THE LUTHERAN LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By
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I

It is a high honor to be asked to speak at this historic joint conference involving the faculty of Bethany Lutheran College, Martin Luther College, and Wisconsin Lutheran College. I also want to acknowledge the seminary faculty as well.

I do a lot of public speaking. As a matter of fact, for our first date, I asked my wife to come hear me give a speech. Nevertheless, I find this a daunting audience, because it is your calling to embody my topic, “The Lutheran Liberal Arts College in the 21st Century.”

Of course, my assigned topic, “The Lutheran Liberal Arts College in the 21st Century,” is, in itself, daunting. It is daunting because it is broad. I could write volumes on the power and the problems of the liberal arts – and, indeed, many more qualified than I have done just that. Then too the history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod can be seen as one long exercise in definition of what it means to be Lutheran. As if these two dimensions were not sufficient in both their extent and their complexity, the call is to set them into the context of the 21st Century!

On his death bed, Goethe is said to have called out, “More light!” As I considered the overwhelming nature of this topic, my first instinct was to cry out, “More time!” More time to prepare and more time to present. But, coming at the end of this conference, I recognized that your attention and your goodwill would not tolerate such an imposition. I also recognized that the organizers did not expect that I would say everything there is to say about “The Lutheran Liberal Arts College in the 21st Century,” but rather they expected (hoped?) that I would say something cogent and insightful.

As every teacher recognizes – and as every teacher wishes students would recognize – it is much harder (but also more useful) to be cogent and insightful than it is to be definitive or exhaustive (or, I might say, to be exhausting).

My next thought was to follow the lead of Dr. Martin Luther at the Marburg Colloquy, to cease debate and to write the words of Scripture on the table. Had I adopted this approach, these are the words I would have written: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”1 Now, I know that writing on tabletops is not what you expected either. And, of course, Luther did a lot more than write on tables both before and after Marburg. And so shall I. This passage from Hebrews is a necessary but not a sufficient proposition for a paper on the Lutheran Liberal arts college in the 21st Century. It is necessary, that is to say, fundamental that the Lutheran Liberal arts college of the 21st Century should not differ from the Lutheran liberal arts college of the 20th Century, in its adherence to the Word, but I would argue that it is insufficient because no one assumes that the Lutheran liberal arts colleges in their 20th Century incarnations were all they could or should be. Were that the case, there would be no need for this conference or for me to have been assigned this topic. Also, as everyone on the frontlines recognizes, the essentially conservative enterprise of preserving our Lutheran heritage cannot be accomplished without a radical transformation of the way in which we “do college.”

My thesis, then, is that there is more to be done to make Lutheran liberal arts colleges all they can and should be, and that it will take strenuous effort to preserve Lutheran liberal arts colleges in the 21st Century.

We need to write on tables and on walls, on our hearts and on the hearts of our students, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

II

Were I in this distinguished audience, I would begin now to squirm in my seat. “Great, we had to come to Mankato in August to hear the self-evident.”
Were I in this audience – and given my less charitable disposition – I also might begin to gather stones. “Great, we had to come to Mankato in August to be insulted! What does he mean (or who does he think he is) saying we need to do more to proclaim the Word?”

My response would be: As Christians, we cannot return too often to the source of every good and perfect gift; nor can we neglect the Biblical injunction to encourage one another.

That the presence of the Word is self-evident in the proposition, “The Lutheran Liberal Arts College in the 21st Century,” does not mean that the meaning of this proposition is either self-evident or broadly or deeply understood.

And, the fact that the faculty of all three institutions are all so faithful to the Word – and I personally know this to be true – does not mean that we cannot do better.

When I was in graduate school at the University of Chicago, I remember a semantically challenged fellow student pleading with a professor that he be exempt from critiquing a book because he “agreed with it.” My critique – better, my challenge – to you as faculty, as servants of the Word, is to take radical action to make our Lutheran liberal arts colleges all they can and should be and to take these colleges which you will have transformed into the 21st Century – better, into the “kingdom come.” I extend this challenge not because I do not appreciate or because I do not think you appreciate the importance of the Word in your calling. Just the opposite, like the hapless Chicago student, I agree with you and appreciate you – better, I love you – and in love, we are to serve one another. As St. Paul wrote to Timothy, “...I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God...”

III

The radical action I propose is that you as faculty and these colleges as institutions exponentially expand your focus on Christian scholarship.

I recognize that, as faculty, you have a three-fold calling: to be teachers, to be scholars, and to engage in service. By focusing my paper on scholarship and by challenging you to increase your focus in the same direction, I am not denigrating the other two; indeed, I would argue, but not here today, that revitalizing Christian scholarship will restore the proper balance among the three and lift up both teaching and service.

IV

The God Who created all things and Who is everywhere present cannot be left out of our scholarship. God must be part of, be pervasive in, – better, be Lord of – our scholarship for it to be Christian.

As Lutherans, we believe in the centrality of the theology of the cross. There is no question that the pivotal event in our personal history and in the history of the world is “...Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

But, there is more to God’s Revelation than the fact of our salvation. There is nothing more important than this fact, but there are more facts than these.

Those of us of a certain age remember an advertising slogan, “V-8 – it’s not just for breakfast anymore!” Let me offer new slogan: “God – He is not now and never has been, just for church on Sunday mornings.” The modern world has driven God from the public square. Often, we Christians have been complicit in the denuding of the public square; all too willing to retreat; all too reticent to advance under the banner of the cross. The world of higher education is as much a part of the public square as are politics and government. The pretence of the sciences, arts, and letters is that they are as universal in their reach as is God Himself. We cannot engage in scholarship that has any validity to its claim to be Christian unless the God Who flatly stated, “...I AM ...the Truth...” is also there.

V

Why am I calling for a renaissance in Christian scholarship? Because the decline of Christian scholarship in other colleges and universities can be directly linked to the decline in Christian teaching and in Christian service, and, indeed, in the decline of Christian mission and identity.

I commend to you two superb books on this topic: The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief and The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches. These two books document that the expulsion of God from the academy was not the result of militant atheists and ruthless secularizers storming the ivy-covered barricades. No, rather, the
story is much less heroic. Faculty and administrators (deliberately and almost gleefully) traded their Christian heritage for the pottage of acceptance by their unbelieving colleagues. The Truth was not lost; it was thrown away with both hands. The recent history of much of Christian higher education parallels the modern development of sciences, arts, and letters. There has been a loss of nerve, which is really a loss of faith, in all fields of human endeavor. Wherein does this loss of faith consist? It is a loss of faith in the very existence of truth. If you could see my paper, you would see that I have not capitalized the word “truth” in this instance, although I did in all previous instances. What has been lost in all of modern academia is a belief that there is such a thing as truth. This loss of faith clearly has its intellectual antecedents in the loss of faith in the One Who is the Truth (I used capitals here), but it is more pervasive. For millennia, thinking people – including those people who never heard of the God of Israel or of Jesus of Nazareth – searched for, claimed to have found, and, indeed, had found things that were true. In different ways, both Socrates and Einstein identified the truth. In the last century and a half, the term “truth” was reduced to “truth claims” and, then “truth claims” themselves were ruled unacceptable in sciences, arts, and letters.

A recent exchange in the Chronicle of Higher Education illustrates how pervasive this rejection of “truth claims” has become. Russell T. McCutcheon, associate professor of religious studies at Southwest Missouri State University, vehemently objected to an essay by Arthur Schwartz of the John Templeton Foundation regarding “character education.” He strongly criticizes Schwartz’s use of what he calls the...rhetorically loaded terms “responsible,” “mature,” and “adult,”... [citing them as] the very reason that critics work to lay bare the unspoken politics that drive the discourse on principles, values, and character – whether politically liberal or conservative. In seeking to portray one set of ad hoc values as self-evident and beyond critique, writers on both sides of the political divide portray the world all too simply, as if we all have some built-in moral compass (call it a soul or human nature – same difference) which just happens to coincide with their group’s interests.

Not wanting to name their viewpoint too openly, writers often rely on empty terms that take on meaning only if their readers presuppose some undisclosed standard. In Schwartz’s case, to deviate from this unknown standard renders one an irresponsible, immature child. What better way to characterize one’s political enemies? Although he claims “character” is politically neutral, Schwartz’s deft rhetoric of “responsibility” and “maturity” suggests that he knows otherwise.11

My quarrel with Professor McCutcheon is not that he opposes the use of “loaded” words to disguise the author’s intent, nor do I carry any brief for Mr. Schwartz. Rather, it is his dismissal of the “...built-in moral compass (call it a soul or human nature)....” What he is saying is that moral propositions and what used to be called natural laws are not true, do not exist. He rejects any presupposition that there are absolutes, any such things as standards, any such thing as the truth.

Contemporary culture and much of contemporary scholarship would say that a “truth claim,” self-evidently, means, “What does it mean to me?” or, “What does it mean to you?” I am by no means dismissive of the psychic or emotional dimension of the truth. God, after all, is also the God of our emotions. However, to contradict Protagoras’ dictum, “man is the measure of all things,” I want to assert that God is the measure of all things, including scholarship. This assertion is itself radical not only in academia, but in all of contemporary culture. I recall hearing a broadcast interview with a woman at a shopping mall in Ohio where a gunman had just randomly murdered some shoppers. The woman said (as best as I can recollect), “Well, I don’t know, but to me, it is wrong.” The rejection of external and absolute standards is even more pervasive in academia because it has a longer history there and because, in large part, this “rejectionism” started in higher education.

Clearly, other Christians have addressed the issue of the nature of higher education. John Henry Cardinal Newman’s The Idea of the University12 and Jaroslav Pelikan’s The Idea of the University: a Reexamination13 speak to this topic, but in most cases, their presuppositions on the nature of truth are implicit. What I am proposing, then, is that the truth – capital- and small-letter T – needs to be made explicit in our Christian scholarship.

VI

My task, then, is to be prescriptive, to provide a prescription for the rekindling of the light; or, to use St. Paul’s language quoted earlier, “...to fan into
flame the gift of God….” In essence, it all comes back to faith. “Out of the abundance of a man’s heart he will speak.” 14 Again, I am not speaking primarily of saving faith. “…Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 15 Saving faith is essential, but, to fulfill the responsibilities of your calling as scholars in Lutheran liberal arts colleges, you must seek out the full counsel of God. 16 God Who is the Truth, Who created everything, is, of necessity, part of your scholarship.

Many have said that Christian scholarship means nothing more and nothing less than the fact that I, the professor, am a redeemed child of God. As such, I follow the Scriptural dictum. “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” 17 Beyond this emphasis on the quality of our performance, this response could be read as an assertion that there is no difference in my scholarship (and, implicitly, in my teaching) in comparison to the scholarship found in any secular college or university, except that they are “better” or are reflective of a more highly-motivated effort. Another way to express it was summarized in two statements I have heard on the campuses of Christian colleges: “There is no such thing as Christian physics, there is only good physics taught by a Christian.” Or, “I open my class with prayer and there is daily chapel and Bible study here, but what we teach is the same.” I would have to say that, if the quality of our performance or the coexistence of prayer and Bible study on the same plot of land is all there is to Christian higher education, we should close the doors of these colleges and support instead campus ministries at secular colleges and universities. The only rationale for the Lutheran liberal arts college is that what is taught in the classroom is based on the Truth, and that real truth, that complete truth, is based on the Word of God.

The denial that there is such a thing as Christian physics or sociology or linguistics or sculpting or biology is widespread. One Christian scholar has written, “It is a puzzling phenomenon that, among so many academics who are professing Christians, all but a tiny minority keep quiet about the intellectual implications of their faith.” 18 It is the unraveling (or, better, knitting together) of the intellectual implications of our Christian faith within our respective disciplines that constitutes true Christian scholarship. This is not to say that there should not be opening prayer in classes or Chapel or separate Bible studies. They should all be there. But we should not privatize our faith. Remember, God is not just for Sunday morning.

There is a real and dangerous tendency, especially among Christian intellectuals, to reduce the Revelation of God to a set of abstract propositions. This view identifies the rational with the spiritual and separates it from the material. Yet, our God created the Heavens and the Earth, the antichrist is the one who denies that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. 19 We eat and drink the body and blood of Christ. 20 At our resurrection, as Job said, in our flesh [we] shall see God. 21 “For in Him we live and move and have our being…” 22 “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.” 23

“The modern solution is radically defective,” my professors at the University of Chicago were fond of saying. Modern scholarship claims that only the material, that which can be touched and measured, is real, is factual. This leaves all the rest – love, beauty, morality, reason, religion – in a never-never land, neither true nor false because, in their view, they are not factual. This approach undermines and ultimately destroys scholarship – and particularly science – itself. If only the material is factual, then scientific predictions and theorems also fall to the ground (or, better, dissipate in ether), along with beauty and morality. In general, scholarship ignores the self-destructive implications of its methodology when it affects science, but applies it with vigor to moral and religious questions. Christian scholars fall into this trap when they over-intellectualize their faith, when they attempt to defend the Bible by saying it is not a science textbook. Of course, it is not a science textbook, but it is a book that can tell us the true meaning of science. Because modern scholarship has declared the immaterial to be unreal, it has told a big lie. A Christian college, then, is the last place on the earth where higher education is truly connected to the real world. Last week, at a conference in Colorado, I saw survey research which shows the general public believes that Christian education is not part of the “real world.” They have missed the point. The Christian college is the only “real world” academic institution in this world.

The meaning of your call as scholars in Lutheran liberal arts colleges, then, is to engage in the kind of rigorous scholarship that reunites body, soul, and spirit; scholarship that reintroduces the Truth into all of the disciplines; that reconnects the material and the spiritual under their proper name: factual. There is no dichotomy of facts and values because, as the old spiritual says, “The Lord God made them all.” 24

Any basic compilation of the complete works of Aristotle contains both his “Physics” and his “Ethics.” For millennia, scholarship did not brand
the material factual and the immaterial nonfactual (and, hence, untrue). Your mission as Christian scholars, then, and you have all chosen to accept it, it is to remedy the “radical defects of the modern solution” by restoring the ancient ways, the ways of the Truth. This is not easy. To be effective Christian scholars in Lutheran liberal arts colleges you must first be faithful to the One Who has called you and second be scholars. There are precious few doing the kind of scholarship that I am talking about. You can not just regurgitate your notes from graduate school or keep up on the literature in the field. Remember, the bulk of modern scholarship is defective; it is defective because it is incomplete, because the God Who is There is not there at all.

VI

I do not want to complain about the defects and failures of modern scholarship and just leave it at that. Too often Lutherans have given the impression that we interpret the Great Commission to be, “Go unto all the world and teach everyone where they got their doctrine wrong.” Criticizing modern scholarship is necessary to make the case for Christian scholarship, but it still does not give us a clue on how to begin this great intellectual work.

One Christian scholar has written:

Even mathematicians or technical scientists will be able to point out some faith-related considerations that have relevance to the foundational questions affecting the frameworks of their disciplines or the applications of their work. It simply does not follow that, because there is no special Christian view of photosynthesis, there is therefore not a Christian view of biology.

The key points I take from this quotation are: one, “the foundational questions affecting the framework of their discipline,” and two, “the applications of their work.” Put another way, Christian scholarship must be Christian in its foundational framework and alert to the Christian implications of its work.

Again, this kind of scholarship is not easy, especially if it is well done. But, on the other hand, the Christian scholar’s calling is the answer to every dissertator’s dream. You are in a position to make an original contribution to knowledge.” Because of the radical defects of modernity, you, the Christian scholar, have unlimited intellectual, that is to say, scholarly opportunity.

I want to be clear that I am talking about real scholarship here. It is necessary, but not sufficient, to do what I have done here today. It is not enough simply to assert that God is the Truth and that God is the Lord of the intellect. The comedienne Joan Rivers has told of trying to impress a date by placing an open Bible on the dining room table and writing, “True!” in the margins. Proclamation is part of the task of the Church and of all Christians including all Christian scholars, but proclamation is not the same as scholarship.

Including in your scholarship both your fundamental framework and an analysis of all the implications means that your work is harder and more complicated than that of secular scholars. To paraphrase the old adage, “Secular scholars work from sun to sun, but a Christian scholar’s work is never done.” Every monograph you write requires another chapter; every article another section; every lesson plan another theme.

Dr. David Whalen, an associate professor at Hillsdale College, has provided an example of this kind of scholarship. He wrote, “The best thing about biochemistry is not learning the mere procedural facility with say, acid-base titration, but entering into one’s own nature and pondering the implications of our material being. The glory of economics [or business courses] has little to do with understanding multipliers or even scarcity, however useful these [concepts] may be, but rather [to explicate] what it means to be one who, in concert with his kind, moves among the myriad contingencies of material conditions and decisions.”

Or, take history. It has often been said that Christianity is a historic religion. Certainly, it has a long history; indeed, from eternity. Christianity also asserts that there are such things as historical facts, facts which are knowable and important. In I Corinthians 15 we read, “For what I received I passed on to you as the first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time…. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” In other words, if we find Christ’s body fossilized in a grave in Israel, it is all over. History matters to the Truth, and the Truth is historical. Most recent histories of religion, on the other hand, talk of the “Jesus idea,” while declaring it irrelevant whether or not Jesus ever existed.
Contemporary history is historicist; that is, it denies that we can know facts, that facts matter, and that facts have implications; i.e., that facts can be the basis of moral judgments.

In letters, too, we have come a long way (downhill) from John Milton, who wrote *Paradise Lost* “to justify ways of God to man.” However, it is not just the content of literature that has lost its connection to the Truth, but also its form which seeks to disorient and to disturb, not to convey the Truth.

Social sciences also have become enamored of methodology and description, leaving aside what are dismissively called “truth claims.” For example, even among Christian social scientists you can find studies of the Sacraments that emphasize “smells and bells” or that measure personal preferences or opinions of those in the pews. Descriptions of the externals do not tell us whether a high view of the Sacraments is true. Nor do personal preferences of the opposition make a high view of the sacraments false. “…Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true and every man a liar.”

Woodrow Wilson, before he became President of Princeton University and President of the United States, was a social scientist of some renown who recognized that the scholar’s understanding of the nature of the world affected scholarship and its application. He wrote:

Jefferson wrote of the “Laws of Nature” – and then by way of an afterthought – “and of Nature’s God.” And they constructed a government as they would have constructed an orrery [a mechanical model of the solar system] – to display the laws of nature. Politics in their thought was a variety of mechanics. The Constitution was founded on the law of gravitation. The government was to exist and moved by virtue of the efficacy of checks and balances.

The trouble with the theory is that government is not a machine, but a living thing. It falls, not under the theory of the universe, but under the theory of organic life. It is accountable to Darwin, not to Newton. It is modified by its environment, necessitated by its tasks, shaped to its functions by the sheer pressure of life.

I am not saying that Wilson was right in elevating Darwin over Newton; indeed, a true understanding of the foundations of government would come from the Word. The Darwinian presupposition eradicates morality from the polity: politics becomes a matter of the survival of the fittest, while the so-called mechanistic system presupposes both original sin and the restraint of sinful impulses by checks and balances. Again, fundamental framework and implications.

I would be remiss if I did not distinguish the way in which we should integrate the truth (lower-case and capital-T) into our scholarship. While we should make sure that our fundamental framework and our discussion of the implications of our scholarship are rooted in the Truth, we should not claim that all of the conclusions of our scholarship are therefore of the same status – are therefore true. It is possible, for example, for Christian scholars to be wrong in their conclusions about the relationship of hormones to muscle mass, or about whether an antiballistic missile system would enhance international security, without being wrong about Who created life or about the blessings He bestows on peace. Faithfulness to the Word does not make all of our pronouncements ex cathedra.

I want to say a word here about academic freedom. As I said before, the record of Christian colleges shows the faculty and administrators giving away their Christian heritage with both hands. In large part, this dreadful state of affairs came about because of a lack of nerve and because of the loss of faith, but often the *raison d’être* was academic freedom; it was argued that conforming scholarship to the Word of God was trumped (trampled?) by the pursuit of truth. Scripture was cited: “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” You see the omission here: the assumption is that Christianity is not, in its totality, true or that it is true only in churchly things, but not in sciences, arts, and letters. It all comes back to the loss of faith.

In reality, the truth does make you free. True Christian scholarship of the kind that puts God back into the center of all knowledge is liberating because it is valid; it is True. The one constant, valid thing is there.

In the great novel *Middlemarch,* Rev. Casaubon was searching for the key to all mythologies. We have that key which is powerful and effective because it is true. As I have said, there is the already-tired cliché that the Bible is not a science text. It is not. It is more than a science text. It is the key to the
truth of the sciences. Using this key, you can write better (true) science texts. The key is like Archimedes’ lever – with it, we can move the world or, to use Scriptural terms, “I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength.”

There also are practical reasons for pursuing Christian scholarship is illustrated by my five-year old son, Erich. A few months ago, he said, “You know, Daddy, I have been thinking about the Big Bang. Do you suppose when God said, ‘Let there be light,’ there was a big bang, but, because there were no scientists around at the time, they didn’t realize that God made the Big Bang?” I recount this story, not to endorse my son’s cosmology, but rather to point out that, if you don’t reconnect God to your disciplines, to your scholarship, someone else will do it, and there is a great chance something will go astray.

There are also spiritual reasons as well as practical reasons for emphasizing Christian scholarship. What you teach in your disciplines must be true. Not only must your data be verified and your citations be accurate, but, regardless of your subject matter, you must teach the One Who is the Truth. In Ezekiel we read:

… prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: hear the Word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! … Their visions are false and your divinations a lie. They say, “the Lord declares,” when the Lord has not sent them; . . . Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Because of your false words and lying visions, I am against you, declares the Sovereign Lord.

This is serious business. Scholarship which is purely human is a lie, is an offense against God. We must not think that if we fail to reconnect our scholarship to the Truth, that we have nonetheless done something of value in teaching business statistics or astronomy or music; we must also not think that we will escape God’s wrath.

Moreover, the Great Commission, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” applies to Christian academics as much as it does to other Christians. Martin Luther is lauded for translating the Bible into “the language of the people,” an action of great scholarship and of great artistry, but, more important, an action which carried out the Great Commission.

The Church, and particularly our church, the Lutheran Church, has been slow to undertake similar mission work. We were slow to translate our liturgies from German and Scandinavian languages, just as we were slow to reach out to urban neighborhoods and to racial and ethnic minorities.

I would argue that we are similarly laggard in undertaking a new translation. The world is increasingly educated – knowledge is exploding, information is proliferating. However, a wealth of knowledge is no guarantee against a poverty of wisdom.

It is up to us, as Christian scholars, to translate the everlasting Truth into the new language of the New World. The New World is the world of the intellect. Mark Noll’s The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind documents a certain simplistic flabbiness in evangelical theology, but I would argue that it goes well beyond theology. I would argue that the Christian response to the life of the mind has frequently been one of bigotry, hostility and neglect; that we have been dismissive of intellectual gifts and pursuits; that we have seen aspirations to scholarly life as “dangerous.” Of course, it is dangerous; just as there was and still is the danger of losing one’s life in foreign mission fields, there is danger of losing one’s soul in this mission field. Jesus warns us not to expect our witnessing to be easy.

My exhortation today – whether you teach biochemistry or business or history or poetry or theology – is that you commit yourself to Christian scholarship. I am persuaded that a renewal of Christian scholarship will revitalize also your Christian teaching and your service.

Again, as teachers at a Lutheran liberal arts college, I would argue that you must engage in Christian scholarship which goes beyond simple proclamation. You must do the hard intellectual work of unifying your fundamental framework with your disciplines and spelling out the full implications of the applications to your disciplines. You must bring reality, that is to say the Truth, that is to say God, back into sciences, arts, and letters. You must do this because, to teach the same scholarship as taught on the secular campus or by your secular graduate schools on Christian campuses is to fail to teach the Truth and is to be derelict in your calling.
There is, of course, more to your teaching than your subject matter. The way in which you teach is to be patterned on Christ Himself. Your pupils are among those you are to love as you love yourself.  

Jesus was often called Teacher. And as a great (the greatest) Teacher, He can teach us about teaching. Certainly, He did not “dumb down” his lessons; Scripture is replete with things that are hard to understand. At the same time, He used parables and demonstrations to drive home the truth of His message.

Such Christian scholarship will renew (I might say, sanctify) your teaching. It will also undergird the liberal arts.

A clear side effect of the knowledge explosion is that there is a loss of ability to communicate across disciplines, much less for them to enrich each other. This loss of the ability to communicate is a great tragedy. Not only are we diminished as individuals by not being able to understand areas outside of our specialty, but we also have a breakdown in community, which has other negative consequences for life on this planet.

Here Christian scholarship comes to the rescue of the liberal arts. We can restore communication and community by elucidating (in both senses of that word) the key to all knowledge, the God Who is the Truth.

IX

When I have discussed the topic of Christian scholarship in other venues, I have been told that it is too hard, that the opposition is too strong, that we do not have the critical mass of Christian academics necessary to bring it off, and (this is what I often think on sleepless nights) that I do not have the intellectual capacity to carry out this great task. Remember Moses, too, felt that he did not have the gifts to respond to God’s call. Elijah felt that he alone was left in Israel to do the work of the Lord.

Indeed, when I had finished the next to final draft of this paper, I stumbled upon George Marsden’s book, The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship. At first, I was troubled that so much of what I had written and thought for nearly twenty-five years was not original. Then, I realized the great comfort that we are not alone. And in this comfort, there is hope. Dr. Marsden has laid out a plan for Christian scholarship:

Academic communities are invaluable and can sustain a depth of sophistication regarding the implications of faith and scholarship that is unattainable in diverse settings [i.e., the secular university]. Yet, while Protestants support educational institutions at every other level, they have almost nothing [yet] to offer at the highest levels of scholarship.

An even simpler way to resist the trend toward secular academic conformity is to adopt faculty development programs that cultivate the Christian academic consciousness of faculty who are already seriously religious. Most church-related schools have many faculty who are personally pious but consider their religion a private affair and so do not relate it to their academic life. They have not been exposed to academic culture where discussions of faith and learning are high-level intellectual concerns.

This is nothing less than a lesson plan for revitalizing Christian scholarship at the Christian college. And, note that it centers on faculty development. While Dr. Marsden hopes that Christian scholars at secular institutions can network to help each other with Christianizing their scholarship, you already have the network at your individual campuses and in this conference.

You never know what might happen when you ask someone like me to speak. I am going to stray into the next session and give my 10 cents worth on what should be done next. I think you could not go wrong in emphasizing, as one of your objectives, faculty development focused on Christian scholarship.

The God of all comfort strengthens us. St. Paul, who himself was lacking in certain gifts, who faced overwhelming opposition, declared, “I can do all things through God Who strengthens me.”

Our calling is not to fear but to go and to do. “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.” I am confident that the Lutheran liberal arts college in the 21st Century will be a great and mighty work of God because of Christian scholarship and Christian scholars like you. James Madison wrote regarding a university that “…after all, the most effectual safeguard against heretical intrusions in the School … will be an Able & Orthodox Professor, whose course of instruction will be an example to his
(successors..." I know many of you. I am in awe of the Christian scholarship that has been done by the faculty at these colleges. But have we – will we – always succeed? No, we have failed; more than failed, we have sinned. And intellectual sins are particularly ugly. But remember, the success of our witness as Christian scholars does not depend on us. “Thanks be to God: He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

NOTES

5. II Timothy 1:6.
23. Romans 11:36.
30. I Corinthians 15:3-6, 14.
32. Romans 3:3-4; compare I John 5:9-11.

35. This paragraph was added at the suggestion of Professor Thomas Kuster of Bethany. I am grateful for his insight.

36. John 8:32.


44. E.g., Luke 8:10 and II Peter 3:16.

45. Exodus 4:10-17.

46. I Kings 19:10, 18.


48. *loc. cit.*

49. II Timothy 1:7.


51. I Corinthians 15:57.