NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

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"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."

(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

After a fairly brutal winter here in Minnesota (including a bunch of snow late in February!), we are finally seeing glimpses of spring with melting snow and bright sunshine. It is remarkable how our moods are shaped by these passing seasons. We infused a good bit of excitement into our gloomy winter with the opening in January of our new Hagfors Center for Science, Business and Religion. A transformative building for our campus community, it is the idea behind the building that I find most inspiring. As we teach students across the disciplines (there are nine departments in the building), we equip them for meaningful lives in a world where the boundaries are fluid and there is both tension and promise at the intersections. Reflective practice is alive and well in our new building!

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

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REFLECT ON THIS

>>By another way<<

This was my first chapel homily of the new year.

Scripture: Matthew 2: 11-12 (KJV)

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver (From "The Summer Day")

I love the fantastical story of the Wise Ones, who travel from afar to find the Christ Child. Found only in Matthew's gospel, the story is mysterious, cryptic, magical – and probably not true. But who cares, because it is a story – like all good fiction – that draws us to a larger truth. And I think that this larger truth is found in the two verses we heard from the story this morning: they find the child and his mother; they bow down in reverence; and then, directed by the Divine, set off by "another way."

I am struck at the dawn of this Epiphany season, this time after Christmas when we mark the ways in which the gospel is proclaimed to the entire world, what it means for all of God's faithful people to set off "by another way" now that we too have seen the Christ Child and been changed forever.

As Pastor Dave shared with us in yesterday's chapel homily, this Epiphany season is a fitting time for us to answer poet Mary Oliver's piercing question, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" But I want to back up a few lines in her poem to explore why the question itself is important. As she writes, "I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass, how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields…Tell me, what else should I have done?" There is the question that haunts me this Epiphany. What else should I have done? What else shall I do now that God has entered human history in the person of a child, now that the Word has become flesh and dwelled among us, now that we have been changed forever by God's loving and gracious act? What else?

What else should I have done? What does it mean for God's faithful people to travel – at God's invitation and direction – by another way?

First, we confess – Early in December, our annual Advent Vespers services began with this powerful prayer, crafted by Keith Watkins:

"Prayer of Confession" by Keith Watkins

God, we confess that ours is still a world in which Herod seems to rule:

The powerful are revered, the visions of the wise are ignored, the poor are afflicted, and the innocents are killed.

You show that salvation comes in the vulnerability of a child, yet we hunger for the "security" of walls.

You teach us that freedom comes in loving service, yet we trample on others in our efforts to be "free."

Forgive us, God, when we look to the palace instead of the stable, when we heed politicians more than prophets.

Renew us with the spirit of Bethlehem, that we may be better prepared for your coming.

Amen.

Ours is a world that reveres power, that ignores wisdom, that afflicts the poor, that kills the innocents. We are people who seek salvation in walling ourselves off from each other. We are a people who seek to get ahead by climbing over the vulnerable in our midst. We long for palaces and other signs of wealth instead of the humble and ordinary ways in which God's will is done. We put our faith in human promises when prophets proclaim another way. We ignore the question that the Christ Child puts to each of us – what else should I do to live as God intends?

And then confident of God's faithful promise of forgiveness and reconciliation, we move forward by another way. Perhaps we listen to the call of prophets like African-American theologian Howard Thurman, who wrote this call to action:

"Now the Work of Christmas Begins"

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

Or perhaps our way forward – what we will do with our one wild and precious life – is to see the world with new eyes this Epiphany.

- To say Yes when the world says No – did you know that research shows that it takes five affirming comments to overcome one critical word? How will you say yes to your friends and neighbors, to those you disagree with, to the strangers in our midst, to the most vulnerable in our community, so that your affirming words might lift their hearts and bodies and spirits?
- To seek abundance in a world marked by the cynicism of scarcity – do we understand that abundance is much more about how we overcome the fear and anxiety of having to share what we have than it is about having more? There is plenty to go around – thanks be to God - so how will we marshal the courage and imagination and resolve to share it wisely with all God's creation?
- To be beacons of hope and joy in a world filled with fear and darkness – recall that wonderful line from Leonard Cohen's "Anthem": "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." Epiphany calls us to be the light of the world – to recognize that in all of its brokenness, all of its cracks, the world so needs the light of hope and joy that shines through us.

How about instead of New Year's resolutions, our task as God's faithful people this Epiphany season is to renew our baptismal promises – to explore what else shall I do, to seek another way

home, to know that God in Christ Jesus has comes into our midst so that all of the world might be redeemed by God's loving grace and our faithful service. May it be so.

>>A sort of republican banquet<<

I had the great privilege earlier this month of celebrating the 90th birthday of Martin Marty and the 20th anniversary of the Marty Center for the Public Understanding of Religion (at the University of Chicago Divinity School) by presenting the following paper at a conference to mark the occasions. You will recognize the themes here and I hope also see how Marty's work has influenced my life in higher education.

""God is good," murmured the Imam as he stepped to the microphone, to which we people of diverse faiths and experiences responded in our hearts, "Yes, God is good, and this is not what our God intends for us."

The occasion was a neighborhood meeting in 2008 following the murder of Ahmednur Ali, one of our Augsburg students – a young Somali-American who broke up a fight while he was tutoring children at the local community center and was gunned down outside the center. The meeting was to address safety concerns in the aftermath of the shooting, and we all experienced first-hand the wrenching emotional impact of this shooting on our lives together. Though we intended to talk about more security cameras and heightened safety patrols, instead we listened to urgent longing for community. Instead of hearts breaking apart, the Imam broke our hearts open to a new path forward. In that spirit, our community came together to rededicate itself to the well-being of our neighbors – yes, to more security cameras and personnel, but even more urgently to finding common purpose in the health, safety and well-being of our neighbors and neighborhood.

It is what has happened on our campus and in our neighborhood since this incident in 2008 that I want to describe briefly this afternoon, and in particular how Marty shaped my response to this event and gave me direction that orients my leadership at Augsburg University and in the world.

First, a brief autobiographical note that informs my contribution to this occasion. I am an unusual Marty student (aren't we all!). I am not a historian of any stripe. I began at the Divinity School in 1978, first as a master's student and then as a doctoral candidate in Ethics and Society. After finishing my doctoral exams, I was distracted by the opportunity to take on an administrative post in the development office at the University – a move that led me eventually through a succession of roles at the University and the Art Institute of Chicago, and further away from finishing a dissertation in ethics. It was upon my return to the Divinity School in 1991 as the associate dean that then Dean Clark Gilpin challenged me to complete my doctoral studies – something about modeling good graduate student behavior, I believe was his point. Given the time that had passed, none of my ethics faculty mentors were still at the Divinity School, so Dean Gilpin offered the most helpful advice I've perhaps ever received. Find someone who will help you finish. That is how it came to be that I am one of the 128 advisees on that card in Marty's wallet! And I stand as just one example – as this afternoon's program illustrates – of the diverse students Marty attracts and mentors and the influence they have across the academy, the church and the world.

I had the same experience many of you in this room enjoyed with Marty – summers on the porch in Riverside, thoughtful guidance on all things related to dissertation writing, provocative challenges to thesis and exposition – but our conversations weren't about American religious history, instead they veered to the role of professions and institutions in American public life, in fact to our shared

commitment to understanding how faith informs our roles in democracy. In that way, Marty helped me understand how my academic pursuits set a foundation for leadership in higher education and beyond – and my path forward has never been the same.

I am a social ethicist now in my 16th year as a university president, and I know that my calling as a leader in higher education has been shaped by several fundamental themes in Marty's life and work – themes that I believe are at the heart of the Marty Center's mission and programs. Allow me to name three "compass points," if you will, in Marty's work that are relevant to my story.

In 1979, Marty penned an essay in *The Journal of Religion* entitled "A sort of republican banquet." Borrowing William James's concept of the republican banquet table, Marty offers a masterful overview of the dynamic ways in which faith and religion have played critical roles in the history of our republic. From the deism of the founders to DeTocqueville's mid-19th century curiosity about how diverse faith communities tolerated each other to John Dewey's "common faith," Robert Bellah's "civil religion" and Peter Berger's "canopy of the sacred," Marty suggests that the willingness (or not) of diverse faiths to come to the banquet table, share their particularities, engage in conversation and seek common purpose has been one of the markers of the well-being of our republic. Stopping short of a normative claim, Marty concludes that "sightings" – or perhaps more fittingly, "seatings" - of the faithful at the banquet table are worthy of our abiding attention.

Hold that image for now – "a sort of republican banquet table."

And then to Marty's 1997 book, *The One and the Many: America's Struggle for the Common Good*, in which he seeks to name the threads of diverse myths, symbols and stories that enable us to craft a robust and vital body politic – not with some grand narrative of oneness or community, but with "associations" that come together in pursuit of, and grounded by, cohesive affections and sentiments. Imagine the common good pursued through an "association of associations."

Another image to hold – "an association of associations."

And finally to a more recent book, *Building Cultures of Trust*, Marty's 2010 expansive argument for the need to restore trust in our institutions and systems – trust that makes possible the sort of common work that undergirds healthy communities and organizations and societies. Here he both names the risks associated with building and restoring trust – risks many of us as leaders and citizens have experienced – while at the same time pointing to the need to build and rebuild trust from the bottom up, on the ground in everyday public life.

A final image – "cultures of trust."

A sort of republican banquet table; an association of associations; and cultures of trust. I believe it is at the intersection of these themes that robust democratic engagement happens. People of faith come to the banquet table, able and willing to share their diverse and particular stories when there is trust that deeply held beliefs will be taken seriously and that there is a foundation for moving forward together.

Now back to my story. Augsburg University, one of the 26 colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is located in a Minneapolis neighborhood that comprises the most diverse zip code between Chicago and Los Angeles, where most of our neighbors are Somali-Americans, the largest Somali community outside of Mogadishu.

Ten years ago, someone broke the commandment, "You shall not murder," and now I know why God gave Moses the great gift of these commandments. Offered in a specific context to the Israelites, God spoke these commandments directly to God's people so that they might know that they were chosen, that God loved them, that God wanted them to flourish. And in following the commandments, the Israelites would live into God's will, God's reign, God's intentions for God's people.

With a nod to my own faith tradition, Martin Luther also is helpful here in his explanation of the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder," when he says: This means that "we are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbor in any way." Simple and yet so remarkably helpful. To kill someone is about much more than the sinful act of murder – the law covers the murderer – it is about our neighbors and our neighborhood. It is about the pain and fear and injustice – it also is about the compassion and consolation and remembering. It is about God in our midst, allowing us to go on, keeping us strong even when we don't believe we can go on because we are sad and desperate and frightened. The commandments are about a loving God with us. A remarkable gift.

And it is God's gift that I was firmly focused on as I led a mourning community in the midst of an anxious and frightened neighborhood. Someone broke a commandment and now we lived in the aftermath. It is clear to me that God does not give us commandments primarily to convict the sinner – we all get that, we're broken, we don't live up to the rules, we struggle to hold it all together. God gives us commandments so that we might know the sort of lives God intends for us to live together.

What this has meant for Augsburg and our neighborhood during these past ten years is an agenda of work and conversation – I'm drawn to mid-20th century Roman Catholic political philosopher John Courtney Murray's reminder that the Latin root of conversation means both to talk together and to live together – an agenda we pursue together at the republican banquet table, sharing our diverse stories as we associate, and building trust as we build a healthier, more just, more equitable and compassionate neighborhood.

And it happens in very practical, concrete, even mundane and ordinary ways – though often with extraordinary impact. Four quick themes of our interfaith work and lives…

- In our undergraduate curriculum, one of our required religion courses introduces our students of diverse faiths and backgrounds to the Lutheran Christian theological concept of vocation. As our faculty report, these classes quickly turn into interfaith conversations as students share how the concepts they are learning ("thick" stories from our institutional tradition) relate, intersect and perhaps clash with their own beliefs. A sort of republican banquet table right there in the classroom.
- In our campus life, we have sought ways to clearly state the firm character of our particular faith tradition – daily chapel services, carrying the cross for university events, sharing how the charisms of our tradition shape our identity – while at the same time being hospitable and embracing of the diverse students we education – a Muslim chaplain in our campus ministry office and a vital Muslim Student Association, prayer spaces and dining options, orientation for residence life staff about interfaith issues, a new Hillel has been organized. Building a culture of trust on campus and beyond.
- In our institutional practices, our Board of Regents has adopted policies that embrace our commitments to hospitality and justice for those of diverse faiths. We have integrated

interfaith prayers, alongside our traditional Christian prayers, into our institutional rituals. A credit-bearing interfaith scholars program deploys students of diverse faith backgrounds as ambassadors of interfaith living across campus – seeking to share information about diverse faiths, build relationships between people of diverse faiths, and help shape positive attitudes toward those of different faith traditions. We monitor these efforts intentionally and vigilantly, knowing that we cannot leave the work to chance.

- In our community engagement, we host (alongside two Lutheran congregations and two Muslim communities) weekly interfaith meals, conversations and service projects. The local Jewish federation has partnered with us to send our students to Israel for study trips. We have three Interfaith fellows (representing Jewish, Muslim and Humanist leaders) from the community serving as resource people on campus. We are seen more and more as a model for interfaith living by our sister colleges and universities who are learning from our work. Lots of associations in association!

I'll conclude here with a word of appreciation to Marty (90 years young!), The Marty Center and the Divinity School for now 40 years of forming my leadership in higher education and society. And I know that similar gratitude flows from a cloud of witnesses across the globe, for who Marty's legacy has shaped the public understanding and practice of religion. I have the great privilege to witness to the power of "a sort of republican banquet table" – the lesson I learned from my teacher, Martin Marty – as we pursue the common good in the academy and in public. Perhaps even as we attend to the "seatings" at the banquet table – our good work as scholars – we are called more and more to take our own seat there on behalf of a more robust and vital republic and democracy. May it be so."

PRACTICE THIS

>>Philanthropic autobiography<<

I have returned once again to this brief note as I have asked my students to engage in this exercise of philanthropic autobiography. If you haven't done this before (or for a while), think back and see how your own views of philanthropy have been shaped and informed.

"It begins with you and me. It begins with our understanding of how we learned to be philanthropic. If we have not been self-reflective about philanthropy, then we are not in a position to ask others to be philanthropic (sound familiar!)

All of us who have studied with Bob Payton have done our philanthropic autobiographies. Philanthropic autobiography is a wonderful exercise that asks us to identify the people, the circumstances, the institutions, and the experiences in our lives that have taught us to be philanthropic. It then challenges us to connect that autobiographical material with our current philanthropic work – personal and/or professional.

I use the philanthropic autobiography exercise with my staff, with boards, at retreats, and with students. I find that time after time, those who are asked to be reflective about their philanthropic identity find the exercise meaningful – and learn that there are a variety of philanthropic stories among their colleagues, a variety of ways of talking and thinking about the philanthropic imagination.

Begin with your story. Write down the influences on your philanthropic identity and then make the links to how you participate in the philanthropic community – as donor, volunteer, caregiver, board member, professional staff, and citizen. What difference does it make?"

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I am once again co-teaching the senior honors seminar on income inequality in the US. Two new books are helpful resources for the issues raised in the course.

$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America by Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer (Mariner Books, 2016) is an engaging study of poverty after the so-called welfare reform of the 1990s.

Also, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond (Crown Books, 2016), which won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize, captures the dynamics of housing insecurity in America through both data and stories of real families.

>>Separated<<

The Christian calendar puts us in the season of Lent, a time of penitence and waiting. Poet T.S. Eliot captures the season well in this poem.

"Ash Wednesday" (1930)

"This is the time of tension between dying and birth,

The place of solitude where three dreams cross Between blue rocks…

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the mountain, spirit of the garden,

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood,

Teach us to care and not to care,

Teach us to sit still Even among these rocks,

Our peace is in His will And even among these rocks,

Sister, mother, and spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,

Suffer me not to be separated.

And let my cry come unto thee."

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Culture change
- Seeing things whole