

“Radical Hope”

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The earliest artwork in the world is painted handprints and animals on cave walls. Across the planet, in Spain, France, Indonesia, and South Africa, through tens of thousands of years and tens of thousands of miles, people painted similar images of what they saw and imagined in the world. The artists never interacted with one another, divided by language and distance, yet the shared subjects demonstrate how people shared interests and experiences, as documented in paleolithic art. Today, we have improved resources and can bridge the gaps between people, even with the disconnections of geography, socioeconomic status, and culture. Through global engagement and utilizing hope for connections across differences, values taught by PLU, we can create a network of support and social justice that can improve human and ecological conditions.

This fall, I had the opportunity to study at Oxford as a part of the PLU Ihon-Oxford program. There are many museums in Oxford, but my favorite was the Pitt Rivers Anthropology Museum. It displays a vast collection with a unique and labyrinthine layout. Living in Oxford, it was a struggle to reconcile the beautiful historical architecture and stellar educational resources with the systematic exploitation of cultures that funded it. The Pitt Rivers Museum creates an optimistic outlook for the future that still confronts the negative impact of colonialism. Instead of showing different cultures and their alien traits, it is organized typologically, with artifacts from various cultures displayed alongside one another by their purpose. They highlight contrasting and shared elements of numerous groups. Pitt Rivers's collaboration with the cultures it presents demonstrates its mindful global engagement. They recognize the coercive method in which the museum received its artifacts, which they address by returning or working with cultures to educate with accuracy. The museum wants to share information in a manner that best represents communities while demonstrating the similarities that exist throughout the world.

The Pitt Rivers Museum holds a philosophy centered around radical hope. According to their website, they “will consider how museums can change to support humanity, our relationships to each other, to the environment and to things.”<sup>1</sup> Radical hope comes with the idea that people can learn about the world, much of which was exploited by England, in a conscientious way. The radical hope in the education in Pitt Rivers Museum connects well with PLU’s value of leading thoughtful lives, as seen in the mission statement: “PLU seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care — for other people, for their communities and for the Earth.”<sup>2</sup> The compassionate work of PLU, as described by the mission statement, comes through thoughtful and insightful involvement with communities. As I learned in my time in Oxford, exploring Pitt Rivers and other sites, we can engage with people and cultures and provide support and change while respecting your place of privilege or role in oppression.

The education provided at PLU focuses on finding a vocation, which intrinsically connects with radical hope and optimism. The emphasis on global engagement is not incidental to the Lutheran education of this institution. “At their best, then, Lutheran schools are organized around [vocation], a calling committed to the promotion of human well-being in a world marked by much ignorance, discrimination, injustice, and suffering.”<sup>3</sup> My education reflects this focus, with every one of my classes at PLU connecting its content to social justice. Last year, I was in a class on Liberation Theology, a religious movement that centers on addressing the suffering of

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<sup>1</sup> “Radical Hope,” Pitt Rivers Museum (University of Oxford), accessed March 9, 2023, <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/radical-hope>.

<sup>2</sup> “About PLU,” Pacific Lutheran University, accessed March 9, 2023, <https://www.plu.edu/about/>.

<sup>3</sup> “Discerning One’s Calling: Lutheran Studies,” Pacific Lutheran University, accessed March 9, 2023, <https://www.plu.edu/lutheran-studies/core-elements/discerning-ones-calling/>.

poverty. Resolving this should be the mission of Christianity, as the goal is to relieve human suffering. The movement was founded and popularized among Catholics in Latin America, but everyone can adopt this mindset. Poverty, and other social injustices, are found everywhere, and recognizing these shared experiences can bring people together and create change. Utilizing the hope for change presented by liberation theology and vocational values provides an opportunity to help others through shared experiences found in global engagement.

In the 2019 ResoLute article featuring Rick Steves, "Travel as a Political Act," Steves highlighted the value of global engagement, calling it a necessity for improving ecological and human conditions. In the article, Steves describes travel as an opportunity to enhance service capacity. He says, "we tend to be frightened, ethnocentric, and easily threatened. And the world is a beautiful place."<sup>4</sup> It is impossible to help what you fear, and Steves highlights this unease towards the unknown, especially regarding foreign cultures and people. But, instead of accepting this fear and avoiding engaging with uncomfortable situations, experiencing the world allows people to appreciate differences and have a holistic global education. Vocation is an optimistic idea as it believes progress comes with individual purpose and service. Learning is necessary for vocational work, as supported by PLU, and there is no better basis for knowledge than firsthand experience. Vocation, especially with a global focus, allows people to uplift one another, which is beneficial in an optimistic future.

When facing massive global issues such as climate change, it is easy to be overwhelmed and feel like doing anything is pointless. There is a reason the central theme of last year's Earth and Diversity Week was "Beyond Climate Doom: Navigating Grief and Anxiety in the Age of

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<sup>4</sup> Lisa Patterson, "Travel as a Political Act: Resolute Online: Winter 2019," Pacific Lutheran University ResoLute (PLU, February 28, 2019), <https://www.plu.edu/resolute/winter-2019/travel-as-a-political-act/>.

Crisis,” and the featured event focused on maintaining hope in the face of overwhelming and frightening challenges. This event, as well as the various discussions and presentations within Earth and Diversity Week, emphasized the power of individuals in mobilizing, passing legislation, and exploring the intersectionality of environmental and social justice. All of this is only possible through holding hope for the future.

In the book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, assigned in my Ihon 112 class, the author Yuval Noah Harari outlines the entirety of human history, beginning with what he calls the cognitive revolution. Harari describes the cognitive revolution as a shift in the intellectual ability of homo sapiens, as we can conjure and believe in ideas without any concrete basis. The broader implication of this is our ability to organize in large numbers, conceptualizing connections between people when, materially, there are none, as well as picturing a future or world that does not technically exist. The book describes, “An imagined reality is something that everyone believes in, and as long as this communal belief persists, the imagined reality exerts force in the world.”<sup>5</sup> These realities hold power, demonstrating the strength of ideas, including radical hope or global engagement. There is an evolutionary and psychological basis for empathy and optimism in improving the world, as well as evidence for the potential of globalization. While people painted hands and animals on cave walls, they laid the groundwork for people today to imagine futures that created the possibility of global connections and community. As demonstrated in the radical hope of Pitt Rivers, the value of observing the world as described by Rick Steves, the charitable values of vocation, and the wide-scale change emphasized in Liberation Theology, it is clear that there is a potential for improving the world utilizing

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<sup>5</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2015), 31.

imagined realities and forming broader connections through global engagement and understanding.

There are commonalities between people across all spaces and time, recognizable in the cave artwork from millennia past, created through imagined communities. The existence of communities show how empathy and interaction overcome the divisions of circumstances and culture. Global engagement, as encouraged in vocation and leading lives of meaningful service PLU, emphasizes the possibilities of respectful relationships with the world, creating better opportunities for human and ecological flourishing.

Word Count: 1248

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