 200 school scholarships, an after-school program, and an annual summer camp. I'm still its volunteer director.

I have been to Haiti 12 times since that first trip. It's been an extraordinary journey, one that I'm incredibly grateful for. I've never worked harder, and I struggle with balance, but the experience of being in partnership with the St. Clare's community has taught me so much about life and how to live it with faith, courage, and love. Father Gerry passed away a few months ago. I miss him enormously. So do the members of St. Clare's and millions of Haitians who were inspired by his courage and leadership. Thankfully, the work we started together continues. His community has great hope for the future and is deeply committed, as I am, to sustaining and expanding the programs.

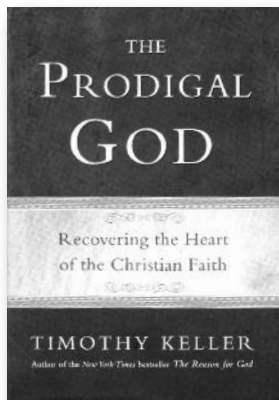
I believe we are all born with love in our hearts and the opportunity to use our lives to help make the world a more just and compassionate place. So often we think that the world's problems are too large and that there's nothing we can do about them. Our hearts might lead us to an opportunity that feels right, but we question whether our contribution would make any difference. At these times, there is much we can learn from the Haitian saying "Piti piti na rive," which means "little by little we will arrive." These wise words remind us of the importance and value of taking small steps towards change and how as we each do what is possible in our lives, cumulatively we can achieve what may seem impossible. There is tremendous power in the smallest step, if only we'll take it.

Margaret Trost is the founder and director of the What If? Foundation (www.whatiffoundation.org), a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing hope and opportunity to impoverished children in Haiti. Inspired and transformed by her experience with a Haitian community, she is devoted to sharing her belief in the power of taking small steps to create a more just and loving world. Trost has degrees from Pennsylvania State University (BA) and the University of Wisconsin (MA). She is the author of *On That Day, Everybody Ate: One Woman's Story of Hope and Possibility in Haiti* (Koa Books, 2008).

Trost wrote this piece in December 2009. Since the Haitian earthquake on January 12, 2010, she has been working with the St. Clare's community to expand the food program (15,000 meals per week are now being served to children and adults) and provide other services to the neighborhood.

The Father's Grace: The Heart of Christianity

BOOK REVIEW BY EMILY WILES '10



The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith, Timothy Keller, Dutton, 2008.

Using the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son¹ as a prime example of the Gospel, Timothy Keller, best-selling author and Presbyterian pastor, presents a thought-provoking, accessible explanation of Christianity to both its skeptics and its adherents in *The Prodigal God*. In Keller's exegesis of the parable, he places the main characters and listeners into two categories as they search for fulfillment. The younger son, who represents Jesus' non-religious listeners, seeks fulfillment through self-gratification, while the elder son, who represents the Pharisees, tries to gain control over God through self-righteousness. Keller claims that Jesus' purpose in telling the parable was to show that both groups were wrong in their search for salvation. The more obvious wrong was the younger son's sin. He wished his father dead in asking for his inheritance and then squandering it. The less obvious—and perhaps more upsetting—sin was the elder son's zealous morality. When the father accepted the younger brother despite his actions, the elder brother became irate and said, "I've been slaving for you and never

disobeyed your orders!"² The elder brother sought to manipulate his father by doing everything correctly. Both sons tried to find salvation by their own doing rather than being faithful to their father.

Even though both his sons were wrong, the father cared so much for them that he went out to meet them without waiting for them to approach him. He loved them and bestowed grace abundantly despite their failings. This, for Keller, is the radical message of the parable and the heart of the Gospel—God lavishly bestows his grace.

Self-gratification and moralism are both spiritual dead ends, so Keller offers a third option—Jesus, the only way to the feast that is salvation. Drawing from the reformed tradition, Keller asserts that people can get a glimpse of this feast "in prayer, in service to others, in the changes in our inner nature through the Gospel, and through the healed relationship that Christ can give us now."³ As Keller defines it, salvation has four dimensions—it is experiential, material, individual, and communal. His view confesses that salvation is eternal but that people can experience a foretaste of salvation individually but more fully in community.

Although Keller's interpretation of the text may not be new, his real contribution is the parallel he draws between the Prodigal Son parable and Christianity in today's society. He claims that he wrote *The Prodigal God* for two audiences: Christians and skeptics of Christianity. By likening these groups to the younger brother and elder brother in the story, Keller challenges his readers to

¹ Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

² Luke 15:29, NIV

³ 133.

examine the category into which they fall. He explains that the Pharisees of biblical times tried to gain control over God and that today's Christians repeat this pattern when they cling to self-righteousness and condemn others for being wayward. By the same token, people who wander away from the Church, condemning it for being filled with people who are too moralistic, are following the path of the younger brother who committed himself to self-gratification.

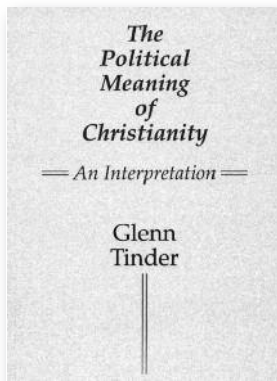
Keller unsettles his Christian readers by pressing them to consider if they are elder brothers or if they truly understand and live out the Gospel. If they fall into the elder brother category, the book is meant to call them back to the real message of the Gospel. On the other hand, Keller speaks as an apologetic voice of Christianity to those who feel alienated by the attitudes of Christians. He aims to convince skeptics that the elder brothers they meet in Christian churches do not understand true Gospel. Just as the elder brother in the parable did not understand sin and salvation, moralistic Christians do not understand that God freely bestows grace on His people. Keller hopes his portrayal of Christianity will reach his lost readers and bring them to Christianity.

In *A Prodigal God*, Keller cuts to the heart of the Christian message that although God's followers are imperfect, God meets his people in a flawed world. Keller presents an abbreviated explanation of how freely God gives grace and what that grace costs God. The book is a compelling sales pitch to both skeptics and adherents of Christianity in a world filled with younger and elder brothers. Keller's idealistic concept of Christianity may not convince all readers, but it truly captures the heart of the faith.

Emily Wiles will graduate from Augsburg College in May 2010 with a degree in youth and family ministry. She is currently a member of Augsburg's Lilly Scholars program.

Christian Political Vocation: A Proactive Prophetic Stance

BOOK REVIEW BY SYLVIA C. BULL '10



The Political Meaning of Christianity: An Interpretation, Glenn Tinder, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1989.

Glenn Tinder's interpretation of Christian political vocation poses thoughtful and challenging questions concerning how Christians ought to conceive of and participate in the political realm. Emphasizing the fallen nature of human society, Tinder closely examines the sinful realities of political systems and offers a model of critical and hesitant political engagement for Christians—the prophetic stance.

Tinder begins by establishing his conception, informed by the Reformation tradition, of humanity's fallen state. Drawing on Augustine's theology, Tinder believes that humanity's sinfulness is manifested in its worldliness; in other words, people try to exalt themselves without recognizing that every person is exalted by God and endowed with innate dignity through *agape* (the love of God for humankind). With this exaltation comes what Tinder terms "destiny" or "eternal selfhood"—a God-given, inherent element of each human's existence that informs and shapes one's thoughts and actions in all areas

of life.¹ With this understanding of the human condition as a foundation, Tinder then discusses a Christian view of the political realm and Christian political obligations.

As human beings are fallen, so are the societies they create and occupy. Tinder argues that government and politics, as the order-keepers of those societies, are also imperfect. Therefore, any attempt to radically transform society to achieve perfection ignores the sinful nature of humanity and gives way to "highly dubious" (and often destructive) motives.² Given the flawed nature of the political system and the dangers inherent in attempts to change or reform the system, Tinder argues that Christians should adopt "the prophetic stance." To stand prophetically is to exist and act in paradoxical ways and to be conscious of ever-present moral ambiguity. One who takes up a prophetic stance will be at once "solitary yet engaged," shaped by "eschatological faith" but cognizant of earthly responsibilities, and always prepared to "appeal to heaven."³

While remaining critical of human ability to effect change and emphasizing our need to rely constantly on God, Tinder suggests that within the prophetic stance one should work toward specific, practical aims. In particular, he argues that liberty should be extended as it reflects respect for the exalted individual and that power and force (which he views as necessary in the political realm) should be used for positive ends based on love for the neighbor.⁴ Engagement and action toward these ends, however, should be tempered by a recognition that we are continually faced with moral dilemmas and the unforeseen consequences of our actions; therefore, we must "act

¹ 28.

² 157.

³ 97.

⁴ 124, 151.

regretfully” and with constant listening and communication.⁵ Fundamentally, Tinder’s prophetic stance is about living in a troubled world without despair, in expectation of the Kingdom of God.⁶

While Tinder poses interesting and provocative questions about the nature of the political realm and a Christian’s role within it, his tone and argument often reflect West-centric and Americo-normative attitudes, and the degree to which he discourages action diminishes the prophetic element of his stance. Using First World/Third World binaries, he suggests that writers in First-World, industrialized contexts (such as himself) offer “a fuller view of the human situation than those ... in the Third World.”⁷ Such a claim is troubling and arrogant, to say the least. Additionally, his nearly exclusive use of Western thinkers and the insufficient attention given to other forms of democracy weaken his argument that the uniquely American democratic system of limited liberty/limited power is the “only ... sensible [Christian] answer to the dangers” of human sin.⁸ Because he does not address any alternative forms of democracy, he fails to adequately demonstrate how the American version of democracy supports liberty and Christian principles more effectively than European or non-Western democracies.⁹

Another difficult aspect of the work lies in the apparent contradiction between the “moral judgment on action” that is a key component of the prophetic stance and the necessity of action within the political realm.¹⁰ In condemning both action for action’s sake and perpetual inaction, Tinder argues for action taken “hesitantly and regretfully.”¹¹ Acting with this mindset, however, must necessarily be reactive rather than proactive. Such an outlook hardly seems prophetic. Instead of continually reacting to injustice that already exists, a truly prophetic stance would—while recognizing the power and pervasiveness of human sin—call for action aimed at preventing injustice. Despite these flaws, Tinder’s work invites important discussion about Christian political vocation, particularly in its advocacy for “political self-criticism,” its wariness of ideologies in any form, and its emphasis on the necessity of listening.¹² In this way, it has value for what it is—one man’s perspective that leads readers to consider more deeply their own interpretation of the political meaning of Christianity.

Sylvia C. Bull, a native of Great Falls, Mont., will graduate from Augsburg College in May 2010 with a double major in religion and international relations and a minor in history. She is currently a member of Augsburg’s Lilly Scholars program.

⁵ 213-15.

⁶ 9-10, 71.

⁷ 11.

⁸ 107.

⁹ For example, Tinder could have at least acknowledged forms of parliamentary democracy used widely around the world, including the hybrid parliamentary models and dominant party systems used in Eastern Europe and Japan. More recently, countries in Latin America (such as Bolivia) have been developing new hybrid forms of democracy which differ significantly from European and American democratic systems, raising additional questions for today’s readers about the merits of Tinder’s argument.

¹⁰ 213.

¹¹ 215.

¹² 228.

Exploring Our Gifts Projects

THE ACTIVITIES OF AUGSBURG'S LILLY GRANT

Theme 1 – Vocation as a Life Approach

Vocatio Worship

Each month of the academic year Augsburg sets aside one chapel service for Vocatio Chapel, a series in which speakers preach about how vocation has played out in their own lives.

Getaway

Once a year a small group of Augsburg for Adults students leave campus and spend a day at a local retreat center. Guided by the project's leaders, they study vocation and engage in exercises that help them discover their gifts, strengths, and passions. These retreats stimulate important discussions and help initiate students into the campus-wide vocation conversation.

Student Vocation Assessments

The Strommen Career and Internship Center at Augsburg uses student vocation assessments as a tool to increase students' self-awareness and help them reflect on their life purpose and spiritual journey.

Theme 2 – Vocation as a Curricular Focus

International Exploration

Each year, with the help of Augsburg's Center for Global Education, Exploring Our Gifts sponsors two study-abroad seminars that enable participants to explore vocation in an international context. In addition, this project awards travel grants to three faculty members per year so that they can study how to incorporate the concept of vocation into study abroad courses.

Lilly Scholars

The Lilly Scholar Program provides a scholarship and a special seminar for students who have an interest in becoming ministers or church leaders. This project allows students to explore the field of ministry and to reflect on whether they are called to this form of service.

Theme 3 – Vocation as Education for Service

Church Leader Development (Camp Stipends)

Since research shows that many church leaders were inspired early in life by a significant camp experience, the Church Leader Development project provides programming and a stipend to encourage students to spend a summer working at a camp.

Lilly Internships

Each spring this semester-long project provides eight students with hands-on experience at faith- and service-based organizations combined with a semimonthly seminar focused on exploration of vocation.

Alternate Spring Break

This project gives students the opportunity to engage in an off-campus community service project during spring break. This service experience takes place in the Gulf Coast region that is recovering from Hurricane Katrina.

Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute

High school youth come to the Augsburg campus for a week during the summer for intensive study of a theological theme. A youth and family ministry faculty member and a campus ministry associate facilitate the experience, a religion professor instructs, and current Augsburg students serve as mentors. Activities include readings, discussions, and site visits. Each student writes a reflection paper at the end of the institute.

Theme 4 – Developing Vocational Awareness in Faculty, Staff, and Students

New Faculty Orientation

The goal of this project is to introduce the concept of vocation to new faculty in an overt and focused manner. Activities for participants include a vocation session at the general orientation, year-long seminars, and an end-of-the year retreat.

Professional Development

The Professional Development project provides opportunities for Augsburg staff and faculty members to explore their own sense of call and to examine how it applies to their work at the College. This project provides book discussion groups and vocation seminars for faculty and staff. In addition, this project supports the work of individual departments as they develop the vocation component of the senior keystone courses in their majors.

Forums

One of the aims of the Lilly Endowment grant has been to make vocation a part of the public language of the campus. In past years the Forums project has brought some prominent public figures to campus to speak and engage in discussions with members of the Augsburg community. Currently, it draws upon faculty and staff members to give luncheon presentations on their own understanding of what it means to be called and what this calling means for work, family life, and civic responsibility.

Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning Development

A key objective of Augsburg's second Lilly Endowment, Inc. grant is the creation and implementation of the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning (ACFL) to build upon the work of Exploring Our Gifts after the Lilly grant ends in the summer of 2010. Programming has already begun, and Augsburg is currently engaged in fundraising with the goal of creating an endowment for the ACFL.

Till & Keep

It is important to have a written forum on vocation that can serve as a resource for the Augsburg community and its alumni as well as a vehicle for outreach to external audiences. To that end, Exploring Our Gifts publishes the annual journal *Till & Keep*, which contains reflections on vocation from faculty, students, staff, and friends of the College.

Lutheran Summer Music

This project helps support a promising Augsburg music student in a summer internship at the Lutheran Summer Music Academy and Festival at Gustavus Adolphus College.

Interreligious Dialogue

As a community that is genuinely interested in theological reflection on vocation, Augsburg welcomes the opportunity to join with non-Christians in exploring the concept of calling. To that end, Campus Ministry periodically hosts public forums with speakers from other faith communities such as Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and Native American.

Website Development for the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning

The purpose of this project is to create a web presence for the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning. This website will contribute to the mission of the center by providing a forum for public communication.

Confirmation Teaching Event

The goal of this recently designed project is to reach out to congregations in the community by providing supplemental confirmation programming. In mid-winter, professors in the youth and family ministry major hold a one-day event that brings the ELCA's "Book of Faith" initiative to confirmation-aged young people, exposes students and their youth ministers to new pedagogies, and demonstrates how Augsburg can serve as a resource for congregations.

AUGSBURG COLLEGE

Exploring
Our Gifts

Reconnecting Faith, Life, and Vocation

Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning

History

In the spring of 2002, the Lilly Endowment, Inc. awarded Augsburg College a \$2 million grant to expand the College's commitment to connecting faith and learning. As a result, Augsburg developed and implemented Exploring Our Gifts. After four years of successful programming, the Lilly Endowment awarded Augsburg a generous sustainability grant, matched by the College, to help support the project for an additional three years.

Exploring Our Gifts focuses on helping students, faculty, and staff discern their vocations in service to God and the world. The results have been universally transformative, with hundreds of students, faculty, and staff benefiting from a wide range of new programs, individual and community experiences, and academic opportunities.

Where We Are Going

Augsburg College is committed to continuing this important work beyond the life of the Lilly grant. To this end, the College has created the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning to embody and build upon the convictions at the heart of Augsburg's educational mission:

To nurture future leaders in service to the world by providing high quality educational opportunities, which are based in the liberal arts and shaped by the faith and values of the Christian Church, by the context of a vital metropolitan setting, and by an intentionally diverse campus community.

Our Purpose

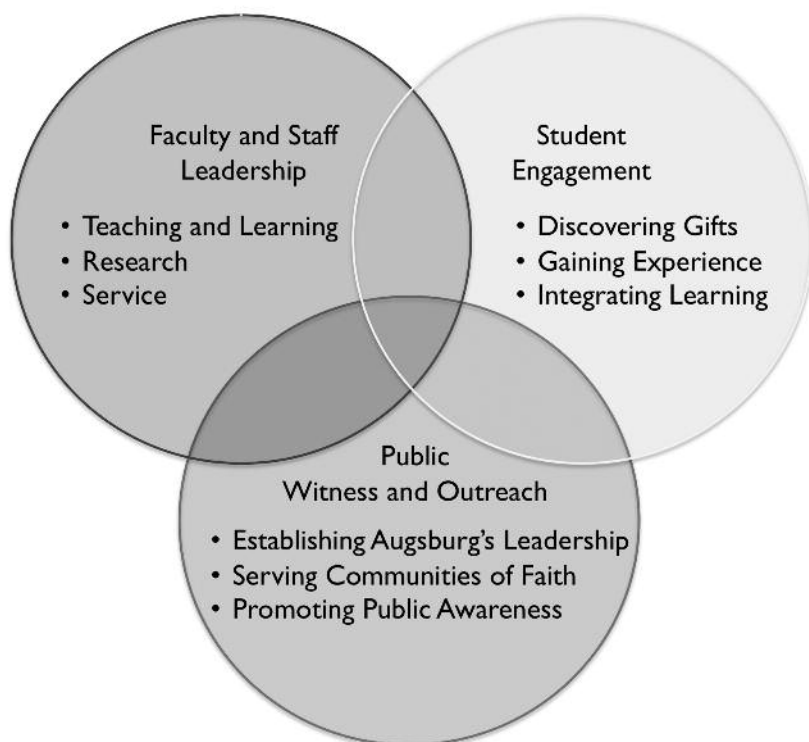
The Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning (ACFL) strengthens Augsburg's commitment to the theological exploration of vocation. To achieve this, the ACFL promotes and supports activities that do the following:

- lie close to the heart of educational enterprise because Augsburg embraces the Lutheran conviction that educational excellence is centered in vocation;
- guide Augsburg into the future by the lessons learned from Bernhard M. Christensen:
 - Christian faith liberates minds and lives,
 - Diversity strengthens vital communities,
 - Interfaith friendships enrich learning,
 - The love of Christ draws us to God, and
 - We are called to service in the world;
- enhance the capacity of the College to nurture vocation in every learning environment with resources and relationships that will yield fruitful results;
- keep the vision of Augsburg's distinctive educational excellence alive and lively in curricular discussions and outreach to the community; and
- advance Augsburg's common commitments, operating as dynamic catalysts within its curricular "Arch" and serving the natural sciences, social sciences, fine arts, professional studies, and the humanities disciplines of its Liberal Arts Foundation as a means of distinguishing the College's teaching, scholarship, and service.

ACFL Goals and Program Emphasis

The work of the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning is designed and organized to achieve the following goals on behalf of Augsburg College:

- establish Augsburg's leadership in the theological exploration of vocation
- articulate and guide the fulfillment of the Augsburg Promise
- live out the lessons of Bernhard Christensen
- encourage reflection on what it means to be human
- promote discernment of individual and institutional vocation



The diagram above provides an overview of the focus and intended program outcomes for the Augsburg Center for Faith and Learning. As the diagram indicates, the ongoing work of the ACFL will focus on three primary areas of activity prescribed by our Lilly grant.

- **Faculty and Staff Leadership**—Developing curricular and programmatic offerings to guide the theological exploration of vocation by
 - modeling discernment of vocation
 - exploring the intersection of faith and academic disciplines
 - hosting campuswide dialogue on the meaning of faith and learning
 - supporting travel to conferences and workshops
 - facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration
- **Student Engagement**—Supporting discovery and development of talents and gifts, discernment of vocation, and exploration of calling through
 - curricular and co-curricular offerings
 - scholarship support

- internships and service-learning experiences
- Dependable Strengths workshops for gift exploration and discernment
- implementing Seeing Things Whole into undergraduate and graduate curriculum
- organizing Book of Faith study groups

- **Public Witness and Outreach**—Promoting Augsburg's leadership in the pursuit and realization of individual and institutional calling through
 - Christensen Symposium
 - Pastoral Leadership Certificate Program
 - interfaith dialogue
 - Book of Faith study materials and workshops
 - conferences to promote the vocation of a Lutheran College
 - conferences to promote theological exploration of vocation

Please contact Thomas Morgan if you have any questions or comments: acfl@augsborg.edu.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Artist Biographies

Betsy Popelka graduated from Augsburg College in May 2007 with a double major in art history and studio art. She currently lives and works in Milwaukee, Wisc. After graduating from Augsburg, she spent a year working with homeless youth in a nonprofit art studio in Seattle followed by three months biking the length of the Mississippi River with two Augsburg classmates. She and her two bicycling companions recently self-published *It's Not All Downhill*, a novel in which they chronicled this incredible journey through words and art. Popelka's art is influenced by the day-to-day adventures of city life, and she actively seeks out the quirky, unusual, and compelling aspects of the urban environment. While she works primarily in watercolor, she also dabbles in papermaking, bookmaking, and pen and ink.

Curt Paulsen is an associate professor at Augsburg College where he teaches courses in the Master of Social Work program. His professional experience includes a 17-year stint as a consultant on the Pine Ridge reservation, agency administration, radio production, consultation with profit and nonprofit organizations, and private practice. In addition, Paulsen is an accomplished photographer. His beautiful and evocative digital prints have been exhibited at the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, Augsburg College, and the Red Wing Framing Gallery.

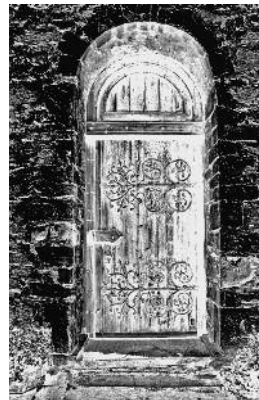
Artwork in This Issue

Cover:



Autumn
Watercolor, 2006
Betsy Popelka

Page 20:



Church Door in Norway
Digital Print, 2009
Curt Paulsen

Page 8:



Church in Ireland
Digital Print, 2009
Curt Paulsen

Page 24:



Cathedral of Trees
Digital Print, 2006
Curt Paulsen

Page 12:



Arboretum Tree
Digital Print, 2009
Curt Paulsen

Page 32:



Indiana Trees
Digital Print, 2001
Curt Paulsen

Page 16:



Bridge Walk
Digital Print, 2009
Curt Paulsen

AUGSBURG
COLLEGE