The ELCA College and the Church: Strengthening the Partnership.

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What a wonderful opportunity it is to have all of you together in one room! My thanks to our hosts for inviting us and to all of you for coming.

In what follows, I will be talking primarily about church-related colleges. I will say only a little about seminaries. This is not because I am indifferent to seminaries, but because the topic of the church's relation to them is not entirely the same as the topic of its relationship to its colleges. In both cases better linkages need to be made, but the kind of linkage is somewhat different, and the barriers to be overcome are not entirely the same. By focusing on one type of institution I am merely trying not to cluster what I say with lots of distinctions. Other opportunities will occur this afternoon to expand the conversation, and if you wish, we can move in that direction during the question and answer session.

Whenever we discuss the church-relatedness of the ELCA colleges, at least two topics arise. The first is internal and involves identifying the core values of the institution--how the Lutheran tradition informs the college's sense of purpose and the ways in which it seeks to carry out that purpose. Questions such as the following need to be considered: how does the Lutheran tradition affect faculty selection? How does it affect the curriculum and classroom teaching? How does it affect student life? And so on. This is an important topic--one to which I have given some attention. The title on the original schedule that you received, "The Lutheran Tradition and the Liberal Arts College: How are they Related?" comes from an essay on that subject. But this summer, as President Torgerson and I discussed my topic, the announced theme did not seem to fit the overall purpose of this day and this particular assembly of participants very well. So we decided to hand out the essay rather than cover that topic here. [The bibliographic information is missing. The article comes from *Called to Serve: St. Olaf and the Vocation of a Church College*, edited by Pamela Schwandt, published by St. Olaf College, 1999.]

Whereas defining the college's relationship to the Lutheran tradition is internal, the second topic is external. It has to do with the relation between the college and the church. It's also an important topic, one which I've lived out in my own life for 21 years at Muhlenberg College and three at Gustavus, but not one I've written or spoken about very much. So, whatever I have to say is very preliminary, and I'll be grateful for your questions and your comments to help me figure out what I want to say. By the way, that last comment (help me figure out what I think) is borrowed from what a colleague had to say about me back in 1992 when I "retired" from chairing the religion department at Muhlenberg. He said: I used to work in an office in New York City, where everyone would discuss what was behind the statements made by their superiors. He or she said so and so, but what was really meant by that? When he came to Muhlenberg, he said, he kept trying to figure out what was behind the statements I made to him

and to the department, until he realized, "nothing." That is, what I said was what I meant. He added, “When he speaks, Darrell may not yet have figured out what he thinks, but what he says and what he means are the same.” I am often not yet clear what I think or am confused about something or ill-informed. It's here where I can use your help.

I will focus on the second topic, under the title "The ELCA College and the Church: Strengthening the Partnership." Allow me to begin with a story, apologizing in advance to those few of you who have already heard it. The incident occurred in the spring my senior year in high school. A group of us were at a Luther League Day at Concordia College in Moorhead, standing in front of the then new Library. The man who operated a farm a mile north of my parents--a friend and a neighbor (who had, by the way, barely finished high school and never himself taken so much as a college course)--asked where I was going to school next year. I said, "the University of North Dakota. I've been accepted. I have a scholarship and a roommate--it's all set." He said, "Have you thought about a church college?" With teenage naiveté and bluntness, I shrugged, "I don't like this place very much." He said, "Well, this isn't the only church college." I said, "It's the only one I know." He said, "'Tell you what, in a week I'm getting a new car. You take it, and go look at St. Olaf or Augsburg or any other one you want to visit." Two or three weeks later, he handed me the keys to his brand new Chevrolet Impala, allowed me, then only 16 years old, to take two other high school boys along, and drive 400 miles to visit colleges. After a morning at St. Olaf, we visited Augsburg and the Lutheran Bible Institute (which was then in Minneapolis). I went home and enrolled at St. Olaf. One of the two boys with me enrolled at Augsburg and is now an ELCA pastor. The other would have come to St. Olaf except for a recently widowed mother. He went to UND and became a physician. I recognize, of course, that other factors besides that visit were at work in my decision, but my neighbor's bold gesture was the turning point. It altered the course of my life. [By the way, did it make any lasting impression on him? Not at all. He forgot all about it until 5-6 years ago when I reminded him. He was utterly elated to learn he'd had some influence and has referred to the event several times since.]

I tell the story in order to focus on my neighbor. His allegiance and concern for church-related colleges were obvious. Without ever having attended one, he felt that a church-related college mattered, and he felt connected. As an active Lutheran layman, the colleges were in some sense "his."

During the last forty years, some tensions have developed in that sort of allegiance and concern. The causes are both conceptual and practical. A conceptual peculiarity characterizes colleges related to the Lutheran church that can be confusing to many. The confusion arises because our society provides us with two ready-made models for church-related institutions, and these colleges do not fit either.

The first model is "sectarian." A sectarian institution prizes religious uniformity and tends to serve those with the same religious identity. It is firmly rooted in a tradition and sees itself as a kind of "religious enclave" in the midst of secular society, a place set apart to which one can retreat for instruction. The sectarian institution can easily locate its difference from the surrounding culture, in part because those differences are embodied in symbolic behavior ("we

don’t' dance," "we are vegetarian," " we don't go around without heads covered," or whatever.). And the sectarian school does not need to struggle very much to define its identity. Its patterns are familiar to anyone who has grown up in that denomination.

The sectarian model has a lot of strengths. It can provide a place of nurture. It can suggest a more radical form of discipleship. But cooperation with the broader society is difficult. Also, it tends to give too much authority to certain *ways* of being Christian. The *marks* of the group's identity too easily *become* its identity.

The sectarian model is what many church members expect of the colleges related to the Lutheran church. They expect them to be religious enclaves, where catechetical instruction is continued, where the faculty, the staff, and the student body are predominantly Lutheran, and where a uniform code of behavior is followed.

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The second model is "non-sectarian." It prizes inclusiveness. Instead of separating from the surrounding society, it seeks to serve all segments and to do so by mirroring that society. It avoids religious differences by minimizing them and seeking a self-definition on which all can agree. It does not need to struggle very much to articulate its identity, because the pattern is being ironed out in the larger community. Persons at the institution are already familiar with it. Instead of an enclave, the non-sectarian institution is a microcosm of the larger society.

There are strengths in this model as well. It can, e.g., easily cooperate with a wide variety of other groups. It is easy for faculty, staff, and students to come and go--no big adjustment is needed. But it does not itself nurture any particular sort of identity; for that its self-definition is too superficial; instead it relies on individuals whose commitments have been nurtured elsewhere. If one allows the term to be used in a neutral way, one could call it "parasitic."

The non-sectarian model is what many academics and many friends in the broader community expect of the colleges related to the Lutheran church. Having been assured that the college is not like a Bob Jones University, they expect a pluralism that allows each subgroup to express itself and the college's own religious commitments to be so general and superficial as to be innocuous. They expect college ceremonies either to be secular or to include representatives of various religions; they chafe at any preference (or what they probably call "favoritism") granted Lutherans at the time of hiring or admission or in scholarship awards or the like. They expect the identity of the college to be very broad but not very deep, not very well rooted in a particular tradition.

I would like to suggest that a Lutheran identity commits a college to a third path--one that is neither sectarian nor non-sectarian. Unlike the sectarian model, this third path takes a religious tradition very seriously and seeks to build its identity around it. It explores the riches of that tradition as part of its contribution to the community as a whole. But, unlike the sectarian model, it seeks to serve the whole community and in so doing is ready to work with people of other religious traditions. The *sectarian* model avoids religious diversity by withdrawing from it. The *non-sectarian* model avoids encountering religious diversity by minimizing and sidestepping it. The *third* model takes religious diversity seriously enough to engage and struggle with it, while

at the same time remaining deeply committed to the importance of its own Lutheran tradition. Rather than an enclave or a microcosm, it is a well dug deep in order to provide something helpful for the whole community.

I am not sure that every denomination would want to support this third model, but the Lutheran tradition does, in part because of its profound insight that the fundamental human reality is communal and relational, in part because any recognition of this fundamental reality entails living with paradoxes and unresolved tensions, in part because of its basic ethical standard of service to others (in the end the morality of every act is judged by this standard), and in part because of its recognition that service to others is nourished by awe and gratitude to God, awe and gratitude sustained and nourished by the gospel message to which the tradition itself bears witness. In other words, whenever a college takes seriously the biblical teaching that every human is a creature of God it cannot withdraw into non-sectarian empty tolerance (on the one hand) or sectarian tribalism (on the other). It must be engaged, *and* its engagements must be inclusive. And, whenever one takes seriously the Lutheran insight that humans are not inherently good but that their goodness must be nourished at the font of God's generosity, then it cannot settle for a superficial link to its religious tradition. Instead of an impediment to inclusiveness (as the non-sectarian model assumes), a deep commitment to the Lutheran tradition actually nourishes and sustains that inclusiveness. This third model affirms and embodies a tension between rootedness and engagement with the world. On the one hand, without rootedness accommodation occurs, societal assumptions are not critiqued, and people are not served (at least not on the deeper levels of their human need). On the other hand, without engagement, isolation occurs, and the church's formulation of the religious tradition is not critiqued. Nor is one challenged to investigate that religious tradition very deeply. The Lutheran tradition summons a college to work out a "both . . . and," both affirming its religious identity and engaging with today's world. The underlying conviction is that this tension is a productive one.

So, to come back to the conceptual difficulty. Many have a hard time understanding or explaining this third way. When a Lutheran college is not following the sectarian model (as it may have done in the past) and is not following the non-sectarian model (the other default position), no one knows quite what to make of it. This leaves us with an interpreting job to be done. Helping people understand this third way is the task of both the church and its colleges. [It would be fruitful for us to discuss how that can be done more effectively.]

Allow me, now, to identify a few practical factors that have affected the concern and loyalty exhibited by my neighbor.

From the church's side, the various mergers have scrambled loyalties. Back when I was driving my neighbor's car to Northfield and Minneapolis, Swedish-Lutherans felt some loyalty to Augustana, Rock Island, or to Gustavus, while those colleges were not even on the radar screen for Norwegian or Danish or Finnish Lutherans. Each of the nine Lutheran groups that are now in the ELCA had its own college or colleges. The mergers of 1960 and 1988 expanded the numbers. It is harder to feel connected to 28 colleges than to one. And, after the mergers, the closest college was often not the one with which a congregation had historic ties. Moreover, in addition to scrambled loyalties, there is a general perception that the colleges have changed.

They are no longer as religiously homogeneous. They no longer have the strict rules they once did regarding dormitory life and social behavior. They are less sectarian than they once were, less ethnic than they once were. And many church members don't quite know what to make of this, so they assume their church-relatedness has declined and the colleges have become non-sectarian, indistinguishable from the other private schools. In the eyes of many, the basic distinction is public or private, thereby blurring the important differences between a college related to the Lutheran church and unaffiliated private colleges.

As a result of these "practical" and "conceptual" issues, fewer members of our congregations have the kind of loyalty and concern that my neighbor exhibited.

Looked at from the college's side, some good things have happened in the sense that the colleges have a wider vision of their role. They have improved the quality of their academic programs by attracting faculty with more expertise. A non-Lutheran student now has good reasons for being attracted to and choosing one of our ELCA colleges. And there are certainly advantages to the increased religious and ethnic diversity that one finds on a college campus today. But this change, as helpful as it is to the academic standing of the college, means that faculty and staff are no longer recruited from the ranks of alumni or from the membership of the ELCA. They come with a variety of college or university backgrounds, with a variety of religious experiences and loyalties, and from various parts of the country or even the world. To be sure, the colleges are usually quite intentional about preserving the main features of their identity and work at explaining to these recruits what it means to be a church-related college. In fact, I hear often that there is more discussion at Gustavus today about what it means to be church-related than there was 25 or 30 years ago. One can also say that the colleges enjoy a high level of commitment from their faculty and staff to the core values and to the church-related identity, but (and this is what affects the external relationship of college and church) those who belong to other denominations and religions do not themselves have direct links with the Lutheran church. They do not embody in their day-to-day movement the relationship between the college and the church that is our topic today. Moreover, the colleges are financially less dependent on the church than they were forty years ago. Many donors provide financial support precisely because the college is related to the Lutheran church, but the proportions have changed. Relatively more financial support now comes from government sources and from foundations, corporations, and friends who are not themselves Lutheran. The net result is that the college, however much its internal identity remains that of a college related to the Lutheran church, is also somewhat less likely to expect the kind of loyalty and concern that my neighbor exhibited.

Thus a certain distancing has occurred. Many faculty and staff who deeply appreciate the Lutheran-based identity of the college feel unconnected from the larger church. They have a diminished sense of the Lutheran community of faith as a partner in the educational process. At the same time, many congregation members have a diminished sense of loyalty and concern--that is, a diminished sense that these are *our* colleges. As a rule they are not well informed about the distinctive benefits of attending a college related to the Lutheran Church. Later this morning, I expect, we'll hear more about those distinctive benefits from Jim Day.

So, I have five questions:

1. Why should the church have colleges at all?
2. Why should a college be related to a church?
3. What can be done to strengthen the partnership?
4. Of what benefit to the college will this be?
5. Of what benefit to the church will this be?

Why should the church have colleges at all?

I do not intend to give a complete answer to this question, but it will be helpful to say one or two things.

The Lutheran church established colleges basically for two purposes--to educate church leaders, both lay and clergy, and to educate young people for community leadership. In a letter to the city councils in Germany in 1524, Luther affirmed both. Then he went on to explain the second in this way:

> If . . . there were no souls, and there were no need at all of schools and languages for the sake of the Scriptures and of God, this one consideration alone would be sufficient to justify the establishment of the very best schools for both boys and girls, namely, that in order to maintain its temporal estate outwardly the world must have good and capable men and women [so far so good, but now his language begins to reflect more gender specific roles], men able to rule well over land and people, women able to manage the household and train children and servants aright. . . . Therefore, it is a matter of properly training our boys and girls to that end.[1]

What links these two purposes together is a sense of vocation--that is, a sense that one is part of a larger community and that one has been called to serve that community. Individualists out to feather their own nests don't become community leaders (in the sense we are using that term) nor do they usually become church leaders.

A college related to the Lutheran church is rooted in a tradition oriented toward freedom--both freedom *from* religious coercion and freedom *for* a restored relationship with God and the neighbor--that is, freedom *for* service. The primary source of freedom is, of course, the Gospel, the Good News that God takes the initiative to restore and renew God's relationship with us. But the primary tool in the exercise of that freedom is wisdom or reason. By "wisdom" I mean that kind of understanding of people and issues that produces sound judgments. It is important to underline that the Lutheran tradition has a lot at stake in cultivating wisdom. For Luther, there was no particular structure of government mandated by the Bible or by faith. Nor were there any particular public policies mandated by Christianity. Only wisdom, guided by the ethical principle of serving the citizenry, could determine what was right. On an individual level we each have a calling, but that calling is not spelled out in detail. Along with the general principles supplied by the Bible, wisdom is needed to figure out how to respond to God's calling to serve the neighbor

[1] Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 45: 368.

and the community. That is, our behavior is not to be governed by a mindless following of rules but to be guided by an *understanding* of what the community needs--for this one can gain much from history, psychology, sociology, economics, political science, biology, communications, art and the like. The community of faith is called to be an agent of change in the world--to help bring about s*halom*. And to fulfill this calling, the church needs leaders--persons with the freedom and wisdom to move toward justice and peace. If the colleges contribute in any way to the enhancement of wisdom, the church needs them, for a lot is at stake for Lutherans in the presence or absence of wisdom.

[By the way, in our society, education is often confused with training. High schools & colleges are expected to credential people with the skills and information needed to do a particular job. However useful to society this may be, training and credentialing do not in themselves foster wisdom. A college related to the Lutheran church is called to foster wisdom. It usually strives to do this through a liberal arts orientation, through one-on-one mentoring, through small classes, and the like.]

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Why should a college be related to the church?

Colleges related to the Lutheran church need their connection to the church, because without that connection they lose their focus, their fundamental, distinctive identity. Education loses its community dimension and becomes either the advancement of individuals with individual purposes and individual agendas or the inculcation of skills needed for particular occupations. To put the matter another way, the college needs its connection to the church, because the Lutheran tradition gives it a strong basis upon which to build the liberal arts--that is, those studies which aim to set people free.

For example, the Lutheran tradition provides a more profound definition of freedom than does our culture.

For example, the Lutheran tradition provides a profound basis for unrestricted academic inquiry. Everything can be studied, everything can be critiqued, because things are always reformable and because genuine, significant service to the community and the neighbor requires that the truth be discovered and the truth be told.

For example, the Lutheran tradition emphasizes the community-oriented vocation of every individual--a calling that gives context and purpose for study.

For example, the Lutheran tradition gives priority to the community--to the need for deliberation and the insight of others.

For example, the Lutheran tradition suggests that we both take our studying very seriously and that we recognize its limits. It is limited by our finitude, by our proclivity to sin, by a profound sense of mystery--the mystery of life and the mystery of a God who does not conform to our expectation. .

To pursue any of these themes would lead us back into the internal question of church-relatedness, so I will not do so but instead move on. [In the article mentioned above, a fuller argument can be found regarding the intimate connection between the Lutheran tradition and the identity of a liberal arts college.]

What can be done to strengthen the partnership?

My basic proposal is that we find a way for persons in the church to begin to see colleges not just as a possible place to educate their children (as important as that may be) but as a resource for the ongoing life of the congregations. I doubt whether a renewed sense of loyalty and concern (as I have been calling it) can emerge without some more direct connection between the colleges and the adults in our congregations.

In order to explain what I have in mind, allow me to step back. Many observers suggest that the church is moving into a post-Christendom society--a society in which the church no longer is granted a privileged position. It is instead one group among others, one religious community among others. [Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition are examples of groups that want to reverse this trend and restore aspects of Christendom that are disappearing.] One result of the developing post-Christendom society is that clergy enjoy lessened social prestige. They no longer have ready access to civic leaders but are relegated to serving their own congregations. Likewise, they are no longer the public spokespersons for the Christian tradition. That task has fallen to the laity, for they alone are present in the workplace or in city hall. And to do this well the laity need to be far more articulate about the faith and its implications for public life than they used to need to be.

In order for laity to be equipped for this role, they need two things: (1) a deeper understanding of the Christian tradition (the Bible, theology, etc.) and (2) a deeper understanding of the relationship between faith and the other areas of their lives. Our seminaries have relatively greater expertise in the first of these two areas. Our colleges have relatively greater expertise in the second. They live at the intersection of faith and the other areas of life--faith and politics, faith and science, faith and business, faith and ecology, etc. If we could link the colleges more effectively with type 2 adult education (that is, adult education concerned with ministry in daily life), our congregations would have a way to appreciate first-hand the value of church-related colleges. And the colleges would be able to make a direct and important contribution to the renewal of the church.

The fact that two things are needed and that seminaries are expert in one and colleges in the other suggests that the linkage should be three-way: colleges, seminaries, church. And this involves seeing the seminaries not just a resource for clergy education but also as a resource for that part of adult education which involves instruction in the tradition. Not only would this three-way cooperation benefit the church, but it may also benefit the seminaries, because it would help sensitize clergy to the importance of encouraging education for ministry in daily life.

Of what benefit to the college would this be?

I have already indicated that most colleges related to the ELCA have a pretty good sense of their internal connection with the Lutheran tradition. But embodying that connection effectively is seldom easy. One of the impediments is the socialization to which faculty were exposed while in graduate school. They were schooled in a discipline and feel a great deal of loyalty to its guild. They are chemists, or they are sociologists, or they are historians and expect to contribute to their disciplines and gain the respect of their peers. Graduate school gave them little practice moving outside that field. In fact faculty members often get very nervous if asked to teach an interdisciplinary topic for any length of time. As the old saying goes, they have learned more and more about less and less. So, on the one hand, the advantage of being at a small liberal arts college is the opportunity for interdisciplinary conversation--being able to converse with a chemist or a political scientist over lunch and learn about something in that field is part of what I enjoy about being on a college campus. But, on the other hand, the prior socialization of faculty gets in the way of exploring those connections more fully.

If the colleges were to be involved in the education of laity for ministry in daily life their faculty would be called upon more often to think through the connections, not alone in front of one's own class but together with faculty from other disciplines and in the presence of adults who are fully engaged in negotiating the intersection of faith and life. The experience would thus encourage them to become more fully what a liberal arts college calls them to be: an academic community.

I think there would be yet another benefit. Anyone in academic circles, no matter how sympathetic they may be to Christianity, is exposed to a fairly sustained critique of the church. Many of those criticisms have some merit, but they usually entail vast generalizations and easily obscure the vitality of faith. A new involvement with serious adult education would deepen the faculty's appreciation for the lived reality of faith and provide a kind of engagement with others that even participating in worship itself does not do. A few years after I left the parish in Washington, DC where I served as pastor, I was invited back to preach. When I stood up in the pulpit and looked out at the congregation, I was momentarily unable to begin my sermon, because instead of a sea of faces, I saw one person after another, each with a story. This person had struggled with addiction. This person had lost a child. This person had dealt with family conflict. This person had faced ethical challenges in their workplace. Each face had a story. It would have been possible to have attended that church regularly and not have known those stories, but pastoral involvement exposed something deeper. I think serious, engaged adult education on issues of ministry is daily life might have a similar effect for teachers at our colleges.

And finally, college professors are generally invigorated by adult learners. Adults are more mature, more articulate, and bring so much more with them into the discussion. I remember asking a geographer from Rutgers to speak to a clergy group about the social factors at work in their region. He came back so excited, because those in attendance were actually interested in what he had to say. He had found an appreciative and engaged audience--something that energizes any teacher.

Of what benefit to the church will this be?

My assessment is that a good number of bright and able people in our society are disillusioned with the institutional church. In some cases, obviously, they are ill-informed, or discouraged because of very personal experiences. But in many cases, the disillusionment has a more general basis. They come to church seeking depth and meaning, but they are too quickly caught up in institutional maintenance and too easily lose sight of the larger purpose of societal change. They get tired and drift away. Two things are necessary to overcome this--one is education, so that they can understand the tradition more deeply and embody it more effectively. The other is a clear focus on the world and the church's role in it. I doubt whether the church, as it presently operates, can *by itself* achieve either of these. But the colleges offer both educational resources and experience at negotiating the intersection of faith and world.

To put it another way, the Lutheran tradition insists that faith and learning are not antithetical. The mission statement of Gustavus is not unusual in specifying as one of its purposes "a mature understanding of the Christian faith." This assumes that college-level education has something to contribute and that faith will be enhanced rather than undermined when exposed to education. If faith and reason are not antithetical in a college setting, then they ought not to be antithetical in congregations. That is, if the church is rightly interested in higher education, rightly challenging church-related colleges to do an effective job of taking faith seriously and integrating faith and reason/faith and learning, then the colleges ought in turn to challenge the church to take learning seriously and to integrate faith and reason/faith and learning. My experience tells me that congregations are very uneven in their response to this challenge. Some make it a priority and do a good job. Others don't even scratch the surface. In a post-Christendom age we need to do a better job.

Not only do we need continuing education to give depth to church life, not only do we need to help members integrate faith and learning, but we also need to help members learn how to deliberate and seek common ground. Those in our society who are not firmly committed to one program or position tend to avoid controversial subjects. They have no confidence that debate will do any good. And this is probably reinforced by the absence of models in the media, where issues are artificially polarized and the debate leads nowhere. Many entering students in college have told me they don’t dare talk about controversial subjects, such as abortion, because they are afraid of an emotionally or even physically hostile reaction. I expect college students are not alone in this fear. Back in the 1980s I organized a day-long workshop on abortion. After a state senator spoke on the politics of abortion, I had a faculty member from a neighboring RC college give the most reasoned presentation he could as to what was at stake in a pro-life position. Then I had another faculty member who had been active in Planned Parenthood give the most reasoned presentation she was able as to which was at stake in a pro-choice position. Two things happened. (1) Several people told me, “I’ve never heard a reasoned position for (whatever the other side was). I have some things to think about.” (2) By the end of the day the group (which had started with polarized and polarizing language about the topic) was talking together about things of common concern such as preventing teenage pregnancy. They had found

some common ground--(to use James Hunter's term[2]--i.e. not compromise but areas where values overlap and people can work together on common strategies for the welfare of the wider community). What I am suggesting is that the church ought to model for its members an engaged search for common ground. Our colleges can be helpful in modeling that search and explaining how one goes about it.

In addition to helping members integrate faith and life and in addition to helping church members learn how to deliberate productively, I expect that a clearer focus on education and on the world and the church's role in it will also inspire more young people to consider the vocation of ordained ministry, because they will see something important happening, of which they want to be a part.

But there is yet another benefit. If the colleges and the church can work together to help people understand what I have labeled the "third model of church-relatedness," the one that is neither sectarian nor non-sectarian, the church will benefit because people will gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the Lutheran tradition. As odd as it sounds to say this, in some respects our colleges are more Lutheran than our congregations. That is, for a variety of reasons, some of them quite valid, the church in the twentieth century focused its attention on redemption, on the second article of the creed--on forgiveness and grace and faith in Jesus the Christ. When combined with the individualism of our culture, with the fragmentation and compartmentalization of modern life, with the psychological orientation of the last fifty years, and with unsophisticated adaptations to ecumenism and religious pluralism, that emphasis on redemption has tended to overshadow Luther's parallel emphasis on God active in the world. In other words, Luther's marvelous sense of God's down to earth activity in ongoing creation--in every aspect of international relations, economic life, and political decision-making--has been obscured. Out of a fear of creationism, God the creator has received too little attention. One result is that the distinctiveness of the Lutheran tradition is obscured, and the gospel message is too easily confused with the "God and me" of evangelical Protestantism. The other result is that we are ill-equipped to deal with many of the urgent issues of the day. Without a vivid sense of God's activity in the world and our co-creatorship, we cannot deal adequately with sexuality, we cannot understand our environmental responsibilities, we cannot foster economic or political justice, and we have a religious base too narrow for inter-religious understanding.

My suggestion is that colleges are exploring the difficult and "messy" questions of ongoing creation. They are dealing with the tensions inherent in Lutheranism's understanding of the world. They are striving to articulate a third way of embodying their church-relatedness. And my suggestion is that if together we all could help the church understand this enterprise and its importance, it would strengthen the church's sense of its own Lutheran identity and its ability to deal with some of the most pressing of contemporary issues.

Concluding Comment

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[2] See James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture Wars* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 35. On pp. 236-237 Hunter cites the ELCA's "Social Statement on Abortion" as an example of a response, successfully framed in theological language and identifying common ground, from a church "wracked by division over the abortion issue."

I want to leave you with two questions to which I do not know the answer.

1. During the gathering in January of ELCA bishops and teaching theologians, I tried in a small discussion group to give expression to the marginalization that some teaching theologians at our colleges feel. But from the conversation that followed, my eyes were opened to see that virtually every group and virtually every institution in the ELCA feels marginalized, at least as compared to their standing prior to the merger in 1988. What some call a "silo mentality" seems the rule. So I ask: what is it about this church that produces the commonplace perception of being marginalized? Is it the size of the church? Is it something about the way we are structured? Is it a difference of philosophy--as, for example, in the colleges and social service agencies seeking to work at the intersection of faith and life while congregations content themselves with being enclaves of personal faith and mutual support?

   To the degree to which we can answer that question, perhaps we can envision alternative strategies to overcome the isolation--that silo mentality that leaves institutions, whether colleges, seminaries, or social service agencies, pretty much on their own.

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2. During a recent meeting of the AAR/SBL, John Cobb, the well-known Methodist theologian from Claremont, CA, spoke to a gathering of Lutheran professors and graduate students. The theme of his remarks was a question: can the church think again? In his eyes, the church has from time to time throughout history been more involved in *thinking* about what matters and more ready to give leadership in that area than it is now. [He meant this observation not as a judgment that no thinking is occurring (it certainly is) but as a challenge to do more.] To the degree the church has withdrawn from thinking, it has done so, I would suggest, partly out of a fear of what it might find. Most Americans do their best to avoid confronting the superficiality and pretense of our contemporary lives. Cobb's question is: can the church think again?

   In June I spent five days with the other members of the Board of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in Collegeville, MN, trying to envision the future direction of that Institute. As a part of that discussion, we thought about the future of the ecumenical movement. The last forty years have seen people rooted in a particular denominational tradition explore together their differences and similarities in a search for mutual understanding and cooperation. But today many persons in their 20s and 30s are not rooted in a faith community. They are searching. So we said that we expect the next phase of the ecumenical movement to focus on "identifying and understanding Christianity lived with authenticity in all its forms, and in multiple religious, cultural, and generational contexts." The statement goes on to say the Institute will foster this by

   --"probing the Gospel in tandem with the world"

   --"leading, teaching, infecting"

--"risking new patterns, definitions, and relationships"
--"nurturing dialogue among the disciplines"
--"stirring up conversations among the scholars and the broader community"
--"engaging questions from leaders in church and world."

From quite another source, therefore, has come a vision of the kind of partnership between church and higher education that I have in mind.

Can the church think again? The viability of the church's role in higher education depends on a "yes" to that question. Only then will it value learning and wisdom. Only then will it value its colleges. Even more, only if the church "can think again" will it exhibit the integrity and authenticity necessary to win the loyalty of those searching for an alternative to the superficiality of contemporary culture.

Can the church think again? I don't know the answer, but I expect that a renewed partnership between church and college will make a "yes" more probable.