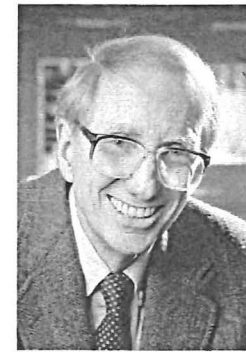


The Vocation of a Christian University in a Globalized World

by Robert N. Bellah



Robert N. Bellah

IF ANY OF YOU CAME TO HEAR me because of the title of my talk, it would be an interesting exercise to pass out a questionnaire and ask what you understand my title to mean before I have even said a single word. I suspect I would get quite a variety of answers because every major term in my title is a kind of Rorschach test, so many meanings could be read into each word. Let me start with the word Christian, which can be not only ambiguous but provocative. Let me say at once that I am not using the term to mean a vague non-denominational contemporary religiosity, so generic that even the Protestant/Catholic distinction has become obscure. On the contrary it is to historical specificity and richness to which I want to point. I know that Pacific Lutheran University is a church-related university and that the church to which it is related is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and I want to celebrate that specificity. But the Lutheran Church exists in conversation and fellowship with other Christian churches, most notably my own Episcopal church with which the ELCA has recently concluded a significant agreement leading to cooperation at many levels. There has also been a fruitful Lutheran/Catholic dialogue for decades which has produced significant results. If the Lutheran Church is an active partner in many kinds of relationship to other Christian churches today, the Lutheran Church also exists in the historical context of a much longer tradition without which Luther's teachings could not even be understood. So when I speak of a Christian university it is not in contrast to a Lutheran university but to call attention to the richness of the heritage that belongs to church-related universities of whatever denomination.

Let me turn now from the most specific word in my title to the most abstract, namely globalization to which I point when I speak of a globalized world. Globalization we tend to think of as

something relatively recent, having largely to do with the global economy, but also having to do with communications, information, entertainment, and so forth. Actually the global economy is not new but has been growing for centuries even if it seems to have reached a new degree of intensity in recent years. But globalization, centered heavily on the economy in our consciousness, is not just economic: it is political and cultural, it is, for good or ill, imperial. That's why it is not only being celebrated but contested. And celebrated and contested in recent months in the same cities: Seattle, Prague, Quebec, Genoa. One more thing about globalization which we ignore at our peril: it is American and its language is American English. Let me illustrate with a passage from Václav Havel's commencement address at Harvard in 1995 when he received an honorary degree:

One evening not long ago I was sitting in an outdoor restaurant by the water. My chair was almost identical to the chairs they have in restaurants by the Vltava River in Prague. They were playing the same rock music they play in most Czech restaurants. I saw advertisements I'm familiar with back home. Above all, I was surrounded by young people who were similarly dressed, who drank familiar-looking drinks, and who behaved as casually as their contemporaries in Prague. Only their complexion and their facial features were different—for I was in Singapore.

Now where do you think the prototype of those chairs, those advertisements, that music, those drinks, those clothes and the casual behavior came from? Not Prague or Singapore, but America. What an observer who visited Serbia and Kosovo just after the Kosovo war reported has a similar implication. However much the Serbians and Kosovar Albanians hated each other, he observed, the one thing they shared was the common aspiration to be like Americans. In a globalized world we can even say that everyone has two nationalities, American and whatever else they happen to have. If it might seem to be charming to be at the heart of a totally new kind of empire, it really isn't so charming.

If Americanization is just another word for globalization, then we Americans are the first to be Americanized with all the consequences of income polarization, overwork and cultural loss that follow Americanization everywhere in the world.

I applaud Pacific Lutheran University's commitment to international education and its desire to be in active relation to the Pacific Rim. But if international education is, as I think it rightly ought to be, a concern for the many different cultures in today's world, and if interest in the Pacific Rim is a concern for the specific cultures that border on the Pacific, then globalization is a threat as much as a promise. As much as it pulls us into relation to others around the world, it also powerfully homogenizes. Multiculturalism and diversity are on the agenda on your campus as on many others, but globalization has a powerful impetus toward monoculturalism and monolingualism. Indeed it has the capacity to co-opt multiculturalism and diversity so that they actually aid the process of homogenization rather than resisting it. This is what happens when they are interpreted as meaning: "We're all different; we're all unique; we should all have a chance to make it in an Americanized world." Nothing wrong with that, but genuine cultural specificity is the first casualty.

When we ask what is a university, we are again faced with some complex questions. In one sense the university is a specifically Western phenomenon, beginning in the high middle ages, which combined the classical heritage as organized through the liberal arts curriculum, that is the trivium, consisting of grammar, rhetoric and logic, and the quadrivium, consisting of music, astronomy, geometry and arithmetic, together with the faculty of theology, and sometimes the added faculties of law and medicine as well. In America during the colonial period and the first hundred years of the Republic, higher education took the form of church-related colleges devoted to the classical tradition and to Bible and theology, and to the training of young men for the ministry, law and public life. But toward the end of the nineteenth century a new idea of the university was imported from Germany, stressing the sciences (which had been largely absent in earlier university and college education), and organized

through disciplines, each of which soon developed national professional organizations. The relation of the college to the church, previously unproblematic, became problematic from that time on and remains so today.

If we see higher education before the middle or late nineteenth century as classical and since then as scientific we are pointing to two very different understandings of what knowledge is and what should be transmitted to young people. In calling the older understanding "classical" I am pointing to the fact that it was based on the assumed importance of certain classical texts, from Greek and Latin literature, but also religious texts, above all, the Bible. The idea of classics implies the idea of a canon, and there was not only the biblical canon, but canons of classical literature. The assumption behind classics and canons is that there are certain texts that are preeminently meaningful and that it is the task of the professor to explain them and of the student to understand them. Indeed it was believed that such texts were centers of meaning, that they could be internalized by students, and that the result was a form of life of a truly educated person capable of responsibility and leadership in the community, religious or secular. It may be hard to imagine at a moment when the very idea of a canon has been thrown on the scrap heap that the inherent meaning of classical texts was simply taken for granted through most of Western history. That didn't mean that there weren't changes. Over time, texts were variously emphasized and variously interpreted, but the dynamic life of continuous interpretation and reinterpretation went on within a structure that was simply assumed.

Science, the new paradigm of higher education, also took place within taken-for-granted structures as all human inquiry necessarily is, but the emphasis had changed dramatically. What was taken for granted was assumed to be only temporary, in order to investigate what was not taken for granted, and nothing was taken for granted in principle. Universal doubt is the principle of science, but not simultaneous universal doubt, because if everything were doubted at once nothing could be studied at all. Still, the emphasis had changed dramatically from the interpretation of pre-existing meaning to the production of new

meaning, or rather, since meaning is a problematic term in relation to science, the production of new information. The distinction between the classical and the scientific understandings of higher education is not the same as the distinction between faith and reason, or the distinction between Jerusalem and Athens, for the traditions that find their source in Jerusalem and Athens respectively are both classical and not scientific and have lived together comfortably in a variety of kinds of Christian higher education for over a thousand years. If I am right, those scholars who assume that the Lutheran faith/reason distinction can allow Lutheran schools to avoid the traumas of educational modernity are premature to say the least. Anyone who cares about meaning in higher education, especially but not exclusively Christian meaning, will find the contemporary higher educational scene challenging, to put it mildly.

When I say that science is the paradigm of the new university, I should at once qualify that statement. The classical idea of education has survived as well, in the form of liberal arts education, to which Pacific Lutheran University is explicitly and laudably committed. Yet, I would argue, the liberal arts have been, to more than a small degree, invaded and colonized by the scientific paradigm. Even in the humanities the idea that the teacher is the producer and transmitter of information and that nothing, certainly nothing about canons and classics, is to be taken for granted, is now widespread. If English majors don't want to study Shakespeare who is the English department to tell them they must? We have not yet reached the point where students who don't like French irregular verbs are not required by the French department to study them, but that leads to some further reflections to which I will return.

Even though the idea of higher education as devoted to scientific inquiry and the dissemination of scientific information has grown ever stronger for over a century, its full implications are becoming clear only today with the arrival of the advanced globalization that I have described above. The American idea of college as a four-year residential institution is rooted in the older understanding of classical education. The experience of being set-apart for four years at the end of adolescence was not primarily for the purpose of transmitting information. As in many cultures, it was a liminal period, a time of initiation, between childhood and adulthood, during which the character, piety and citizenship necessary for responsible adulthood was to be formed. And a classical education, oriented primarily to the interpretation of meaning, was a good fit with this initiatory experience. Science, however, is not about the formation of character, and has little to do with initiatory experiences, so the survival of the four-year college as a residential experience is an anachronism. We might be surprised that it lasted as long as it did. Of course, on top of the four-year college were added the professional schools and the graduate departments, which produced and transmitted information but also, inevitably, contributed to professional formation or deformation as the case may be. Nonetheless why does the production and dissemination

of information require a brick and mortar institution providing a four-year undergraduate education, or even a cluster of research departments and professional schools in the same location? The answer is, it doesn't, and we are just beginning to wake up to that fact.

Let me give you a few wake-up calls that I have run across lately:

- Thirty years from now the big university campuses will be relics. Universities won't survive. It is as large a change as when we first got the printed book. (Peter Drucker, business sage)
- If you believe that an institution that has survived for a millennium cannot disappear in just a few decades, just ask yourself what has happened to the family farm. (William Wulf, president of the National Academy of Engineering)
- I wonder at times if we are not like the dinosaurs, looking up at the sky at the approaching asteroid and wondering whether

<p><i>...we are by nature creatures of tradition because we do not make up the world in which we live but must come to terms with what is given to us, which is almost everything</i></p>	<p>it has an implication for our future. (Frank Rhodes, president emeritus, Cornell University)</p> <p>What is the "approaching asteroid"? Maybe there are several.</p> <p>If one thinks of university education as information transmission, then obviously the new information technology obviates the need for super-expensive brick and mortar institutions—all the student needs is a laptop computer. If one thinks of the university primarily as a research institution, then the market economy can, through mergers and acquisitions,</p>
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take over the profitable sectors, and the rest can just be abandoned. Or, one more asteroid, government, which is the largest funder of higher education by far, in its mania for "audits" and "outcomes assessment" may decide that institutions like the University of Phoenix can more cheaply produce the desired results than the older, much more expensive, kind of institutions.

The big asteroid, of which all the others are only the accompanying fragments, is of course the global economy, amplified by the tremendous cultural and political energies it has unleashed. Of late the economy has spilled over into every sphere of life. Most immediately ominous for us is the takeover of our health care system by for-profit corporations. Already some sectors of the university have seen the boundary between education and economics erode to the point of non-existence.

Howard Gardner and his associates in a new book I have read in page proofs called *Good Work*, in which they take as one of their fields of inquiry genetics, quote an informant as saying: "The graduate students in genetics used to sit in the lunchroom of the Bio Labs, reading copies of the journal *Cell*. Nowadays, they still sit there reading, but they're scanning copies of the *Wall Street Journal*." (p. 91) Given the time lag between research and publication, we might find, due to the falling market value of bio-tech stocks, that these students are reading the journal

The Heather Koller Memorial Lecture

This endowed lecture honors the life and memory of Heather Koller (B.A., Pacific Lutheran University, 1994). It was established in 1994 by her family—parents Brant and Carol Koller and sister Jennifer Behn. Heather had battled bone cancer from earlier in childhood. It returned in 1993 during her study at PLU, involved great pain and long hospitalization her senior year, and claimed her life in June, 1994. A month earlier her patience, determination, and courage were epitomized when she walked across the Commencement stage, unaided, to receive her degree in philosophy and English. In honor of Heather, the designated focus of the Koller endowed lectures is ethics and creative writing.

On November 21, 1996, the first lecture, "Confronting Death: Who Chooses, Who Controls?," was delivered jointly in dialogue format by Dax Cowart and Robert Burt. Cowart is the subject of the widely acclaimed video, "Dax's Case," and Burt is Professor of Law at Yale University. The lecture was published in "The Hastings Center Report," January-February, 1998 (vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 14-24).

The second Heather Koller Memorial Lecture was delivered on September 25, 2001, by Robert N. Bellah, Professor of Sociology emeritus at the University of California-Berkeley and author of *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society*. Dr. Bellah is also the year 2000 recipient of the coveted National Humanities Medal.

Cell again, but we can't deny the tendency that this anecdote depicts. David Hollinger, a Berkeley historian, in a recent issue of *Academe*, the journal of the American Association of University Professors, calls for solidarity in the face of these tendencies which he describes as follows:

[W]ithout solidarity, the professoriate will continue to fragment on terms created by the surrounding society. The problem of faculty solidarity is now located, more than ever, in the force fields of capital, where profit functions like gravity, where knowledge takes the form of property, where human energy is converted into money, and where values dance to the tune of markets. It is in that dynamic and multilayered space that faculties will seize or surrender what solidarity is within their reach.

Some of you have read my own piece in *Academe* called "The True Scholar" in which I quoted an article from *Harvard Magazine* called "The Market-Model University: Humanities in the Age of Money," an article that shows that departments in the university are treated differently depending on the amount of revenue they generate. Hollinger notes how this plays out in the inner life of the institution:

Universities are generally willing to pay the most money to faculty whose careers are the least fully defined by the traditional research and teaching missions of universities, and to pay the least money to those faculty whose careers are the most fully defined by those missions. (Hollinger's italics)

It is hard to see how, if we consistently reward those who ride the asteroids and undervalue those who resist them, we have much chance of avoiding our predicted demise.

I should point out that Hollinger differs from me in that he is thinking almost completely in terms of the modern research university model, whereas I have been implying, and will have to begin to redeem the implication, that we cannot defend the research university unless we also first defend the classical university which was the chrysalis from which the research university emerged and which still, even if largely unconsciously, provides it much of its *raison d'être*.

So, having dealt cursorily with the word "Christian" and a bit more substantially with the words "globalized" and "university," I am now ready to begin to talk about the key term in my title, "vocation," which will lead me back in the end of my talk to some further consideration of what it means to be "Christian" in the university today.

Vocation is a biblical term but let me first give a quite secular version of how I want to use the term. I will turn to Emerson, whose essays I never understand, but whose sentences often contain striking truths. He wrote in 1845:

Talleyrand's question is still the main one to be asked of the scholar: Not, Is he rich? Is he committed? Is he

well-meaning? Has he this or that faculty? Is he of the movement? Is he of the establishment?—but, "is he any body?" Does he stand for something? (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Middlebury College Commencement Address, 1845, in Emerson at Middlebury College, Middlebury College, Vermont, 1999, p. 45.)

As a first approximation, then, let me describe the scholar's vocation as standing for something. As I tried to show in my article "The True Scholar," standing for something involves more than cognitive skills. It is a quality of a whole person, ethical and aesthetic as well as cognitive, and if it is to be effective, not just of a person but of an institution which makes it possible for such persons to thrive. And the metaphor of standing for something implies also the metaphor of a ground on which to stand. What is the ground on which the scholar and the university must stand? One might say values, but I have chosen another term: again provisionally, I will say that the ground is meaning, and here I want deliberately to distinguish meaning from information.

By emphasizing the ground on which we stand I am trying to make clear that we have to start from somewhere. Much science reporting and much contemporary philosophy is written as if it were a view from nowhere, as if science is sciencing itself and philosophy philosophizing itself. But we know from recent science studies that science is in fact always done from somewhere and that the somewhere is important for the results. And philosophy was for most of its history, and in several great traditions, a way of life, not just a way of arguing.

Since I am going to be identifying the ground on which we stand not only with meaning but with tradition, a term I have just been unable to avoid, let me make a brief defense of this much calumnied word. Once at Berkeley I gave a graduate seminar on tradition, as a kind of act of provocation. A surprising number of students turned up. I asked them what they thought of tradition and they all uniformly told me that tradition is a bad thing, an idea common enough in a place where tradition is often seen as the enemy of free inquiry. But then I asked the students if they had thought up the idea that tradition is a bad thing all by themselves, or whether they had not, perhaps unconsciously, absorbed an anti-traditional tradition. I think that at least some of the students, by the end of the semester, had come to understand what I meant: that we are by nature creatures of tradition because we do not make up the world in which we live but must come to terms with what is given to us, which is almost everything, and that free inquiry can open up many important questions but it cannot replace the substance of our lives. Jaroslav Pelikan has made a useful distinction which helps us clarify the real meaning of tradition. He calls tradition in the pejorative sense, that is mindless repetition of the past, traditionalism and says that traditionalism is the dead faith of the living whereas tradition is the living faith of the dead.

I want to argue that it is the classical tradition, in which I include both Athens and Jerusalem, and the practices that enact

that tradition, and the communities that carry that tradition, however imperfectly understood and however unconsciously internalized, that give us the substance of our vocation as university teachers, insofar as we are capable of transmitting meaning and not just information to our students. Max Weber's great essay "Science as a Vocation" shows us why science cannot replace the classical tradition as the basis for the education of the whole person. (Not only is this essay worth reading for anyone concerned with education today, but Max Weber in general is most interesting for Lutherans, since he struggled with Lutheranism all his life and was perhaps more than he knew influenced by the Lutheran tradition.) But the central point in Weber's essay is that when the student brings to science Tolstoy's great question "What shall we do and how shall we live?" it has no answer. Science cannot even tell us why it is worth pursuing science. In the university we idolize free inquiry as an absolute but we don't ask often enough on what ground, on what basis, can we claim the right of free inquiry. And if our defense is only in terms of utility, how can we defend ourselves against the asteroids that claim that the corporate organization of scientific inquiry, as in the case of health care, is more cost effective, and that the university as we know it is no longer an efficient and therefore viable institution?

Let me suggest that while science gives us information, what I am calling the classical tradition, with all its practices and social embodiments, and only the classical tradition, can give us meaning, and that in the end we cannot live by information alone. We have all heard about the information superhighway and more and more of us are spending a good deal of time on it. Today we are in the midst of an information explosion. I have heard it said that the world's knowledge doubles every two years, and I am not prepared to doubt it, though I don't know how that is quantified. But of this I am sure: the world's meaning is not doubling every two years. Indeed we might be tempted to argue that the more information the less meaning.

But if, as I have argued, meaning is dependent on traditional texts and practices, we might begin to understand that though the word is frequently used, meaning is not nearly as central to our present concerns as is information. After all, meaning doesn't tell us something new, it seems just to be saying the same old thing, though in a deeper understanding it makes sense of the new. Meaning is iterative, not cumulative. If someone in an intimate relation says to the other "Do you love me?" and the other replies "Why do you ask, I told you that yesterday?" we can say that he doesn't get it. The request was not for information but for the reiteration of meaning. Or another way of making the point would be if someone said, "Why do we have to say the Lord's Prayer *this* Sunday?—we already said it *last* Sunday." Again we would say the person is asking the wrong question. The Lord's Prayer is not information that we can forget once we've heard it; it is an expression of the deepest commitment of the community which uses it, and its reiteration is not redundant but a renewed affirmation of meaning, an invocation of a total context.

In order to make the distinction between meaning and

information concrete I have just used two examples of ritual. I have spoken of traditions as entailing not only texts but practices, and in these two, rather typical, examples, the practices are rituals, the ritual affirmation of love in an intimate relationship, and the church's use of the Lord's Prayer in worship. Now I'm really getting in trouble: not only am I defending tradition but ritual as a central practice of tradition, and ritual is often as vilified an idea as tradition in the culture of free inquiry. Nonetheless I will persist.

Experiences of ritual, such as these examples, don't tell us anything about specifics, but they remind us of the whole of which we are a part, they place us in the context of tradition. In an information culture, where only what is new and what is useful is interesting, ritual is incomprehensible. I noticed a full page ad in the October 2, 2000, *New Yorker* which read: "Fact: almost everything you learn today will be obsolete in 12 months." But it is precisely because ritual reiterates what in one sense we already know but in another we will never know enough that it will not be obsolete in 12 months.

If I am right, then ritual as an expression of tradition is close to the basis of culture, and of our humanity, and we can't avoid it. Ritual persists in the interstices of our lives—otherwise how could we live?—but ritual practices as central cultural concerns are pushed to the margins in contemporary society. Just how little understood ritual is today can be illustrated with the words of our president, or some would say, our resident. When George W. Bush was asked to explain the difference between the Episcopal Church in which he was raised and the Methodist Church to which he now belongs he said:

The Episcopal Church is very ritualistic and it has a kind of repetition to the service. It's the same service, basically, over and over again. Different sermon, of course. The Methodist Church is lower key. We don't have the kneeling. And I'm sure there is some kind of heavy doctrinal difference as well, which I'm not sophisticated enough to explain to you. (quoted in the *Houston Post*)

It is just the repetition, the "same service, basically over and over again," as Bush so charmingly puts it, which links the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer service to the continuous liturgical history of the church and even to the liturgical practice of ancient Israel: it is just this repetition—repetition of the Gloria, the Creed, the Sanctus, the Our Father and so forth—that guarantees it will not be obsolete in 12 months. Hegel speaks of an old man who utters the same creed as the child, but for whom it signifies his whole life. The child in contrast may understand the religious content of the creed. But all of life and the whole world still exist outside it. It is that lifelong repetition in the context of a life lived that has made the difference.

I have used Christian examples because they are readily at hand, but my point is more general. When we teach we are by no means only transmitting information. If that were all we do, then we really would be obsolete and our institutions would be

properly consigned to the ash heap of history. When we convey meaning we teach respect for certain texts, certain ideas and certain practices, that are often rituals, even when we don't recognize them as such. An effective academic lecture or seminar session is the enactment of a ritual form so that it genuinely comes alive. The human interaction between student and teacher is at the center of such rituals and cannot possibly be replaced by distance learning. This is important: the information world is disembodied; the meaning world is not just mental, it is tangible, physical, human.

Let me digress again: it is sometimes said today that what we need is learning, not teaching, and that the good teacher is a learning coach who helps students learn what they need, but claims no authority as such. This makes perfect sense if education is seen as information transmission, but it makes no sense at all if education is seen as meaning transmission. For one thing, students who already know what they need shouldn't come to college at all; they really should opt for distance learning. If you come to college you may find out that you don't already know what you need, you may be transformed by exposure to great texts and great ideas and great teachers. A real teacher is far more than a learning coach. A real teacher who stands for something, who embodies something, teaches with his or her whole person. We say that such a teacher is a role model, which is right as far as it goes, but is rather pallid. Rather we could say that a really good teacher is internalized by the student so that the student becomes in part what that teacher is. Here I am not at all talking about indoctrination, certainly not about proselytizing, as though the teacher could imprint him or herself on the student. I have found, on the contrary, that it is much more likely the student who has fought with me all the way through the semester, challenged everything I tried to say and everything I believe in, that ends up learning what I have to teach, whereas the student who has gone through the course saying, "yes, professor, yes, professor," and regurgitates back in the final examination what he or she (often mistakenly) thinks I have said, forgets it all as soon as the class is over, "so I can make room for the new stuff I have to learn in the next class" as one student said.

Let me say that although I have put science on the side of information and tradition on the side of meaning, it is only the abstract idea of science, or perhaps the ideology of science that could be called scientism, that deserves to be so categorized and not science as practiced. The practice of science, even though it needs more than science to explain itself, is part of tradition as I understand it, and not its enemy. I think of a great biology professor at Berkeley who regularly taught Biology 1. During the course of the semester he "became" each of several great figures in the history of biology—Aristotle, Linnaeus, Darwin, Mendel, and so forth—so that the story of biological inquiry was enacted in the presence of the students to their delight and edification. Indeed in my own utterly secular and iconoclastic field of sociology where the claim to be a science is still held by many, there is, even in my rather radical department at Berkeley, a

strange piety toward the tradition. No undergraduate major nor any Ph.D. candidate can get a degree in my department without a fairly sophisticated idea of the texts of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. Lo, a canon, in the least likely place.

So far, in trying to explicate the idea of the vocation of the university, I have spoken of science and tradition, information and meaning. I want to make it clear that these are polarities and not dichotomies. I am not arguing for one set of contrast terms against the other—if I seem to it is because I think one side is much less well understood in the university today—but each set needs the other. I hope that will be completely clear when I offer my last pair of contrast terms: substance and criticism.

Let me turn to a sentence near the end of Philip Nordquist's interesting history of your university, *Educating for Service*, where he suggests that Christian faith provides a vantage point "from which to take on the prejudices of modernity." (p. 225) I want to bracket the Christian faith idea for the moment, though I will return to it, and talk a bit about the prejudices of modernity. I will argue that the great problem with modernity (and I include postmodernity as well, because it is really only a form of hypermodernity) is that it is all process and no substance. Johann Amason has usefully defined modernity as "the unlimited expansion of strategic rationality in pursuit of wealth and power, and the no less novel capacity of self-questioning and self-transformation." (*Social Theory*, p. 374) If I may condense this definition to two words I would say modernity is characterized by rationalization (in the sense Weber used the term) and criticism. Since both rationalization and criticism are formal they must have some substance to be rationalized and criticized, and again, Weber provides the term: it is tradition that is to be rationalized and criticized. At its best modernity has taken the substance of tradition and generalized it and applied it. The two most central substantive values of Western modernity, freedom and equality, derive ultimately from the biblical tradition (see Paul on Christian freedom or Paul on equality: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus") now generalized beyond the sphere of religion to become operative principles of society. As Charles Taylor in his book that raises the question *A Catholic Modernity?* argues, modernity has both fulfilled the Gospel and subverted it, by realizing in practice what had only been ideals in the tradition, but then continuously undermining its own ethical achievements by its relentless pursuit of rationalization and criticism. And the danger with respect to freedom, which in America tends to eclipse equality as a value, is that when absolutized it loses its content because it cannot specify freedom from what or freedom for what. Bruno Latour applies this criticism to postmodernity when he writes:

[Postmodernists] feel that they come 'after' the moderns, but with the disagreeable sentiment that there is no more 'after'. 'No future': this is the slogan added to the moderns' motto 'No past'. What remains? Disconnected instants and groundless denunciations,

since the postmoderns no longer believe in the reasons that would allow them to denounce and to become indignant. (Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard, 1993, p. 46.)

In short, modernity has given us instruments, material and cultural, of great power but it has not shown us what to do with them. I will argue that we still live in the light of the great traditions of humankind, that modernity has not replaced them, although it has deeply shaken them, and that we need more than ever to reappropriate those great traditions to give us the substance for a genuine form of life and a sense of direction in a world where we seem to have lost the map and don't know how to make one. The reappropriation of tradition for which I am arguing is, however, though critical of modernity, not a rejection of it. Any reappropriation today cannot be a rejection of criticism, but, as Paul Ricoeur says, reappropriation "in and through criticism." Substance without criticism withers; criticism without substance self-destructs.

But there is no such thing as tradition as such, just as there is no such thing as language as such, but only traditions and languages. So what tradition am I talking about? Certainly not one exclusive tradition, not in today's world, where we have the possibilities of understanding all the great traditions perhaps more clearly than ever before. We have modern scholarship to thank for that. Just as I don't like being called a communitarian because some critics think that means commitment to one and only one community, so I wouldn't want to be called a traditionalist if it meant commitment to one and only one tradition. We can use all the traditions we can get.

In the undergraduate course on the sociology of religion which I taught for many years at Harvard and at Berkeley, and which was a kind of comparative historical sociology of religion, I taught each tradition that I singled out for discussion, first of all in order that the students might understand it. I remember vividly one day when I had finished my lecture on Confucianism a student leaving class dropped a note on the desk in front of me. When I read it it said "Scratch one Presbyterian; add one Confucian." I truly thought that lecture was a success, although, much as I admire Confucianism, I wasn't seeking converts. I have also more than once had Jewish students come to me in my office hours and say, "I have been to religious instruction and services for years but I never understood Judaism until I took this class. Thank you." What I was trying to do was open up the students to understand the meaning of the traditions I was describing. I wasn't preaching, at least in the pejorative meaning of preaching, though I think really good preaching tries to do that, open up the text for us. But even though the "texts" in my course were religious, I wasn't doing anything different from what a good teacher of Shakespeare or Plato would do, trying to make the texts come alive to the student. Such teaching does not preclude criticism; it is the necessary prerequisite for criticism, for how can you criticize what you don't understand?

But, finally, let's get to the sense of "Christian" in my title,

the vocation of a *Christian* university. How can I justify that? It would be easy to fall back on the claim that after all it is our own tradition, and in a sense I will do that, but not at first. It is far too difficult to say of anyone in the world today what is his or her tradition, because the world is awash with traditions and most of them have become quite incoherent. It is particularly dangerous to assume that because of someone's race or ethnicity or last name you know what their "culture" or "tradition" is. In an important sense all the traditions belong to us, not only the great traditions but the tribal traditions, and we can learn from all of them, though they are all in danger and in need of interpretation and understanding.

Still we do have a history, and Pacific Lutheran University has a history, and part of standing for something, which is the scholar's and the community of scholars' vocation, is to accept that history and work with it. But how can one accept the idea of being a member of a Lutheran, and therefore necessarily Christian, university knowing that not all of the faculty and students, perhaps not even a majority, are either Lutheran or Christian, and that certainly not all that is taught in this university could remotely be called Christian? I think it is possible if enough members of the faculty stand for something and, whether what they stand for is Lutheranism, or Catholicism, or Judaism, or humanism, they respect what the institution stands for and try to understand it and convey it to the students. Starting from the ground on which you stand, namely this university in this place, you would be transmitting not a narrow or parochial tradition, but an ecumenical Lutheran tradition that has opened itself up to the world and appreciates other Christian and non-Christian traditions as indeed part of the tradition of this place.

Yet, if I were you, and I can only try to put myself in your place, not speak for you, I would not forget that you are a church-related institution and that, indeed, in your 1995 document "PLU 2000," Harvey Neufeld, Vice President Emeritus for Church Relations, was quoted as saying, "On the one hand, PLU is the servant of the church. . . On the other hand PLU is at times a pacesetter for the church." This will be harder for some to accept, but especially in America where religion has become so privatized and so spiritualized (as in "I'm not religious but I'm very spiritual," which means I don't go to church), it is important to recover a sense of the church as a living community in continuity with a past that reaches back to the Reformation and beyond that to medieval Catholicism and beyond that to the Church Fathers and the New Testament and finally to ancient Israel, in all its bewildering richness and complexity. Being the servant and pacesetter for the church is a great responsibility. Those who accept that call can be seen as "organic intellectuals" of the church, to use Gramsci's phrase, a role I have accepted for myself. If such a stance is based on a deep understanding of oneself and the community of which one is a part, it entails no loss of freedom; indeed it enhances freedom.

And this takes me to some of the central teachings of Christianity, which, even if we cannot accept, we can try to

understand and appreciate. Here I want to talk about the church, not only the ELCA and its predecessors, to which this institution owes a debt of gratitude for its very existence and for its survival during many historical vicissitudes, but the larger church of which the Lutheran Church is part. Particularly in America where hyper-individualism has gone farther than anywhere else, I want to insist that the church is the heart of Christian faith, that the call of the Gospel is not the call of the individual to a private relation to Jesus, but a call to membership in the church which is the Body of Christ. We will be saved together or we will not be saved at all. The fundamentally social nature of Christian faith goes back to ancient Israel. The idea that God made human beings in his own image applies to every human being. Indeed Gregory of Nyssa held that we should not speak of human beings in the plural any more than we speak of three Gods, for "the whole image of human nature from the first man to the last is but one image of him who is." From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry the call is into membership in the beloved community. The sacraments are completely social: to be baptized is to enter the church (For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body. I Cor 12:13); to take communion is to become one with the body of Christ (Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. I Cor 10:17)). Grace is fundamentally not individual but social and its saving life-stream flows through the one body. And just as every human is created in the image of God, so Christ did not just take a human body but he incorporated himself in our humanity. "Every man was in Jesus Christ," says Cyril of Alexandria. The idea of a purely private relation to Jesus brackets out the whole biblical understanding of the world: the drama of the creation, fall, incarnation, and final reconciliation of the whole creation. The church is the place where God and humanity come together; it is a taste of the coming kingdom; it is our refuge and our salvation and the ground from which we can go out into the world to do the work God has given us to do.

We are called as individuals to do a variety of services for the common body, but before that we are called all together to enter the Body of Christ. Our vocation as Christians and our vocation as a Christian university pulls us entirely beyond ourselves into the service of the world: "Educating for Service," as your motto puts it.

Before I close let me take one last look at the globalized world in which we live, whose forces seem continuously determined to remove whatever ground we may have beneath our feet. Robert Reich, in his new book *The Future of Success* points out the price we pay for the enormous range of possibilities offered to us by globalization. We live in the world of the terrific deal. "Finding and switching to something better is easier today than at any other time in the history of humanity, and in a few years, will be easier still. We're on the way to getting exactly what we want instantly, from anywhere, at the best value for our money." The price? The willingness, or, increasingly, the necessity of making ourselves into better deals, willing to switch jobs, switch locations, all too often switch "spouses or partners, although not usually on an annual basis," he wryly notes. And although the educated and the affluent are pulling ever farther ahead of the average person and especially those at the bottom of the wage scale, it is the affluent who work the longest hours, under the greatest pressure, and increasingly, with the least security. As Nicholas Boyle puts it, "even for the wealthy of the planet the price of prosperity is more competition, harder work, the mobilization of women, more and more auditing and alienating control, or alternatively the stupor and despair of unemployment and dependency." In a world of ever-increasing choice, ever-increasing pressure, ever-increasing change, where is the ground on which to stand, where is meaning and tradition, where is the church and how can the church respond to such a world? Those are among the most urgent questions that it is the vocation of a Christian university in a globalized world is to try to answer. →

