People of Wondrous Ability

The Origins and Gifts of Lutheran Education

PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

Cover Art
Luther's Rose from the Rose Window in Ness Chapel
Dale Chihuly Rose Window in the Mary Baker Russell Music Center

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People of Wondrous Ability: The Origins and Gifts of Lutheran Education

In his passionate letter urging the leaders of Germany to create what seemed impossible – a literate nation from a largely illiterate populace – Martin Luther wrote that the affirmation of his appeal would animate a "people of wondrous ability, fit for everything" in society. Who could have known in 1524 that a letter penned by a professor from a little-known university would reshape not only education but also global cultures? For, indeed, literacy and access to education have become a universal right.

From that small beginning there emerged during the subsequent 500 years an international network of academies, colleges, and universities marked by the vision of the founders: Martin Luther, Philipp Melanchthon, and their academic colleagues at the University of Wittenberg. Their commitment to the reform of university education bequeathed to Lutheran centers of higher learning the remarkable capacity to reform themselves in light of new knowledge, unexpected crises, and human need.

Yet Lutheran education did not spring suddenly from a small university by the Elbe River. Rather, it was watered by learned tributaries that flowed from China, India, Western Asia, Africa, and Europe. While the contemporary Lutheran university or college may trace its historical origins to the Renaissance university in Wittenberg founded in 1502, its inheritance is suffused with the gifts of other schools, cultures, and religions.

This primer is a brief introduction to those learned tributaries; their acceptance, rejection, or reshaping in 16th c. Wittenberg; and the reforming insights that animated the early Lutheran experiment in higher education. Neither comprehensive nor marked by scholarly or theological detail, this narrative highlights the human tragedies and intellectual achievements that gave rise to the Lutheran form of education. It begins with the experience of suffering and the quest for lives of meaning and purpose.

A way of living with others in this world

After hundreds of years of body-crushing labor, they walked out of their enslavement with only bits of bread in their hands, pulling the elderly along and carrying children in their arms. They had little idea what the future would bring, only that they had taken the first steps, led by one of their own: a man who had heard a voice that said, *Move*. And so this group of *hapiru,* or "dusty ones" – who had toiled in dry dirt and straw – was now walking out of its confinement.

This memory, the oldest memory of the Jewish people, is found in Exodus, the second book of the Hebrew Scriptures. There the ancient text narrates the liberation of Hebrew slaves from their oppression in pharaonic Egypt, the subsequent making of a covenant or lasting relationship between the newly freed slaves and their liberating God, and the giving of the Ten Words or Commandments through their leader Moses. Together, this cluster of events, dating from the mid-13th c. BCE, serves as the framework in which Jewish learning emerged, a learning born of a living memory celebrated in narrative and ritual by subsequent generations unto the present day.

In time, the Ten Words or Mosaic Law would be expanded into the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, commonly called Torah, a word that means "instruction" or "teaching." And yet Torah was not a compilation of abstract concepts or musings on the deity's nature, but rather *an instruction in living* – how to live with other human beings, with the Earth and its many creatures, and with the God of the Hebrew people: their liberator and provider. To the Law of Moses would be added the writings of the Hebrew prophets who served the cause of social justice, and a body of historical narratives and wisdom writings that offered practical advice for daily life.

> *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*
>
> [Deuteronomy 6:4-7]

Torah scroll

In contrast to their Greek neighbors, who delighted in philosophical speculation, the teaching of Torah had a decidedly down-to-earth emphasis that powerfully shaped and guided the human journey from birth to death. Indeed, after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the Roman imperial army in the 1st c. CE, the future of the Jewish people would be enlivened and guided by rabbis ("masters," "learned teachers") who would lead the study of Torah in the synagogue.

"Do not give us rabbis that are foolish, stupid, and unlearned," reads one Jewish ordination prayer from the medieval period. Not only did rabbis offer instruction inspired by the Bible; they also argued and argued in a learned manner over its interpretation. After all, social legislation, historical narratives, and epic poetry are prone to interpretation: "What did this text mean in the past, and what might it mean now in a *different* context?" Indeed, the ability of these ancient texts to speak powerfully to new generations continues to rest in their resiliency, their ability to possess more than one meaning.

In their civil and at times heated disputes over the meaning of a biblical text, the first rabbis and subsequent generations of "learned teachers" have resisted the fundamentalist temptation to view the ancient scriptures in terms black and white. One unequivocal, unchanging meaning might not be adequate. After all, a text could hold a multiplicity of meanings. *Could education actually be instruction in respectful argumentation over the meaning of words?*

Difficult questions lead to enlightenment

During the same period in which various writings were being edited and collected into the Hebrew Bible, the ancient culture of Athens found itself disturbed by a man who would not stop asking questions. "Disturbed" might be an understatement in light of the fact that Greek teachers who tutored the sons of elite families (the only ones deemed worthy of education) were expected to communicate knowledge to their students. To the parents and city elders who believed that education was intended to support their prominence within the status quo, the methods of a philosopher tutor named Socrates were not only odd – they also seemed subversive. After all, who wants children educated to ask their parents difficult and uncomfortable questions?

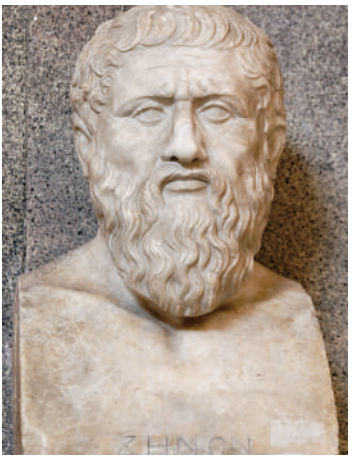
According to Plato, Socrates was single-minded in his pursuit of answers to questions that no one had asked before, and in this pursuit he undermined the more conventional beliefs of his peers. He received no honors for suggesting that many of his fellow citizens thought and acted as their elders instructed them – without ever raising a question: The conventional were leading the conventional. Thus, he upheld *the overarching value of self-criticism* in order to free oneself from slavery to an uninformed opinion. Plato quoted Socrates saying to his skeptical listeners:

> *If I say that to talk every day about virtue is the greatest good, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you will believe me still less. It is not easy to convince you of this.*
>
> [Plato, *Apology* I. 38a]

Indifferent to the pursuit of wealth, Socrates grew to be concerned with ethics and what an ethical or "good" life might be. In the end, however, he was sentenced to death because his educational method – *asking difficult questions that called into question what others cherished* – proved to be unsettling. He died by state-administered poisoning in 399 BCE, Plato grieving his execution.

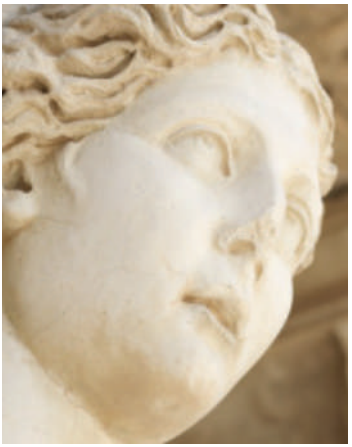
Perhaps it was the encounter with injustice and intellectual weakness among his fellow citizens that led Plato to assert that all humans are born

into ignorance, and that many if not most prefer living a life circumscribed by such ignorance. In his allegory of the cave, Plato claimed that one of the essential challenges for every human being is to move from the folly of ignorance into the light of wisdom, a movement also found in the biblical book of Proverbs (chapters 8-9). It is no easy task to recognize that a life shaped by ignorance is a life lived in the shadows even though it may appear to be perfectly normal. Indeed, a willful attachment to ignorance – "Don't confuse me or complicate my life with learning" – is its own cruel enslavement.



Plato

While Plato recognized the shadows in human life, he also claimed that humans have the capacity to be enlightened. Thus education is not so much the act of imposing knowledge on the other but of *awakening "the soul" to its capacity for enlightenment* (*The Republic*, VII). What human beings need, he claimed, is a guide or companion who will animate and awaken this capacity in others. Indeed, he made the bold claim that only those who pursue and love wisdom (i.e., "philosophers") are truly capable of leadership in society. After all, who would want a person proud of his or her ignorance making decisions that will influence an entire nation?



Ancient personification of wisdom

His student, Aristotle, made two achievements – among his many – that continue to shape education. First, he focused on a broad range of subjects in his enquiry and teaching: from cosmology to zoology, from politics to poetry, from biology to rhetoric. Indeed, the many forms of life and thought he investigated would come to influence the curriculum of the modern university. As some scholars have noted, his collected works on an immense variety of subjects form a veritable encyclopedia of knowledge: *Learning in one subject alone was insufficient* because such

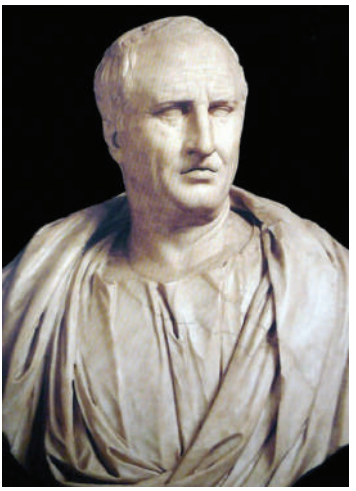
narrowed learning would not be able to contend with the complex and interrelated issues facing society. Second, he promoted what some would call an inductive form of learning, one in which no conclusions or claims are made until there has been a thorough and comparative investigation of a particular subject. In this regard, Aristotle laid the groundwork for the scientific method that is so pervasive in the university today: Based on one's study of a particular object, issue, or event, a hypothesis with supporting evidence is offered for review, affirmation, or correction to the community of experts in a particular field. Thus, *research and learning have far more to do with an ongoing process than claiming an unchanging or infallible "truth."*

Training for public leadership

It would be a stretch to claim that most North Americans spend their time in abstract speculation and philosophical inquiry. In this respect, U.S. cultural values are generally more Roman than Greek, more concerned with practical function than speculative thought. For the most part, ancient Romans did not value learning as an end in itself, either for personal enlightenment or critical thinking. Rather, *they promoted education as a means to accomplish something else*: to govern, create laws, plan and build cities, produce skilled soldiers and thus enhance Rome's colonizing ambitions. Thus in the *Aeneid*, Virgil compares the Greek love of learning with the duties of the Roman conqueror:

> *Others will cast more tenderly in bronze*
> *Their breathing figures, I can well believe,*
> *And bring more lifelike portraits out of marble;*
> *Argue more eloquently, use the pointer*
> *To trace the paths of the heavens*
> *And accurately foretell the rising of the stars.*
> *Roman, remember by your strength to rule*
> *Earth's peoples – for your arts are to be these:*
> *To pacify, to impose the rule of law,*
> *To spare the conquered, battle down the proud.*
>
> (Book VI: 1145-1147)

Walk through the remaining structures of ancient Rome today, and you will encounter the basilica, the architectural symbol of Rome's dedication to its extensive body of law, political life, and governance. Indeed, the *Twelve Tables* of ancient Roman law were intended to govern everyone with equity, the patrician noble as well as the street cleaner, yet there was no mechanism and no will to educate the population and interpret the law by the majority who were illiterate.



Cicero

Not surprisingly, it was the sons of Rome's powerful political families who were educated by Greek and then Roman tutors in literature, written composition (grammar), and persuasive speech (rhetoric) – what would become the foundation of learning in Europe's medieval universities: the *trivium* or "three ways." To this foundation was added the study of logic, civic virtue and, for the wealthiest and brightest, the study of philosophy (in Athens) and law (in Rome). It goes without saying that a colonizing society would give particular attention to the study of military strategy with which the Romans were proficient. Music and the visual arts, physiology and athletic training, zoology and metaphysics: Why would anyone want or need to study these subjects? After all, how could they help in the economic conquest of other nations?

By way of contrast, the Roman philosopher and senator Marcus Cicero promoted the Stoic notion that all human beings – from army generals to domestic servants – enjoy the light of divine reason and are thus called to respect and offer each other fraternal love: a truly discordant and subversive idea in a stratified society sustained by slave labor. Indeed, in his popular work *On Duties,* Cicero argued that the primary purpose of legal study and making of laws is to secure justice for all persons, regardless of gender, race, or social status. He also argued that persuasive speech (rhetoric) was absolutely necessary in the education of leaders since they would need to persuade others of their vision or interests. For what good would be the greatest idea if one could not persuade others of its value? While his radical view of human equality might have changed a model of

education that served a minority of politically powerful males, it did not win the day. Indeed, his well-connected enemy, Mark Antony, ordered Cicero's death and then had his severed head displayed in that most public of places, the Roman Forum.

Does the education of only a small portion of the population inevitably serve the interests of the minority in its control of the majority? Or this: *Does the study of law and civic virtue exist to protect the vulnerable from the predation of the powerful, to promote justice where injustice could readily flower?*

Teaching an alternative social vision

Within fifty years of Cicero's death, Jesus of Nazareth was born in Roman Palestine.

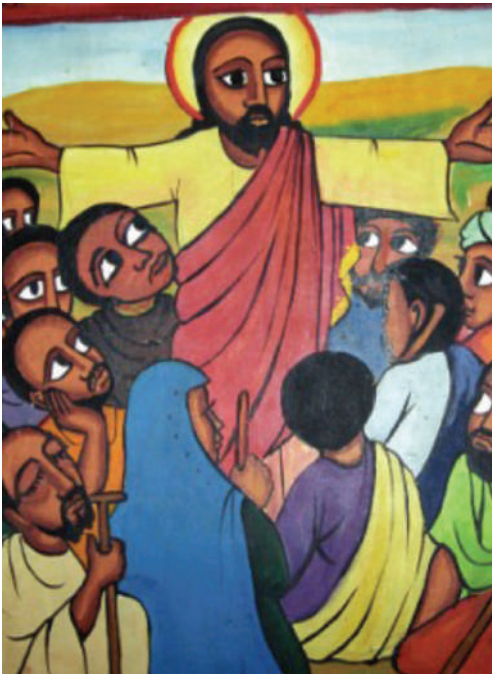
While the gospels, the four theological biographies of the Christian Scriptures, offer diverse portraits of Jesus – from itinerant prophet and friend of the marginalized to Son of God and savior – the author of Mark, the earliest written gospel, wrote that, "Jesus began to teach them many things in parables" (4:2). Indeed, on various occasions in all four gospels, Jesus refers to himself or is called "teacher" and his followers "disciples," a word that means "students," those capable of receiving instruction. But in the gospels, Jesus does not offer important information or "facts" about human life, the world, or God; rather, and in accord with Jewish practice, his teaching disclosed *a way of living with others in this world*, a way of living so different than the one sanctioned by Athenian elites or Roman emperors.

For those who claim that the Christian movement is inherently anti-intellectual and has little time for learning, it can be a surprise to discover that the central figure in the Christian story was considered a teacher whose vision of life in this world – grounded in his experience of God and his insightful observation of his culture's neuroses – gained the attention of a diverse range of followers, of students. Indeed, his teaching appealed to women and girls who were considered by their culture intellectually inferior to men and thus unqualified to study; to the illiterate poor who, in the midst of crushing daily labor, had no access to learning; to children who were considered property, albeit cherished property, in the domestic workforce; to the chronically sick and disabled who could not pay the fee demanded by the many healers who dotted the ancient landscape. Drawing

on the stories and rituals of the Jewish people – a people who suffered under Rome's economic, military, and political occupation – Jesus "taught" an alternative social vision that destabilized cherished cultural assumptions.

The writer of the Gospel of Matthew narrates one form of this teaching. Early in his public life, notes this gospel, Jesus ascends a mountainside (as did Moses) and announces that the blessing or honor of God rests on the poor, mourners, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, peacemakers, and those who are persecuted in their promotion of justice and just social relations (Matthew 5:3-10). Given that ancient and modern cultures tend to reward persons who are financially successful, ambitious, healthy, and well-connected, the qualities of life Jesus mentions in this early teaching seem strange. What makes his words striking is their upheaval of cultural values that many took (and still take) for granted. Indeed, the cultural values of Rome were shaped by Rome's belief in its own "exceptionalism" and its mission to extend the empire's economic, political, and social power through colonial control and slave labor. In that context, Jesus' claim that God is allied with those who suffer under such oppression would not sit well with the authorities.

For the first students of Jesus, his teaching was expressed in his manner of life: *His "teaching" was his way of living,* an alternative to the soul-crushing life sanctioned by Rome and its Palestinian collaborators. In other words, his manner of life – shaped by his understanding of "the kingdom of God" – was at odds with the vision of life that flowed from the "kingdom of the emperor." Even though the colonized might complain bitterly about colonial rule, it should be noted Rome did not execute complainers. The Romans were quick, however, to silence those who threatened



African Jesus blesses the people

their rule with a "teaching" that called into question the Roman status quo. If Jesus taught loyalty to the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of the emperor; if he taught that God favors a way of living at odds with the dominant culture; if he taught that peace among people could be realized only through justice and mercy for all, would Rome's practice of using violence and economic coercion to achieve "peace" not be called into question?

After Jesus' death in Jerusalem (ca. 30 CE), his followers continued to live into his teaching, his manner of life, in household communities scattered throughout the Mediterranean. And it was in these communities that children, women leaders, every ethnicity, the vulnerable, and persons of differing social status were welcomed by leaders and teachers. An early follower of Jesus named Paul – a Hellenistic Jewish intellectual – became a teacher in this new movement spreading rapidly throughout the Empire. In his writings, Paul used the word "grace" to describe the revelation of God in and through the teaching, the life of Jesus. What Jesus revealed, claimed Paul, was the graciousness of God toward all humans: an implicit criticism of Rome as well as the legalistic and judgmental tendencies alive in every culture and religion. If God were gracious toward all humans – regardless of their gender, race, or social status – and desired their flourishing, could not such graciousness animate intellectual generosity, social well-being, and an ethic of care for the most vulnerable in any society?

Narrow or expansive learning?

What is glimpsed in Paul's writings, which form a hefty portion of the Christian Scriptures, is a minority community, shaped by the life and death of a Jewish teacher, living in Greek, Roman, and African cultures. What faced these Christian communities and their leaders outside of Roman Palestine was the challenge to accept, reject, or reshape the learning alive in cultures that did not share their religious vision. For instance, could the writings of Aristotle or Cicero complement the teaching of Jesus? Would it matter if a Greek philosopher or Roman legal scholar were neither Jewish nor Christian? Or this: Would Jesus' acceptance of women and their leadership in the movement that emerged after his death be welcomed in the overwhelmingly patriarchal cultures of the ancient world?

One early Christian teacher rejected all knowledge and insight that did not originate within the Christian community. In sarcastic tone, Tertullian,

a native of Carthage in North Africa trained in law, asked: "What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?" Alluding to the school founded by Plato, he wondered, "What does the Church have to do with the Academy?" (*Prescriptions against Heretics*, 7). For Tertullian, education among Christians should be focused solely on Christian sources (just the Bible, please): no Plato, Aristotle, or Cicero. In his mind, the knowledge and methods created by non-Christian persons and groups were inferior to Christian sources. Perhaps he was influenced unconsciously by the Roman claim to "exceptionalism," which he unwittingly transferred to Christianity. Indeed, that stream of thought has not died and remains alive in every field or discipline whose practitioners believe they have no need to be in dialogue with and thus learn from others who hold different if not conflicting viewpoints.

Clement, a North African from Alexandria in Egypt, thought otherwise. As a Christian catechist and a student of Greek philosophy, he argued that since God is the progenitor of all things (not only Jewish or Christian things) and has endowed humans with reason, every form of knowledge and inquiry is worthy of study if not potential incorporation into Christian learning. His more generous evaluation stood in stark contrast to Tertullian's desire to preserve the "purity" of Christian learning. Indeed, Clement, the Christian intellectual, drew upon a wide range of sources – from the works of Homer to the Stoic philosophy that inspired Cicero, from the writings of Plato to the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian gospels. It was Clement's intellectual generosity, wide learning, and charity toward persons different from himself that stood in stark contrast to the more exclusivist mentality of Tertullian. Clement steadfastly insisted that expansive learning from many disciplines rightly belongs at the heart of a school sponsored by Christians. In Clement, one meets a thoughtful and generous tradition:

> *I call them truly learned who bring everything to bear on the truth; from geometry, and music, and grammar, and philosophy itself, culling whatever is useful.*
>
> (*Stromata*, IX)

A life of learning for women

Within one hundred years of Clement's death (215 CE), the Roman emperor Constantine brought the persecuted Christian movement under his protection. Few scholars would claim that the emperor made a sincere conversion to Christianity perhaps he was simply trying to appease the deity of a growing minority group who sponsored a robust educational and social welfare program in a city filled with poor and illiterate people. While he made lavish financial gifts to the Roman Christian community, Constantine soon abandoned them when he moved the imperial capital eastward to a new city, Constantinople, named after himself. Why leave the symbolic heart of the Empire? To say the least, there was trouble on the eastern border, where foreign armies advanced in hopes of seizing Roman imperial land, but not only trouble there: Various nomadic tribes were boldly pushing their way into the Empire from many directions. Thus, Rome itself was left defenseless, its economic, transportation, and political structure unraveling at a rapid speed.

It was in this context that a young student named Benedict came from Norcia in central Italy to pursue his "studies in humanity" in Rome. Yet his time in the city was short-lived as he became disillusioned with his student peers and the quality of life among the city's residents and church leaders. For he encountered in Rome what his biographer called "lewd" and debauched living and – more distressing – the powerful families who claimed to be Christian yet seemed interested in only one thing: preserving their political legacy and inherited wealth. Had they any interest in responding to the growing needs of an increasingly distressed population, Benedict could not discern it.

Leaving the city, he travelled into the wilderness of the southern Apennine mountain range, eventually settling in a hillside cave close to contemporary Subiaco. During a three-year period of discernment, he came to recognize that if Christian life and learning were to survive the destruction of the Empire and the apathy of urban Christians, an alternative form of life would be needed. He then began the project of composing a guide or "rule" for communities of men and communities of women – what would come to be called monastic life.

"Listen carefully to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart" (*Rule of St. Benedict*, Prologue, 1). Thus begins one of the

most famous works in European and religious literature. That introduction, echoing the "master" of rabbinic tradition and the image of Jesus the teacher, concludes with these words:

> *We intend to establish a school for the Lord's service. We hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome ... never swerving from [God's] instructions, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery.*
>
> (Prologue, 50)

The astounding irony of the monastic life was this: A vast network of monasteries emerged in wilderness places cut off from urban life, intentionally cut off from such life so that that monk or nun might be devoted to *ora et labora:* daily communal prayer and daily labor. And yet by virtue of their isolation, most monastic communities escaped the destruction of looting invaders and were able to preserve the educational tradition that had been watered by Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Christian sources. Benedict's *Rule* prescribed public reading of various texts during communal meals as well as the communal recitation of the Hebrew psalms during the seven times reserved for communal prayer, a pattern of worship received from ancient Jewish practice. From this prescription sprang monastic literacy and, in turn, monastic commitments to education.

Hildegard of Bingen

While many contemporary North Americans might find the idea of spending one's life in a monastery antiquarian at best and hopelessly confining at worse, monastic life offered a compelling alternative to most people who were destined to follow in the same steps as their parents and grandparents. In the monastery, one enjoyed greater freedom to discern and follow one's vocation. For most women who

would find themselves married by age 16 in unions arranged without their consent, monastic life served as the only way in which they could enjoy some measure of autonomy and agency, receive an education unimagined in the larger culture, and produce their own literary works.

Born in 11th c. Germany, Hildegard of Bingen became the "magistra" (teacher and abbess) of her monastic community along the Rhine and there established, against much resistance, a flourishing center of learning. Indeed, Hildegard produced three major works of theology, musical plays and compositions for the liturgy, a collection of astonishing visual images, botanical and medicinal works, and – in a time when very few if any women could speak publicly – a body of speeches and sermons delivered to huge and enthusiastic crowds. To a monastic teacher, she offered this advice:

> *Be like the sun with your teaching, like the moon in your readiness to adapt, like the wind by your unwavering guidance, like gentle breezes in your forbearance, and like fire in the arousing and inspiring of your instruction.*
>
> (*Patrologia Latina* 197: 289)

Islam's House of Wisdom

For close to 1,000 years, monastic women and men cared for and promoted education in Western Europe: an astonishing feat in the midst of incredible social dislocation and communal anxiety. At the same time, and still little known in much of the world today, the spiritual descendants of the prophet Muhammad (c. 570-632 CE) created an unprecedented experiment in cross-cultural and religiously diverse learning: the *bayt al-hikma* or house of wisdom. While the followers of Islam believed that their religion

Scholars at an Abbasid library.

was the "final" revelation of God as manifested in the Qur'an, they were frequently respectful of their Jewish and Christian predecessors. Adherents of the two older traditions could convert to Islam or pay a tax that allowed them to maintain their religious traditions so long as they refrained from proselytizing. Thus, in the major cities of northwestern India, Western Asia (frequently called the Middle East), North Africa, and Spain – all controlled by Muslim caliphs – Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived together and tolerated each other's differences.

It was in this beneficial atmosphere that the house of wisdom emerged and made possible a wide sharing of knowledge. As inveterate traders, Muslim caravans brought the learning of China and India – the two other centers of scholarly learning in the world – to the Western Asian centers of Islam. And within those centers – in Damascus; Baghdad; Cairo; and eventually in Granada, Spain – Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Persian scholars translated and studied the Hebrew Scriptures; the writings of the ancient Greeks and Egyptians; Persian works of science, medicine, philosophy, and theology; literary studies produced in the Mesopotamian Christian schools of Edessa and Nisibis; and mathematical, engineering, and astronomical writings of China and India.

In this "Golden Age" of Islam (c. 750-1250), the houses of wisdom, centers of learning and research, made astonishing advances: the translation of all available written works into Arabic, thus creating the largest repository of books in the world; establishment of the first hospitals that used scientific procedures to investigate disease and disability; creation of advanced techniques in architectural, agricultural, astronomical, engineering, and medical experimentation; construction of the first observatory and collection of observations that made Copernicus' theory of a heliocentric universe possible; development of sophisticated urban public lighting, water, and sewage systems; and experimentation with engineering advances that furnished western medieval architects the means to build soaring gothic cathedrals.

This was the first instance in the history of learning in which *scholars from many disciplines and differing religious traditions worked together in order to advance knowledge for the sake of human well-being*, the advance of knowledge being the indispensable vocation of the modern university. Indeed, these Muslim-sponsored centers of learning influenced the establishment of the first universities in the West and animated the Italian Renaissance that began in the 14th century.

Study in the liberating arts

Trota of Ruggiero

The distance between Muslim North Africa and Christian Italy was not all that far. Indeed, one can fly between the two regions today in less than 30 minutes. In the medieval city of Salerno, in southern Italy, the first western center of medicine emerged in the 9th c. and came to prominence in the following century. Founded in a monastic hospice, the Salerno school of medicine was inspired by and continued the Muslim tradition of bringing experts together from various regions and traditions to study anatomy, pharmacology, and surgery. Thus, Jewish, Byzantine Christian, Roman Christian, and Muslim scholars collaborated in creating a scientific rather than a magical approach to healthcare. Indeed, Salerno welcomed one of the most gifted female physician researchers of the era, Trota of Ruggiero, who published works on gynecology, newborn and childcare, and dermatology. Not unlike Hildegard of Bingen, Trota was the exception to the rule of women who were normally confined to the domestic household unless they had access to education through monastic schools. Her medical texts, a synthesis of Greek, Arabic, and her own investigations, were influential through the beginning of the 17th c., when medical knowledge advanced and her groundbreaking work was revised.

As Europe recovered from invasions Visigothic and Viking, monastic schools in rural areas continued to educate monks, nuns, clergy, and a small number of wealthy lay people. And yet as the cities came back to life, a new form of learning emerged, consistent with and yet reshaping monastic education. Within 200 years of the establishment of the Salerno School of Medicine, the first European university was founded in 1088 at Bologna in central Italy, specializing in the study of law. In short order, the University of Oxford (1096) and then the University of Paris (1170) were established, Paris becoming famous for the study of philosophy and theology.

The medieval universities (for many were established in the high middle ages) became the chief centers of learning in which the ancient *trivium*

(grammar, logic, rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (or "four paths" of arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music) formed the seven *Liberal Arts*: "liberal" in that such study was considered necessary for any free (*liber*) person who would participate and lead in civic life. While the *trivium* focused on learning grammar, logic, and persuasive discourse (education in word), the *quadrivium* engaged students in learning mathematics and calculation (education in number): the two foundations of the modern "college of arts and sciences." The liberal arts thus served as foundation for the study of philosophy and theology or, on the other hand, the study of the *Practical Arts*: architecture, agriculture, commerce, law, and medicine.

While the medieval universities included specialized or professional schools in the Practical Arts, the study of such fields alone was considered wholly inadequate for the educated person. *Indeed, without the study of logic, how could one parse an argument made in law or philosophy? Without the study of rhetoric, how could one persuade others of one's argument through engaging writing or speaking? Without the study of arithmetic, how could one advance in architecture, commerce, or medicine? How could one become a leader in society without study in the liberating arts intended to free one from ignorance, conformity, and satisfaction with the status quo:* a notion utterly at odds with the university's vocation to interrogate received traditions, experiment, engage in research, and advance knowledge in every field, from agriculture to theology?

By the 13th century, the medieval university had also become the matrix in which study of the natural sciences was promoted. Clearly dependent on the more sophisticated work undertaken by Chinese and Indian scholars in astronomy, geology, mathematics, medicine, metallurgy, and seismology – much of which entered the West through Muslim houses of wisdom – the European universities expended considerable energy in translating scientific manuscripts from West, South, and East Asia. The influx of this body of scientific knowledge animated and accelerated study of the natural world that had begun in monastic land reclamation projects, plant hybridization, herbal medicine, agriculture, and astronomical observation.

Drawing on Greek antecedents, the scientific study of the Earth, its creatures, and the heavens came under the rubric of "natural philosophy" and was frequently directed by scholars of the newly-founded mendicant religious orders: the Franciscans and the Dominicans who established *studia* (houses of study) in the major universities and contributed "magistri"

(masters or teachers) to their faculties. Dominican and Franciscan scholars – Albert of Cologne, Roger Bacon, William of Ockham, and Duns Scotus – made significant contributions to the study of the natural world and solidified its study within the medieval schools. In this regard, the Latin term *universitas*, "the drawing of many things or persons into one body or one company," aptly describes the medieval yearning to produce a universal knowledge of physical life within a metaphysical framework.

As inheritors of Jewish, Greek, Roman, Christian, Persian, Indian, and Chinese learning, the medieval universities – from Uppsala in Sweden to Palermo in Sicily, from Glasgow in Scotland to Krakow in Poland – offered all known fields of study. It was in 1231 that Pope Gregory IX issued a papal letter (*Parens scientiarum*) promoting and protecting the academic autonomy of the university corporation, positioning himself as patron and protector while also asserting his authority in a growing contest with political leaders. Gregory's letter secured the rights of students as well as their masters – teachers who demonstrated to the university chancellor their mastery in a discipline.

Who could have imagined that a pope would become the defender of academic freedom and thus promote within the university the ability to question the very tradition he represented?

Death and learning

During the late medieval period (1350-1500), two significant movements – one horrific and the other salutary – reoriented education. In the late 1340s, the Black Plague entered Western Asia, North Africa, and Europe through Mediterranean ports and, with devastating rapidity, killed between 30-60% of the population. While mortality rates in rural areas could hover around 20%, they jumped to 75% in the cities, where population density was an incubator of disease. Located in urban centers, the universities experienced massive loss of faculty and students.

The Dance of Death

The largely Christian population, unable to discern the plague's scientific cause, wondered why such horrific death had fallen upon them. Was such terrible devastation punishment from a God angry with his disobedient children? Or this: Were others somehow responsible for the devastation? In a horrific turn to scapegoating, Jewish citizens were blamed, persecuted, and in many instances murdered by Christians. Only in those very few places influenced by Arabic scientific inquiry and medical practice did a more rational understanding of the plague's nature and mode of dispersion prevail.

In the Black Death's aftermath, recovery was slow but steadfast, especially in the towns of northern and central Italy, where a benevolent climate spurred agricultural growth and commerce. After more than a century of famine, plague, violent crime, social despair, and traumatized education, scholars looked to what they considered a more enlightened era for inspiration: classical antiquity. Their attention was drawn to the philosophers, historians, and poets of ancient Greece and Rome; the writings of the New Testament (only recently available in the original Greek); and the writings of church "mothers" and "fathers" (100-600 CE) who were the first commentators on Christian life and learning. Indeed, it was "renaissance" scholars who coined the term "middle age" to describe a cultural epoch they preferred to overlook. It was the "classical age" or "antiquity" they considered "golden," unsullied by the conflicts, corruption, and misery of the late medieval world.

In their ardent desire to experience the rebirth of society from the previous era of calamity, the leaders of this movement focused their attention less on the human aspiration for eternal union with the divine and more on the presence of the divine in humanity on Earth. If the medieval world leaned toward the afterlife, the *humanists* focused their gaze on the ideal human endowed with divine dignity living in this world. While the humanists promoted educational immersion in the *trivium* and *quadrivium* as the foundation for any and all practical training, they also retrieved the rich treasure of classical learning and so introduced the study of classical literature and languages, poetry, history, and ethics. Thus, it is not surprising that contemporary study in the Humanities includes classical and modern languages; history; literature and creative writing; and philosophy, theology, and ethics: all incarnations of Renaissance humanism.

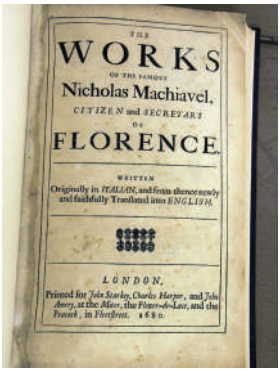
The study of these ancient yet seemingly "new" disciplines posed questions for university students and the larger culture.

Does the study of history not provide a potential critique of what many consider the "normativity" of the present moment? Does historical study not open other possibilities for thinking and acting in the present? Does the study of languages not reveal a world of experience and insight normally closed to those who grasp only one language and its inherently parochial cultural values? Does the study of literature not only assist one in writing better but also prompt insight into the human condition and expose the wisdom found in cultures different than one's own? When one engages in the study of philosophy, theology, and ethics, is the imagination not drawn into sustained reflection on human purpose, the quest for meaning, and ways of living with others in peace rather than violence?

In other words, the humanist reform of learning was focused on educating leaders, the vast majority men but also wealthy women, whose broad learning, moral sensibilities, and appreciative understanding of different cultures could lead to the humanization of culture, that is, the recognition of each person's inherent dignity: a potential critique of individual and social violence.

In contrast to the late medieval assessment of the human condition as incorrigibly erring and disobedient, the Renaissance vision of humanity was robustly idealistic. Indeed, in his exposition of human dignity, the Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola expressed this optimistic view when he wrote:

> *You, O Human, with no limit or no bound, may choose for yourself the limits and bounds of your nature. You are placed at the world's center so that you may survey everything in the world … With free choice and dignity, you may fashion yourself into whatever form you choose ... To you is granted the power, contained in your intellect and judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms.*
>
> ("Oration on the Dignity of Man")


THE
WORKS
OF THE FAMOUS
Nicholas Machiavel,
CITIZEN and SECRETARY
OF
FLORENCE.
WRITTEN
Originally in ITALIAN, and from thence newly
and faithfully Translated into ENGLISH.
LONDON,
Printed for John Starkey, Charles Harper, and John
Amery, at the Mitre, the Flower-de-Luce, and the
Prince's, in Fleetstreet. 1675.

And yet, one wonders: Did the humanist vision, grounded in a positive appraisal of human ability, suffer from naiveté? Only 27 years after the publication of "Oration," Niccolò Machiavelli suggested in his best-selling book, *The Prince,* that fear and harsh treatment of one's people would allow rulers to maintain control over those most resistant to their will. Indeed, Spain and Portugal had already begun the process of colonizing and decimating the indigenous populations of the Caribbean islands and the Aztec Empire.

Should education invite students to recognize and guard the inherent dignity of every human being or train them to serve economic or political empires that would use and frequently abuse humans and the Earth for the sake of profit?

Trained in the humanities at the Spanish University of Salamanca, Bartolome de las Casas, former slave owner turned Dominican priest, was one of the few voices in the western hemisphere who defended the dignity of the indigenous population and denounced the rapacious behavior of the conquistadores. Drawing on the works of Aristotle, Cicero, the Bible, and papal law, las Casas created the first *Declaration of Human Rights*. His study of history, ethics, theology, and literature thus enabled him to recover an insight lost to his own generation and its thirst for imperial conquest.

Questioning authority

Born one year earlier than las Casas in 1483, Martin Luther was raised by a father who held considerable ambition for his eldest son. A businessman committed to increasing his family's stature and financial resources, Hans Luther sent Martin to Latin schools where he learned grammar and Latin, the language of law and religion: subjects that would prepare the young student for potential advancement to university studies. Later in life, Luther would call his elementary education a "taste of hell." Yet he persevered and eventually enrolled in a school sponsored by the Brothers of the Common Life, a group of laypersons devoted to simple living, communal prayer, and teaching the poor and needy. Under the more compassionate tutoring of the brothers, he advanced in the study of rhetoric, logic, Latin, Greek, and music – one of the subjects in which he excelled as a singer, instrumentalist, and composer. In 1501, he was

admitted to the University of Erfurt, where he completed a master's degree ("at that whorehouse of a school," he called it) and then, due to considerable parental pressure, prepared to enroll in law studies.

Martin Luther

After a traumatic near-death experience in 1505, he changed his educational path and entered the Augustinian Hermits of the Strict Observance, a religious order marked by austerity of life and commitment to learning. Indeed, the monks of the "strict observance" were intent on clearing out the lax living, endowed wealth, and poor leadership of the late medieval Augustinian cloisters and, thus, from his first day in the monastery, Luther breathed the air of reform. He was also counseled by his tutors to accept nothing at face value, including the writings of the most famous philosophers (e.g., Aristotle) and theologians (e.g., Thomas Aquinas), the two fields to which he was drawn. Needless to say, his decision to enter monastic life and pursue the study of theology infuriated his father, who saw his hopes for social advancement dashed. "What good is a son who can only pray?" he asked in despair.

It goes without saying that Luther was a young person possessed of a profound spiritual hunger, a hunger that was not satisfied by the well-ordered system of medieval theology and church practice. Indeed, Luther's primary and initial quest was theological, focused on his understanding of God and God's relationship with humanity. While he became a devout monastic priest, the many spiritual practices he was invited to undertake never eased his doubt and his fear that he, an imperfect person, was alienated from his divine creator and would be judged unfit for heaven. Perhaps the legacy of the Black Death continued to stir his imagination. Perhaps the late medieval teaching that one must work hard spiritually to gain favor with God confounded him, for he asked and asked frequently:

"How much must I do to gain such favor and ensure eternal union with God and all that is good?" To his dismay, the priests of his community were unable to answer his question.

In 1508, Luther's former religious superior, Johann von Staupitz, now the dean of a newly established university in the Saxon city of Wittenberg, invited Luther to teach at the school. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Luther the overachiever earned three more degrees, including a doctorate in theology between 1508 and 1512. He was invested as a member of the faculty of the Wittenberg school and began to teach courses on books of the Bible. As he lectured, he rigorously questioned the meaning of the biblical texts and the early and medieval Christian commentaries on the Bible. What meaning did they hold, what guidance could they give to a young person beset with doubt and anxiety?

It was in his study of the New Testament letters of Paul that he encountered an insight he came to believe was overlooked if not abandoned by the medieval church. While Luther, in the 16th c., grew up in a spiritual system that instructed people to work zealously to become "right" with God, to "justify" themselves before God, Paul, in the 1st c., offered a much different viewpoint: He wrote that it is God who brings people into a right relationship with God out of sheer love for them – by grace alone – and thus frees them from needless worry about their eternal destiny and the commonly held view that one must work diligently to gain divine favor. This Pauline insight, found in the letter to the Romans, liberated Luther from his profound anxiety.

> *I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.'" I began to understand that the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith. All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light.*
>
> (*Preface to the Latin Writings*)

If God, and God alone, justified one, then the desire to claim the privilege of one's gender, ethnicity, or social status was ruled out. No human condition or effort could be used to gain favor with God. Thus, the Pauline insight possessed a profoundly *egalitarian implication* that was unsettling to a socially stratified culture and religious community. Consequently, this core insight raised challenging questions about the teaching and practices of the most powerful social institution of his time: the Roman Church, governed by the pope to whom Luther had vowed obedience when he was ordained a priest.

Back to the future?

It was the study of an ancient text that eased Luther's anxiety, freed his conscience, and catapulted him into notoriety as he asked more and more troubling questions of what most people thought normal and unchanging. With the humanists, Luther found a way out of the calamity and corruption of his cultural epoch through the study of languages, ancient literature, and history. Indeed, the ancient biblical text, newly received in its original Greek form, now appeared as the charter of reform for church and society. Yet reform did not drop *de novo* out of the heavens but had its origins in the ancient Jewish story of freedom from oppression, the alternative vision of Jesus of Nazareth, the countercultural practices of diverse early Christian communities as well as their embrace of those cultural gifts that complemented the Christian vision. Not surprisingly, Luther's reform gestated in the reforming monastery of which he was a member and the humanist university where he taught and worked with colleagues who shared his desire to reshape education.

Thus, Lutheran education did not spring newborn from Luther's head, but rather was a recovery of ancient insight and vision, the reshaping of much monastic and medieval tradition, the inclusion of humanist methods, and the realignment of learning in light of contemporary need. In other words, previous experiments in learning – from rabbinic arguments over a biblical text to Greek philosophical enquiry, from monastic education to Muslim scientific experiments, from the medieval embrace of the liberal arts to the humanist recovery of ancient wisdom – all entered into the reform of education that emerged in the 16th century.

Entrance to the University of Wittenberg

For the reform-minded faculty at the small university in Wittenberg, the Bible – now interpreted through the lens of justification by grace alone – became the mirror through which they understood the religion and culture in which they lived. In the hierarchical system of medieval life, the Scriptures offered a more *egalitarian view of community*, one in which every person could join in the election of his or her religious leaders. In a culture where priestly or religious life was considered the only "true" vocation and one far holier than marriage, the Scriptures clearly pointed to the *value of marriage* for lay as well as ordained persons. Indeed, the Scriptures revealed the worth and *dignity of every calling in life* so long as such callings were attentive to and relieved human suffering, promoted the flourishing of life for the many, and sustained the common good. In a church that frequently invoked the image of Christ the terrifying judge, the Scriptures revealed *the prophet from Nazareth who shared food and drink with gluttons, prostitutes, and those considered social outsiders* – the One, said Luther, who revealed the "gracious and loving heart" of God.

Here, however, was the problem: The Bible, as with most texts used in the universities, was published almost exclusively in Latin rather than German, the language of Luther's students and the parishioners of the university church he served. Thus, he began the process of translating the entire Bible into German, echoing the translation projects led by scholars in Islam's house of wisdom. In 1522, the New Testament was published with artistic images created by Luther's colleague and confidant, Lucas Cranach. In 1535, the entire Bible was translated into German by a group of university scholars working with Luther. Indeed, Luther is praised in Germany today as the creator of the modern German language.

Luther's German Bible

If the Bible were a charter of reform for church and society, then it would need to be placed in the hands of the rapidly growing number of persons who were drawn to this movement for change. No longer the preserve of a few educated elites, one witnesses in this translation and publication project the first step in *the democratization of knowledge*. It would be quickly extended through the composition of new songs, the creation of vivid artwork, the publication of scandalous cartoons, and the reorientation of architecture – a sophisticated multimedia initiative intent on the disbursement of reform insights and practices. Indeed, the communication revolution ignited by the invention of the printing press in 1440 enabled the reform to spread quickly throughout the universities, city halls, schools, palaces, markets, churches, and homes of 16th c. Europe.

Governed by clods and boors

Yet what good is a book if you can't read? This was the sobering reality that faced the reforming professors: The majority of the population was illiterate, at best able to sign their names to a legal document. Indeed, Luther compounded the problem by insisting that "evangelical" or "Lutheran" rulers suppress the long-established monasteries and convents in their regions. For theological reasons, this disestablishment was vigorously promoted: After all, there were to be no "first-class" (religious professionals) and "second-class" Christians (lay people), but one community of spiritual equals. The effect of the suppression, however, was the loss of the thousand-year tradition of monastic education. The elimination of one "problem" actually produced another.

In 1524, Luther wrote an appeal to all the city councils in Germany, asking them to establish and maintain schools. In this passionate appeal, he asked what no one had ever asked previously in human history: *that the state should establish the means to create a literate nation*. He admitted that education should be nourished first in the home by parents, the first teachers of their children. Yet, he also recognized that this ideal is rarely achieved. Thus, he argued that education – preeminently the ability to read and write – must be made available to all citizens, not only the wealthy elite.

> *Now the welfare of a city consists not only in gathering great treasures and providing solid walls, beautiful buildings, and a supply of armaments. In fact, where these abound and reckless fools get control of them, the city suffers great loss. But a city's welfare, safety, and strength consist in its learned citizens; for such persons can readily gather treasures and all goods, protect them and put them to good use.*
>
> (To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools)

In order to create a body of literate citizens, Luther insisted that girls and boys should be educated. While Luther betrayed the patriarchal bias of his culture and asked that boys have more time in school than girls, his appeal, nonetheless, was the first in human history that asked for the publicly funded education of girls from all classes of society. Of paramount importance was literacy, for if future parents were able to read and write, to have the riches of knowledge opened to them, they would be the first to foster in their children a desire for education.

The alternative was dismal, as he witnessed the loss of monastic and cathedral schools. Who will lead cities in government, education, religion, and commerce, he asked. Do citizens really want to be governed by clods and boors, by those with little or no education? "Let clods and boors rule over swine and wolves," he answered, but not over fellow citizens. Indeed, those who seek their own profit or use positions of influence only for themselves rather than the common welfare of the people are unfit for leadership. Only the liberally educated possess the aptitude and skill to care for the common good.

Learning for life in this world

In his *Address to the German Nobility* (1520), his first major attack directed at the Roman church, Luther asked for the reform of universities. With Benedict, the father of western monasticism, he decried the "dissolute living" he had witnessed among faculty and students, yet personal weakness never bothered Luther all that much. After all, this was the religious reformer who encouraged his peers to "sin boldly and rejoice in Christ's mercy even more boldly" (Letter to Philipp Melanchthon, 1521). Of far greater concern was his sense that the study of Scripture and early Christian

original intent was obscured. While he was deeply suspicious of some works attributed to Aristotle, he allowed that others and those of Cicero should be studied. Every effort should be made to ensure that all students learn ancient and modern languages: the ancient languages enabling students to read the works of classical antiquity, particularly the Bible; the modern languages advancing trade with other nations and securing greater knowledge of the world. The *quadrivium* was to be taught vigorously so that future leaders in civic life would grasp the practical arts that sustain the common life of the city.

> *If there were learned masters to teach the languages and history, students would hear the happenings and the sayings of all the world and learn … thus they could set before themselves, as in a mirror, the character, life, counsels, and purposes, success and failure of the whole world from the beginning. As a result of this knowledge, they could form their own opinions, draw from history the knowledge and understanding of what should be sought and what avoided, and be able to assist and direct others.*
>
> (To the Councilmen)

Historical study was of paramount importance in order to examine texts in their contexts, to learn from human folly, and to take inspiration in the present from achievements that benefited humankind in the past. Indeed, the Wittenberg reformers shared the humanist agenda: The study of ancient texts – unsullied by the decadence, corruption, and calamity of the previous generation – would uncover the fresh spring of wisdom that could inspire the current generation to shape a more humane future for the benefit of all.

For most Americans, socialized into forgetting the past in order to live in the present moment, the humanist agenda may well seem baffling if not hopelessly antiquarian. Why waste one's time on "dead" languages and study of the past? Why spend one minute studying anything that is mired in a context so different than one's own? In other words, *why value memory?* But, then, one might want to consider the ancient Jewish story of liberation from slavery and its powerful resonance in the many modern movements of liberation. One might consider the healing actions of Jesus and their powerful animation of nursing care and humanitarian commitments to global healthcare. One might consider monastic protection of forested land

or Franciscan solidarity with birds and animals and their inspiring presence in the ecological movement today. For the Wittenberg reformers, the university was the place in which memory was honored and history studied critically.

To them it was clear: *People with no memory of their past – of their originating stories – have little idea of who they are and what their purpose in life might be. Indeed, they have no center from which they can engage the many voices that claim their attention and energies.*

Philipp Melanchthon

As they promoted study of the classical trivium and quadrivium; the medieval legacy of law, medicine, and theology; and the humanist study of history, languages, literature, and ethics, they also included the natural sciences in the curriculum of the reformed university. In his instructions for the establishment of new Lutheran universities, Philipp Melanchthon, the Wittenberg professor of classics and chief architect of Lutheran higher education, separated astronomy, botany, iatrochemistry, and mathematics from their previous moorings in philosophy. They now stood as independent fields with their own integrity.

It should come as no surprise that Melanchthon and Luther insisted that *each of the disciplines should be free to employ its own methods of study, research, and experimentation without interference* from any other discipline. Thus, theologians should not dictate the study of geology, and historians should not interfere in the study of music. While the Bible presented God's gracious advance toward human beings, it did not offer a cure for syphilis, the "new" disease sweeping through early modern Europe. Let theologians care for the former, scientists for the latter.

> *No science should stand in the way of another science, but each should continue to have its own mode of procedure on its own terms. Every science should make use of its own terminology and for this reason one should not ridicule it; but one should be of use to the other, and they should put their achievements at one another's disposal.*
>
> (*Lectures on Genesis*, I:19)

Since human knowledge is limited, a great measure of *intellectual modesty* should mark the university. Every discipline should be wary of claiming to hold a vision of the whole and thus see itself as the "center" of academic life no matter how "useful" or "profitable" it claimed to be. At the same time, a great measure of *intellectual generosity* should abound since professors and students in the various disciplines of the university need each other if they are to grasp with greater clarity and maturity the subject of their common study: life with others on Earth. "They should put their achievements at one another's disposal." If there was to be freedom for disciplinary research and experimentation, there was an even greater need for interdisciplinary cooperation so that students might glimpse how life with others on Earth is connected in complex rather than simplistic ways.

In this regard, Luther's central theological conviction influenced Melanchthon's educational innovations: Freed by the graciousness of God from justifying one's very existence, from being a "good" or "godly" person in order to claim a reward, from spending one's energy and funds on spiritual practices that could allegedly benefit one's eternal destiny, attention was now redirected toward life on this Earth; toward advancing knowledge of life, others, their communities, and the Earth through study and research within the university; toward a student's imminent engagement in civic life and care for the common good. Thus, the ethical dimension of Lutheran education flowed from its theological center.

By 1560, the year of his death, Philipp Melanchthon had served as the architect of new Lutheran universities; guided existing schools into the Lutheran reform of education; or offered advice on curriculum reform at Marburg (1527), Tübingen (1536), Copenhagen, Griefswald, and Leipzig (1539), Frankfurt-an-der-Oder (1540), Leipzig (1543), Königsberg (1544), Heidelberg and Jena (1558). By 1600, over 300 Lutheran-sponsored schools were established throughout the cities of Germany where the nascent reform movement held sway. Little surprise, then, that even before his death, Melanchthon was called the *Praeceptor Germaniae*, the Teacher of Germany.

Thus, within a short 10 years – from the first public questioning of established authority by Luther in 1517 to the building of the first Lutheran university at Marburg in 1527 – both ancient and medieval models of education were reformed in response to radical changes in church and society.

Gifts of Lutheran education

What, then, does this narrative reveal of the gifts – the insights, practices, and values – that mark the genesis of this educational tradition watered by many learned tributaries?

One rarely gets in trouble for maintaining the status quo, the way things are. Yet whether one considers Moses, Socrates, Jesus, Hildegard, or Luther, the capacity to ask questions – troubling questions – of what most people consider "normal" suffuses the genetic coding of the Lutheran educational tradition. Thus, a university education is far less about receiving information or learning a job skill and far more about *interrogating with critical empathy* the claim, conclusion, experiment, proposed legislation, sermon, medical diagnosis, or media broadcast – to name but a few. For without the learned capacity to question with critical empathy, no advance in knowledge can take place and no meaningful leadership in society is possible.

Luther paid attention to his experience of doubt and anxiety; he did not ignore it or pretend it was of little consequence. Rather his experience prompted him to recognize the great disparity between what is unsatisfactory and what might be: the very matrix in which the impulse to change is born. Even when he spoke eloquently of trusting in the Word of God alone, he did so in terms of his experience: "At once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself." *Attention to one's intellectual, affective, or spiritual struggles* may well lead to an unexpected breakthrough in learning and perception. Or say it this way: "Is the unexamined life worth living?"

In the anti-intellectual bias of U.S. culture, the experience of "transformative learning" or the proverbial "Aha!" moment is frequently associated with many things except – learning in the classroom and in the study. How ironic that this cultural bias is alive in many centers of higher learning. Yet Luther's "breakthrough" – one that gave birth to a reform movement profoundly altering European then global cultures – emerged from the hard work of *trying to make sense of a challenging text or question.* Study in the classroom shaped activism in the street; the latter did not displace the former but rather was focused and honed by passionate study that slowly revealed the way out of a terrible mess.

While Luther, Melanchthon, and their colleagues were firmly rooted in western Christian and medieval educational traditions, their embrace of ancient Greek inquiry, rabbinic argumentation, Roman legal study, Chinese and Indian scientific advances promoted by Muslim scholars through medieval universities, and the humanist agenda had far more to do with Clement of Alexandria than Tertullian of Carthage. *Openness to many sources of knowledge and methods of study was welcomed.* And yet "openness" to many voices and many ideas – the steady refrain of post-modernity – was shaped by thoughtful discernment: What personal or cultural "gift" is helpful and thus welcomed, can be reformed and incorporated, or needs to be rejected because it militates against educational mission?

At the same time, the Lutheran *reformers of education were not allergic to paradox and metaphor.* On the one hand, Luther's theology was dialectical, that is, capable of holding two apparently contradictory images or ideas together at the same time: e.g., the human being is readily turned on the self, a self-serving creature, and also capable, with divine assistance, of turning toward others in respect and love. Such paradoxical tension produces a question: How can one be both at the same time? On the other hand, the humanist study of narrative and poetry fostered the recognition that words, persons, and images hold a surplus of meaning; they cannot be reduced to the flatness of one thing, an objectification of life. Thus, *the capacity for living with tension and ambiguity* emerged in the tradition.

But, then, there is this: *The incredible passion of the activist reformer can produce blindness to other possibilities or intolerance of those who do not express loyalty* to one's cause, project, or reform. The capacity for ambiguity or the desire to bring critical empathy to an issue can be perceived as needless theorizing or apathy. Although Luther promoted remarkable changes in theology, church practice, education, and welfare, his unwavering commitment to the religious insights that liberated him from misery also produced a violent intolerance of other Protestants (i.e., the Radicals), Roman Catholics, Muslims (in the form of the Ottoman army), and Jews. Indeed, the vitriolic writings published at the end of his life have prompted contemporary Lutherans to issue heartfelt apologies for the intolerance expressed in them. How does one hold one's convictions and, at the same time, remain open to other possibilities? Fundamentalism ("my way or the highway") and relativism ("anything goes") appear as disheartening options.

The Lutheran reformers of education held to the theological claim that God is all-knowing and all-merciful, and the anthropological claim that human beings are limited in knowledge as fallible and mortal beings. The second claim was not intended to diminish the advance of knowledge through research, experimentation, and performance in the academy. With Aristotle and the Stoics, the Lutheran reformers agreed that reason guides research in the arts and sciences. Whether or not one accepts their theological claim, the anthropological claim concerning the limitations of human knowledge actually argued for *a wider sharing of expertise, methods, and knowledge throughout the academy*, something that infrequently happens.

Finally, the early Lutheran reform of education was attentive to the experience of suffering. For Luther and his university colleagues, the image of the crucified Christ (not an empty cross) pointed to the place where God is most clearly present: in the embrace of human suffering (death) and in the work to alleviate that suffering (resurrection). Frequently lost to spiritualizing Protestants and used erroneously and terribly by Christians to blame Jews rather than the Roman executioners for the death of Jesus, the image of the crucified Christ – *the image of innocent and unjust suffering at the hands of the Empire – is where Lutheran commitments to social justice are first nourished*.

Lutheran education has fostered remarkable charitable work throughout the world. Yet when professors and students begin to ask why charity is needed in the first place, one has moved from the care of misery-making conditions (i.e., poverty, hunger, homelessness, lack of healthcare) to the more difficult question of who or what produces such misery within a social system. For many, that is a troubling place to go, for it calls into question the very structures that many take for granted and rely upon for their well-being.

But, then, doesn't asking questions of what one's society considers "normal" rest at the very heart of Lutheran education?

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