

The University of Dubuque: Our Tradition, Our Heritage, Our Future¹

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At the University of Dubuque, we are rediscovering our past and inventing our future. Over the last six years, our institution has changed in many ways. In 1998, a new mission statement was adopted by the Board of Trustees affirming that we as an institution value our Presbyterian tradition and aspire to grow to be an outstanding Christian institution of higher education. A few years later, the Board approved a bold *Plan for Transformation* that has ushered in radical changes to our programs, and to the faculty, staff and administration of the University. New programs have been developed and others have been eliminated in a truly sweeping redesign of the University. In addition to program changes, the University is undergoing a transformation in ethos and a rediscovery of our values as an institution. As both a result and a part of these changes, we are in the midst of a complete revision of our undergraduate core curriculum. And as we roll in our new core curriculum, we are transforming the undergraduate educational experience at the University. In short, bold and controversial action by the board has paved the way for much discussion and work by the faculty, administration and staff as we rediscover our institutional calling and redesign our educational programs. We are truly engaged in an exciting, and ongoing process of planning, implementation, assessment and improvement of our educational offerings.

In the midst of this process, frequent mention is made of our mission statement and its affirmation of our heritage as a Presbyterian university. Our mission documents affirm that we “value the Presbyterian tradition.” What does this bold statement mean? Is it being suggested that we return to some golden age in our past? Is it being suggested that we believe only Presbyterians have the truth? Nobody seems to have these interpretations in mind. But it is also clear that it is not our institutional intention to drop the terms *Presbyterian* and *Christian* from our literature, or identify ourselves as merely a “historically-

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Presbyterian” University. The tradition which we value is not to be merely a part of our past, but a source of insight and nourishment for our future. But what kind of nourishment does our tradition provide? How can we value this tradition while we, and our students, live and operate in a rapidly changing world? These are hard questions without easy answers. But they are the types of questions we must ask, and continue to ask as we reclaim our heritage.

In this paper, I present an understanding of some key elements of our Presbyterian tradition and our heritage as an institution. It is my hope that this account will support a continuing discussion through which a knowledge of the elements of our tradition will inform and continually transform our life as a University. Valuing our Presbyterian tradition will not be accomplished in the writing of a document that codifies what it means to be *Reformed* or *Presbyterian*. Neither will it be achieved by finding some unique pattern for higher education from our past that we can apply to our programs today. Valuing our tradition will only be accomplished as we keep the discussion going, as we continually ask what that tradition means for this new day, as we continually challenge and encourage one another through community dialogue. It is in this spirit that I offer this paper on our tradition and our heritage. Our history does not give us a blueprint for our institution today. But it does come rich with values and insights from which we can learn.

In section I, I outline several central themes in the Reformed theological perspective which nourished both our founders and our leaders through the years. The Reformed worldview, I suggest, provides a distinctive perspective on higher education, a perspective which historically gave rise to numerous colleges and universities in America. In section II, I turn specifically to the University of Dubuque and identify a number of important aspects of our unique heritage. Finally, in section III, I challenge you, the reader, to join in the conversation. Let us turn, first, to the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition in which the University of Dubuque was born. What is it and what does it have to say to us today?

I. Valuing the Reformed and Presbyterian Tradition in Higher Education.

We “value the Presbyterian tradition.” This is a bold statement. What might it mean? How are we to interpret it? Let me suggest that we begin with a brief reflection on the nature of traditions. For some, the word *tradition* brings to mind events and practices of the past, as if the focus of tradition is on the past. But traditions are more than memories. They are living realities. To say that we are a part of a tradition is to say that we are part of a living strand of people, practices and ways of understanding that stretches from the past, through the present into the future. Traditions are alive and active, taking on new manifestations in each period of history, new manifestations continuous with their past but creatively responding to the present situation. Thus to be part of a

tradition is not only to learn and grow from it, but to help shape it in the present. So it is with the tradition that we mark with the words *Reformed* and *Presbyterian*. As a Presbyterian university, we are both shaped by this tradition and shape it anew. Using another helpful metaphor, Hans Georg Gadamer writes of our relationship with tradition as a dialogue. At its heart is language, a language which shapes our own thoughts and practices, but also a language to which we contribute. “For tradition is a genuine partner in dialogue, and we belong to it, as does the I with a Thou,” a Thou which stands in a special relationship with us (Gadamer 1989, 358). To say that we value the Presbyterian tradition, then, is to affirm that we stand in a living relationship with the past, that we speak a language shaped by that past, and that we appropriate that language to express ourselves in the present and the future. As we do, we are both shaped by and shape the tradition. It is thus particularly appropriate that the Presbyterian Church (USA), the particular body within which we stand, affirms that we are the “‘church reformed, always reforming,’ according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit” (*The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* 1996,G-2.0200).

The Reformed Tradition in America.

This quotation alludes to the fact that the Presbyterian Church stands within the branch of the Christian faith that has been given the name *Reformed*. As a Presbyterian institution, our roots as a university have been nurtured by the Reformed Faith. Although all Christians would trace their roots to the person and work of Jesus, various segments of the Christian Church have been significantly shaped by different influential thinkers. Reformed Christianity has been influenced by the work of Huldreich Zwingli and John Calvin, two important leaders in the Protestant Reformation in 16th century Europe, in what we now call Switzerland. These reformers, especially Calvin, inspired one of the main branches of Protestant Christianity after the Reformation. Calvinist Christians in Scotland in the 17th century began using the word *Presbyterian* to label the distinctive form of church government adopted by many Reformed churches. One important root of Reformed Christianity in America taps into the emigration of Scottish and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians to the early colonies. Another important root taps into the Puritan movement of 17th century England, and the subsequent Puritan emigration to the New World, where Puritans set out to establish communities based on their own Calvinistic understanding of God’s covenant. Reflecting different views of church government, which were already present in England, Puritans contributed to both the Presbyterian and the Congregationalist movements in America. In addition to Scotch Presbyterians and English Puritans, Dutch settlers, beginning in 1624, brought another variety of Reformed Christianity to America. Although Calvinist and Reformed ideas influenced other

traditions, including the Church of England (usually called the “Episcopal Church” in America) and the Baptist and Methodist movements, it was in the Presbyterian, Congregational and Dutch Reformed traditions that they were most fully expressed and lived out. For various reasons, it is the Presbyterian and the Dutch branches of the Reformed tradition that have maintained the strongest continuity with the ideas of John Calvin. In the remainder of this section, as we consider the theological tradition out of which the University of Dubuque emerged, I will draw upon the ideas of John Calvin himself and the history of Reformed higher education in America. (For a helpful summary of Reformed groups in America, see Leith 1981.)

The Reformed Tradition and Higher Education.

As Reformed Christians made their home in the New World, they had an extremely significant impact on the shape of colonial higher education. There was just something about Calvinism which led to the establishment of colleges. As James Bratt reports, “The Puritans of Massachusetts Bay organized Harvard College six years after they founded their colony” (Bratt 1995, 12). Christians with Reformed leanings founded Yale and Princeton as well. And as European settlers moved westward in the years that followed, Christian settlers from the Reformed traditions founded hosts of other colleges and universities. Quoting the words of Digby Baltzell, Bratt reports that “nearly a third of the United States' two hundred colleges at the time of the Civil War had been founded ‘by the heirs of Calvinism,’ and another third were ‘indirectly controlled by the Presbyterian church’” (Bratt 1995, 12; See also Longfield 1992, 99). What was it that moved Reformed Christians to found colleges and universities? As is true of all causal questions, there is no simple answer. But at least part of the answer lies in the Calvinist view of God, of the world, and of humankind. Several elements in the Calvinist worldview fostered the development of institutions of higher education. In particular, we will consider five themes.

Five Themes in Reformed Thought.

*First, as is well known, the Reformed tradition emphasizes the **sovereignty of God**.* The God that is revealed in the Bible, and ultimately in Jesus Christ, controls everything that exists. In contrast to Deism, which was also to have a significant influence on early American thought, John Calvin insisted that God is not “a momentary Creator” who has left the world to run on its own. God, says Calvin, “drives the celestial frame . . . [and] sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow” (Calvin 1960, 198-199). As the Creator of all, God has authority over all that exists. Thus, from the Calvinist perspective, the purpose of all that is, and of human life in particular, is focused

on relationship to God. Human beings “live to the end that they may know God,” wrote Calvin (Calvin 1960, 46). *Knowing and lovingly obeying the sovereign God is the very purpose of human life. This central Reformed conviction has at least two related implications. It implies, first of all, that the world and all that is in it, including every aspect of our lives, belong to God. Whatever we do, we are to do it in such a way that we glorify or give honor to God. And second, because all of reality and life is God’s, every corner of reality is related to, and reflects the nature and glory of God.* Thus, from a thoroughly Reformed perspective, there really are no *secular* aspects of reality and life. There are no *sacred* places, if this implies that other places are *profane*. All the world is sacred. There are no parts of life that are not *religious*, because all of life is to be lived in relationship to the Creator God who made us, and continues to sustain and remake us into what was intended for us in creation.

Second, the Reformed tradition insists that all of life has been tainted by sin, including the life of the mind. Just as God’s rule covers all of life, so our turning away from God distorts the whole of life. Sin, the human rebellion against the Creator, mars the whole person and all of creation. Humans stand before God as profoundly corrupted beings, whose minds and wills are bent out of shape. As a result, humans, in their “natural” condition apart from the special help of God, are unable to fully understand the truth. Sin has epistemological consequences, not just in regard to knowledge of God, but in regard to *all of our knowledge*. Since God is intimately involved in every aspect of reality, a broken relationship to God and a distorted understanding of God has the implication that one can have only a partial understanding, at best, of any aspect of reality.

One might think that Calvin would have concluded that Christians can learn nothing from nonbelievers. But this is far from the case. For Calvin the claim that all human thought is limited by sin does not imply that “natural” humankind is totally lacking in insight. In fact, he gives an important place to such “natural” understanding in his perspective on the world. *The third theme that I highlight in Reformed thought is this: God’s grace has been bestowed upon all, both those on the inside and those on the outside of the Christian faith.* In spite of the radical nature of sin and the distortion of understanding it brings, the Reformed view still affirms the presence of true insight in the scholarship of nonbelievers. In Calvin, this comes out in at least two ways. First, he teaches that even in areas as central to religion as belief in God and moral understanding, God has implanted in human minds a degree of truth (Calvin 1960, 273). Second, Calvin emphasizes that Christians can learn from non-Christian thinkers. Over and over again, as a humanist scholar himself, Calvin quotes or alludes to classical literature to illustrate his own ideas. Calvin even believed that the study of the “arts and sciences” enables the Christian to understand both the Scriptures and the world more fully. *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, a document written under the supervision of Calvin to order the life of the church and city of Geneva, calls for

the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, but adds, “Since it is impossible to profit by such instruction without first knowing languages and the humanities . . . it will be necessary to establish a school” to prepare young people for both the ministry and civic involvement (in Hillerbrand 1968). And when one looks at the curriculum of the school Calvin designs, the language study is full of classic pagan writers. Similarly, Calvin affirms that the knowledge and ability to teach “the arts” are “bestowed indiscriminately upon the pious and impious” and should therefore be “counted among the natural gifts” (Calvin 1960, 273). He continues,

Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the spirit of God.

Working through the branches of pagan writings, Calvin affirms in each the presence of God’s truth. The ancient jurists who formulated principles for civic life, the “philosophers” who studied nature, the rhetoricians who taught the art of speaking, the teachers of medicine, and the mathematicians all have wisdom that the Christian recognizes comes from God. “Those men,” Calvin writes, “whome Scripture calls ‘natural men’ were, indeed, sharp and penetrating in their investigation of inferior things. Let us, accordingly, learn by their example how many gifts the Lord left to human nature even after it was despoiled of its true good” (Calvin 1960, 274-275). Thus, balanced with the claim that the mind has been “despoiled” and darkened by sin, is Calvin’s affirmation that Christians have much to learn from non-Christian writers, into whose minds also God has poured insight. Following Calvin, the Reformed tradition has consistently affirmed that all that is true is part of God’s truth. All insight and understanding are gifts from God, whether they are recognized as gifts to those to whom they are given or not. It follows that it is wrong to reject and ignore the ideas of “secular” or “pagan” writers. Rather, the task of a Christian is to sort through and learn from them, integrating the insights of both Christian and non-Christian sources with the recognition that it is God that is the source of all truth.

These first three themes provide a framework within which the Reformed thinker understands the world. But if this were all to the picture, humankind would be left with only a partial, distorted vision of reality. Like all of human life, the understanding would be left in its corrupted state. But God has not left humankind to waste away in this condition. *The Reformed worldview also affirms this fourth theme: Through the work of Jesus Christ, God is working to restore humankind to its full created goodness.* With all Christendom, this

tradition shares the conviction that in Jesus Christ God has acted to redeem humankind. In light of the holistic impact of sin which we have seen expressed in the second theme above, it is not surprising that the Reformed view of redemption is equally holistic. The gospel, or *good news*, of Jesus is not just that humans can now return to their proper relationship with God. It is not that Jesus has provided a way for humans to escape this world and make it to heaven. The good news is that God loves *this world* and wants to redeem it. God wants to transform all of life in this world, by changing individual lives, by transforming human understanding, and by transforming social structures. God is working to restore the world in its entirety to its created goodness.

The fifth and final theme in Reformed thought we will consider here follows directly from those that we have already discussed. *If God is working to redeem the fallen world, and if the purpose of human life is to live for God's glory, then it is the responsibility of Christians to be involved in transforming the world into the place God wants it to be.* Nicholas Wolterstorff argues forcefully that the a unique feature of English Puritanism was its call for Christians to change the structures of society. Unlike others in their time, who saw these structures as God-created and therefore not to be changed, these early Calvinists saw social structures themselves as corrupted and in need of reform (Wolterstorff 1983, 9). As Wolterstorff writes,

. . . the emergence of original Calvinism represented a fundamental alteration in Christian sensibility, from the vision and practice of turning away from the social world in order to seek closer union with God to the vision and practice of working to reform the social world in obedience to God (Wolterstorff 1983, 11).

The result is what Wolterstorff calls “world-transformative” Christianity. As the Puritans moved across the Atlantic to America, they sought to build a transformed society structured according to God’s law. Although the application of this conviction has taken different forms in various contexts, Reformed Christians have shared the conviction that God wants to do more than transform individuals, or even to create an alternative community. *God wants, with the help of the faithful, to restore the world to its created goodness.*

Four Applications to Higher Education.

How does all of this motivate the establishment of colleges and universities? *First, flowing from the Reformed worldview is the conviction that proper human development, referred to in theological terms as the process of sanctification, is holistic.* It involves a transformation that includes the intellectual, the spiritual, and the social dimensions of life. This holistic view of

human development cuts two ways. On the one hand, it means that the task of helping individuals grow spiritually cannot be separated from helping them develop intellectually. If the mission of the people of God is to encourage full spiritual growth, it must provide for proper education. As we have seen, Calvin himself affirmed the value of an education in the pagan liberal arts for helping Christians understand the Scriptures. Similarly, if God is involved in every aspect of reality, one cannot fully appreciate the glory of God until one has a broad understanding of all that God has created. Thus, the Reformed perspective provides a clear motivation for establishing institutions which enable humans to learn about all aspects of reality. But on the other hand, this holistic understanding of proper human development means that these institutions will not be narrowly intellectualistic. Education, in the Reformed view, can never be purely a matter of taking in information. Because the human understanding is distorted by sin and moral confusion, gaining information alone can never produce true understanding. A Christian education must aim not only at intellectual growth, but at spiritual growth. Students, according to the Reformed perspective, must be encouraged to encounter Jesus Christ and begin the redemptive transformation that occurs through the work of the Holy Spirit. Only then can the student gain a full understanding and appreciation of what he or she learns. Spiritual and intellectual growth are linked with other aspects of human life as well. Students must be nurtured morally and socially through the examples, programs and policies they experience in the educational process. In sum, the Reformed view provides an impetus for education which integrates the educational process into a broader framework of human development, which includes growth in faith, character, and social responsibility.

A second implication of the Reformed perspective is this: It is the task of Christian scholars, both teachers and students, to understand all of reality in light of God's truth. As we have seen, the Reformed perspective emphasizes that all truth is God's. But it also insists that our minds have been clouded by sin. In Jesus, God has begun the task of restoring human life to its created goodness. What is of particular relevance to education is that this restoration includes the cognitive and epistemic dimensions of our lives. Salvation not only restores our relationship with God but also puts us on the track to a restored understanding of reality. Does God suddenly wipe away our confusion and fill our minds with only truth? No. Reformed Christianity is painfully aware of our ongoing sinfulness and continuing intellectual confusion. But we look forward, in the Reformed view, with hope. Through God's work in Christ and through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, God is transforming our understanding. An important part of this transformation process is God's work through communities of scholars who work at understanding all of reality – including the natural world, the human world and the world of philosophical ideas – in light of God's truth as it is revealed in both the living Word, Jesus Christ, and the written word in the Bible.

This second implication of Reformed thought has two corollaries. First, it defines the institution's goals for its scholar-students. Reformed educational institutions seek to provide a broad education that is integrated into the framework of the truths revealed in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. The goal is to provide students with not just a lot of knowledge, but a unified framework within which this knowledge can be placed. In the Reformed perspective, this framework is defined by themes we have already defined. The student is not simply to store information about the natural world, but to understand that the natural world is a creation of God. The student is not just to learn about human achievements and social behavior, but to understand these in light of the conviction that humans have been created in the image of God. Second, the Reformed perspective defines the task of the scholar-teachers. Just as the students are not to learn isolated bits of truth, so teachers, in the Reformed understanding, view their field as interconnected with other fields of learning and unified under the sovereignty of God. In short, the Reformed perspective provides a framework within which both students and teachers can work out a worldview which brings all they do into a coherent perspective.

*A third implication of the Reformed perspective for higher education is related to the second: Scholarship and academic activity, for both teachers and students, is a **vocation**, a calling from God.* As we have seen, Reformed Christianity resists the division of life into the sacred and the secular. In a very real sense this view sees all of life as sacred, all of life to be lived to the glory of God. So it is not just “priests” or “pastors” who are called by God, but every believer who lives his or her life in response to Christ. *The Reformed tradition has consistently emphasized that as each person pursues God’s will, his or her work becomes a **vocation**.* Calvin emphasized that all humans are called by God to particular tasks. He wrote, “the Lord bids each one of us in all life’s actions to look to his calling” (Calvin 1960, 724). It is the calling of each Christian to perform the function God has assigned to him or to her.² All of a person’s life, in work and play, is the means by which one responds to and gives glory to God. What does this mean for scholars and students? *It means that Reformed scholars*

² Although in the context of this passage John Calvin seems to be expressing a kind of social conservatism by calling for all to stick with their tasks, in the development of Reformed thought the idea that all work can be seen as a ‘calling’ from God is an important departure from the Catholic tradition which tended to see ‘vocation’ as setting some individuals apart in a special category. Just as Luther led the Reformers in emphasizing the priesthood of all believers, in the Reformed doctrine of Christian vocation Calvin is emphasizing a radical equality of tasks beneath the sovereignty of God who calls each one to perform a particular task.

see their teaching and their research as a calling from God. For the reformed scholar, research is done in response to God, whether it be in science, in history, in psychology, in philosophy, or in theology. Through investigating God's truth, through publishing their findings, through fostering student learning, scholars can glorify God. And so can students. In the Reformed perspective, being a student-scholar is itself an important response to God's call. It is an opportunity to learn about God's truth and glorify God in one's studies, even in areas usually understood as 'secular.'

In this regard, the Reformed understanding goes against the culture of our day. Whereas many of today's students (and their parents!), see the educational enterprise merely as necessary preparation for a 'vocation' or 'career,' the Reformed college will seek to help students see learning itself as a part of their vocation. Education, in this view, is not just career preparation.³ It is valuable in itself. The student informed by the Reformed perspective understands that the wisdom of God can be discovered in every field, and the task of learning is itself a calling. But it is also preparation for the continuing vocation the student will pursue after graduation. Students will be encouraged to view their future career in a much different way as well. The goal of life is not to make money. It is to glorify God. This does not mean one should not seek a good job. But there is a radical difference between getting an education in order to get a well-paying job and preparing for the vocation to which a student senses he or she is being called. Teaching, writing, business administration, environmental research, medical or scientific research, missionary service, aviation management, computer information management, graphic design, and many more, are all vocations to which students may be called by God. In short, the Reformed perspective encourages students to see both their education and their careers as part of their calling from God. Education is not just a hoop through which they must jump to earn money to get what they one want.

³ As this section shows, emphases of Reformed education will not always be popular in our materialistic, pragmatic and individualistic culture. To be truly Christian and Reformed, a college or university must resist the pressure to simply cater to the wants of our "market." Reformed Christianity, at its best, seeks to transform our sin-infected culture. Rather than giving students what they value when they enter, Reformed education seeks to transform its students' values so they will in turn transform the society into which they are being called by God. This has important implications for how we approach efforts at communicating our mission and marketing our education product. Advertising is important. But we must be careful not to simply say what we think our culture wants to hear. Serving our society is crucial to our success, but we must resist being conformed to the values of that society.(Hauerwas 1996; Himmelfarb 1996)

The Reformed view of *vocation* has a similar implication for faculty members. The scholar and teacher, in this view, should not see his or her position as ‘a job’ whereby he or she makes a living. The teacher-scholar’s position is just as much a ‘calling’ as is that of the pastor at the church which she attends, or that of the auto mechanic who fixes her car. No one in any of these positions should see his or her ‘job’ as just a job. When performed in response to the gracious work of God, the work of scholarship, whether as a student, as a teacher or as a research scholar, are more than jobs. They are callings through which one can glorify God with one’s life.

Finally, the Reformed understanding of higher education looks beyond itself to engagement with the culture around it. As we have seen above, the Reformed worldview sees God as transforming all of life, both individual and social. It is the Christian’s task to join in this transforming work in the world. Reformed higher education seeks to play an important role in this task. It nurtures students in holistic growth. It encourages them to see both their current studies and the future careers as part of their calling from God. These ideas already imply that students are being prepared for a *mission*. They are to serve God in the world. Although this emphasis takes on different flavors in different times, as we will see when we consider our particular heritage here at the University of Dubuque, the objective of preparing students for service and mission in the world plays a very important role in the Reformed view of higher education.

In sum, it is no accident that Reformed Christians, from their first years in America, founded colleges and universities. Since, in the Reformed perspective, all true understanding is a gift from God, it is important to encourage broad and holistic education. Since all creation is God’s, God can be served in a multitude of ways. Since God is transforming his creation, we too can be agents of transformation in the world. All of these emphases point toward colleges and universities. The Reformed tradition offers us a rich heritage. As I have emphasized above, I do not present these themes from our theological heritage because I believe they provide a blueprint for our institution today. But I do believe they can significantly nurture our thinking and enrich the language with which we carry on the dialogue about how we live out our mission, our calling as an institution today and tomorrow. But before we think about the future, it will also be helpful to consider our own unique heritage here at the University of Dubuque.

II. Our Institutional Heritage.

We have noted several important emphases of the Reformed tradition, especially in its view of higher education. We turn now to a more specific look at the unique, multifaceted heritage of the University of Dubuque. What can we learn from our own past? Many features of our history are common to other

Presbyterian and church-related colleges, and even to other institutions of higher education. But a unique combination of institutional experiences and a peculiar history has made us who we are today. It is not my intention to provide a history. Others have written papers that helpfully narrate our story (Longfield 1995). Instead, I will highlight six historical threads that I believe contribute to who we are today.⁴

Educating Pastors: From Van Vliet's Seminary to Today.

Perhaps the most obvious and unchanging strand running through our history is the task of training pastors for ministry in local churches. Our institution began in 1852 with the vision and work of the Rev. Adrian Van Vliet, the Pastor of the First German Presbyterian Church of Dubuque, who set about training young men to be pastors to German immigrants. This work, born in the basement of the church, grew into a small school for pastors. (For a brief account of this early school, see Middents 1997, 31.) As the years went by this small seminary continued to develop, and its leadership found it necessary to add a college and even an academy to prepare students for the seminary. But in the beginning, the purpose of all of these was to prepare pastors for church leadership. In its 1904-1905 bulletin, the German Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the North West, as the institution was then named, stated that “[t]he object of the School is to prepare young men to preach the gospel in the German language.” Already by 1904, the program of study included “a full course of instruction in academic, collegiate, and theological branches, covering a period of nine years.”⁵ All of this was necessary “so that nothing is lacking for the efficient equipment of students for the pulpit and pastorate” (Catalogue of the German Presbyterian Theological School of the Northwest 1904-1905). Through the years the University of Dubuque has changed and broadened in many ways. It now prepares both men and women for pastoral ministry in denominations beyond just the Presbyterian Church. It has obviously changed its primary language. And it has broadened its mission to include much more than training pastors. The college has become a vital part of the institution. But in spite of all the changes, the University of Dubuque is still training pastors.

⁴ In this section, I am indebted to Mary Sand, a great student and researcher, for her hard work digging through old catalogs in the University of Dubuque archives and selecting key passages that capture the history of the University's self-understanding through the years.

⁵ The next sentence reads, "The faculty at present consists of six professors." What a teaching load they must have had!

A Presbyterian University.

Already in 1904-1905 the mission of the institution has begun to change. Even the description of the school's mission quoted above shows signs of change. The words of the bulletin are defensive, as if written to prove to financial supporters that in spite of the addition of the college and academy, the school had remained faithful to its original purpose. But the next paragraph makes clear that there are some students attending the college who do not go on to seminary. The 1904-1905 Bulletin states,

The collegiate department has been greatly strengthened and now affords an opportunity for German young men to attain a college education. These advantages are open to students, who may not intend to enter the ministry, so that for a small sum the youth of our German Presbyterian churches may obtain a thorough education (Catalogue of the German Presbyterian Theological School of the Northwest 1904-1905).

And then in the next paragraph it is announced that plans are underway for a "commodious building. . . equipped with the most modern scientific apparatus." By 1904 the developing institution is well beyond the point of providing a narrow pre-seminary education. It seeks to provide a well-rounded course of study. Nevertheless it is emphasized that the purpose of the school is to train pastors. The same Bulletin explains the new science building like this: "All these improvements have been made with the distinct purpose of carrying out the original aim of the school. A thoroughly trained German ministry is the only object." The tension is obvious. The school has begun to discover, *but is not quite ready to admit*, that God has given its mission a new dimension.

In 1908 the words are much the same. It is still emphasized that gifts to the school are gifts to prepare ministers for the churches. But this paragraph is added.

The strictly collegiate work of the School has likewise a missionary aspect. Education gives power to life. Our foreign-speaking people have been neglected in the generous provisions which have been made for higher education. This School seeks to remedy this defect in the educational system so that the blessings of Christian culture may be given to the membership of our German and Bohemian churches (Catalogue of the German Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the Northwest 1908-1909).

(This paragraph remains basically the same through at least 1916, except that the reference to German and Bohemians is dropped by 1916.)

So by 1908, a broader institutional mission is taking shape. The school is beginning to see its purpose as providing an education in “Christian culture” to a constituency that now includes lay persons as well as pastors. In short, a small Presbyterian university has begun to emerge.

As a Presbyterian University, our heritage includes many commonly shared features of small Presbyterian colleges through the years. Let me note a few. *First, from early on the college is conceived as both “thoroughly Christian” and “thoroughly non-sectarian”* (Catalogue of the Dubuque College 1916-1917). As the emerging university developed past its narrow role of preparing pastors, it expanded to include students from many denominational traditions. In the 1916 bulletin we read,

While the majority of students belong to the Presbyterian Church, almost every other Church is represented. Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Evangelical, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Greek Apostolic [Greek Orthodox], and other denominations exist among the students without friction, who in the finest fellowship unite in the Chapel service and in devotional exercises in the dining rooms (Catalogue of the Dubuque College 1916-1917, 17).

Second, through the years the College conceived of its mission as providing a broad education framed within a Christian worldview. As the 1936-1938 catalog of the College of Liberal Arts states, “the University of Dubuque aims to broaden the students’ knowledge of the universe and of man, in an environment pervaded by the Christian philosophy of life” (The University of Dubuque Bulletin: Annual Catalogue of the College of Liberal Arts 1936-1937). In the spirit of the Reformed view of higher education we discussed in Section I, our predecessors at the University of Dubuque saw the Christian view of life as the integrating factor for the whole course of study – no matter what the field. This is well illustrated in the 1946-1947 bulletin which affirms that it is in Jesus Christ that “the truth has been revealed,” and continues

We strive to interpret all the branches of learning in light of this revealed Truth. Whether it be the sciences or the arts, the attempt is made to be as objective as possible in teaching their contents and methods, but at the same time to relate as best we can all realms of the student’s thought and life to the truth of Christianity (The University of Dubuque Bulletin 1946-1947, 12).

And on the next page we read, “The University recognizes no conflict between true scholarship and Christian faith. It is our aim that each department of instruction contribute toward the synthesis of faith and knowledge which should

be the possession of every educated Christian” (The University of Dubuque Bulletin 1946-1947, 13).

Third, again in the spirit of the Reformed perspective, the University consciously attempted to foster spiritual and moral growth, as well as intellectual learning. As the 1936-1937 catalog states,

By insisting upon the contribution of Christianity to the total process of education, it is our aim to provide students with those moral and religious insights which will make for the best personal growth and the most adequate participation in the life of the home, community, nation and world (The University of Dubuque Bulletin: Annual Catalogue of the College of Liberal Arts 1936-1937).

It is toward the end of moral and spiritual development that chapel services and courses in religion, Bible and moral theology were required.⁶ Although policies such as these are controversial, and were even controversial when they were in place, we must see the purpose behind the policies: to encourage spiritual and moral growth in a way that would complement the intellectual growth of students. In spite of changing approaches, promoting spiritual and moral growth continued to be part of the University’s stated purpose throughout the years. Even as late as the 1984-1985 catalog, we read this: “As an academic community, the university has as a central purpose the intellectual, personal and spiritual growth of the individual” (The University of Dubuque College of Liberal Arts Bulletin 1984-1984).

Fourth, as a Presbyterian institution of higher education the University of Dubuque has consistently understood its mission as preparing leaders for service in the wider community. As the College of Liberal Arts emerged from the Seminary, the early leaders had begun to see that they could provide an education for German and Bohemian youth who otherwise would not have such an opportunity. This mission to immigrant people broadened beyond German speaking people and gave a unique flavor to the University. By the 1920's the University saw the assimilation of foreign born individuals into the melting pot of America as a chief goal. As the 1923-1924 catalog states,

The University of Dubuque is unique among educational institutions. It gathers upon one campus promising young representatives from all nations to train them in the spirit of Christianity and the principles of American institutions, and to give them the preparation and enthusiasm for service

⁶ See (Longfield 1995) for an account of the controversies surrounding required chapel at various times in our University’s history.

and leadership throughout the world. The methods adopted by the University have proved to afford a successful solution of the problem of Americanization, now the most vital problem in the United States (Catalogue of the University of Dubuque 1923-1924).

The same catalog goes on to describe the way the University prepares this international community for service and leadership. Students are educated in the American political principles and achievements, but they are also taught about “the life of other nations of the world.” The catalog emphasizes that “all races are welcome” and “many races are represented” on the campus, and stresses “developing the spirit of real Americanism.” “Americanization and Christianization are the twin aims of the University of Dubuque.” Whether or not we agree with this strong blending of American patriotism and Christianity, we see here a clear indication that the University saw its mission as including the preparation of students for involvement in society at large. The University of Dubuque sought to help its students understand both American and international cultures and to prepare them for service throughout the world.

In sum, while the University of Dubuque shared many features of a typical church-related college, these features took on their own unique flavor here at the University of Dubuque. As a Presbyterian college, the institution sought to be Christian, but not sectarian. It sought to provide an education framed within and integrated by the Christian worldview, no matter what field the student pursued. It took a holistic approach to student development, promoting not only intellectual growth, but moral and spiritual life as well. And it sought to prepare its students for leadership and service in both the church and society at large. Out of the movement that had begun with Van Vliet’s church-basement school for pastors there had emerged a university whose purpose was to educate students from many countries for diverse types of leadership and service.

A Liberal Arts College.

We have now seen that a crucial dimension of the University of Dubuque’s heritage is defined by its identity as a Presbyterian university. But from its beginning, the new College was also a part of another tradition – the tradition that champions the *liberal arts*. A *liberal* education is hard to define. The term *liberal arts* is easy to use but difficult to explain. Nevertheless, Western higher education has clearly been influenced by an important, if evolving and fluid, family of ideas about advanced education that stretches at least as far back as ancient Greece. At times, as in the medieval European universities and in most early American colleges and universities, this tradition has been aligned with Christian or other theistic thought. But at other times the tradition has manifested itself in a more classically humanist form, as in its early roots in Greece and Rome

and in the emergence of more secular liberal arts colleges and universities in the twentieth century. Although the tradition has had a significant impact on all higher education in America, it is perhaps most closely related to small, private colleges. As one such college, the University of Dubuque's undergraduate college shares in this tradition. And at some periods in its history, especially in the late twentieth century, this tradition overshadowed the Christian or Presbyterian tradition we have discussed above. In the early twenty-first century, we are witnessing an exciting renewal of awareness of our calling as a Christian institution. As we form our future, however, I would contend that we should also remember and learn from our roots in the liberal arts tradition that has also contributed to our unique heritage.

But what is the *liberal arts tradition*? As I have said, this is not an easy question to answer. I begin by saying one thing that it is not. The liberal arts tradition is not simply a list of disciplines. The liberal arts tradition is a way of seeing the purpose and nature of a quality education. In the 1990's the University's undergraduate curriculum was framed around the social sciences, the natural sciences and the humanities. Some would argue that a liberal arts education should confine itself to these traditional disciplines and areas, leaving applied and professional programs to other types of institutions. But it is far from clear that all of these areas or learning, and only these areas, fall within the liberal arts. When one considers the historical roots of the liberal arts, one finds a changing list of subjects. It is true that the tradition has tended to include both a linguistic- rhetorical dimension and a scientific-theoretical dimension, suggesting the phrase 'arts and sciences' that is used in some educational institutions.⁷ But beyond that there have been many variations. More importantly, seeing a liberal arts education in terms of a list of courses or subjects misses the point. The goal of a *liberal education*, as it is sometimes called, is not to inculcate expertise in certain fields, but to *free* and equip a person for all of life.⁸ As Christian

⁷ In the medieval period, a longstanding tradition divided the curriculum into the trivium, which consisted of grammar, rhetoric and logic, and the quadrivium, which consisted of music, astronomy, arithmetic and geometry. The subjects in the trivium, as they were understood at the time involved concerns with language and communication. The subjects in the quadrivium, as they were understood at the time, were mathematical. One writer has characterized the tradition as having a built-in tension between the orators and the philosophers.(Oakley 1992, 49)

⁸ Merold Westphal points out that the way in which this full human life is understood in classical humanism is different from the way in which it is understood in Christian humanism. As I have pointed out above, the liberal arts educational tradition has developed in the context of both religious and secular

philosopher Merold Westphal has pointed out, the foundation of a liberal arts education is a humanist vision of what human life can and should be and an understanding of how one can grow into that kind of life. The goal, he writes, “is to make the student not just employable but as fully human as possible” (in Gill 1997, 37). There may well be certain skills or types of knowledge that are very important to an education aimed at this goal. The abilities to reason (logic) and communicate (rhetoric) are crucial, for example. But in the liberal arts perspective these are important because they enable a person to live life to the fullest, in the way human life was intended to be lived.

This description, however, is still overly broad. At the risk of oversimplifying a complicated picture, let me briefly suggest three more specific aims of the liberal arts tradition. *First, this tradition has consistently emphasized rhetoric and reasoning. In other words, the liberal arts have sought to help its students communicate, both in writing and in speech, and to think rationally.* Through teaching the student how to think critically and communicate effectively, the liberal education *liberates* the student from the constraints of irrational biases and the emotional appeals of others and enables her to communicate her ideas successfully to others. Literature and philosophy have always been important to the curriculum of a liberal education. But the object has not been to teach the stories or to inculcate the philosophies, but to help the students learn to think critically and to write and speak well themselves. *Second, this tradition has consistently emphasized breadth of understanding.* It is not narrow expertise that the liberal arts tradition seeks to impart. This may equip the student for one particular task, but it does not prepare him for all of life. In the medieval curriculum, we find both literature (rhetoric) and philosophy (systematic understanding), both the arts and the sciences. Typically, liberal arts institutions have required that students complete courses from several diverse categories, such as the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences. To live a full life, one must have an understanding of the great achievements in literature, in philosophy

perspectives. Based on the different understandings of human nature which underlie classical humanism and Christian thought, it is not surprising that some of the elements of the educational program will vary between secular and Christian schools. In the secular humanist context, for example, living rationally is perhaps the highest ideal. But in the Christian context reason is affirmed, but in the context of an awareness of one’s own sin and an emphasis on the spiritual life as well. Nevertheless, there is a similar ideal, which is to enable the student to live life at its best. It is here that one finds both traditions at odds with the “postmodern” view which argues that there is no “best” way to live. It is not at all clear, therefore, that the postmodern paradigm can consistently provide the foundation for a true liberal arts education.

and in the arts (the humanities), one must have an understanding of how humans behave as individuals and in society (the social sciences), and one must have an understanding of the natural world in which we live (the natural sciences). A broad education in all of these areas is important for a person who wants to live a maximally fruitful life.

Third, the liberal arts education has emphasized the value of learning for its own sake. As Merold Westphal points out, one may find one of the roots of the liberal arts tradition in Aristotle's concept of intellectual virtue. Westphal paraphrases Aristotle's description of intellectual virtue as including not only "moral" and "technical know-how," but also "understanding for its own sake." Contemplation of the truth, being awestruck by the beauty in a work of art or literature, being struck by the wonder of the natural order, and the excitement of learning new ideas are all part of the quality life that comes with a fully developed intellect. Westphal emphasizes that the intellectual ideal of the liberal arts does not exclude the "technical know-how" that prepare a student for a career, but it does refuse to see such knowledge as the only purpose of education. Preparing for a particular career is a part, but not the whole of becoming an educated human being. In the twentieth century, this balance between a broad education and specialization has most frequently been manifested in the requirement that students complete both a major in a particular field and a variety of other courses in general education. Although this is not the only pattern in the long history of liberal education, it is one way that the tradition has emphasized that technical training is not enough for a truly liberating education.

At least these three aims are central to the liberal arts: 1) to teach the student to think and communicate, 2) to provide the student with a broad understanding of all of the dimensions of reality and life, and 3) to give the student an appreciation for contemplation of the truth for its own sake. These aims are clearly part of our heritage at the University of Dubuque. As early as 1908, the bulletin states, "Education gives power to life" (Catalogue of the German Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the Northwest 1908-1909). The emphasis on giving students a broad education is perhaps the most obvious theme. By 1904 the institution had built a new science building with the latest scientific equipment. Clearly the understanding of what it took to train young men for the ministry was not a narrow education in the Bible! In the 1936 catalog we find the following two paragraphs:

By acquainting [students] with the various fields of human interest and activity and instructing them in the proper methods of thinking, it is our aim to guide students in the appreciation of truth and creative living.

By providing the proper classroom inspiration and library and laboratory facilities, it is our aim that student will enter into intensive,

objective study in one branch of learning so that they may learn to isolate, evaluate, and follow the implications of facts, and have the capacity to pursue a certain vocation successfully (The University of Dubuque Bulletin: Annual Catalogue of the College of Liberal Arts 1936-1937).

In these two paragraphs, we see the emphasis on breadth of knowledge, the aim of helping students learn to think, the stress on appreciating the truth, and a balanced appreciation of broad education and professional preparation. As one looks at other catalogs through the years, one finds other evidence of the importance of the liberal arts tradition at the University of Dubuque. In the 1937-1938 catalog we find a description of the aims of general education which includes “[a]bility to use effectively written and spoken English” and knowledge and appreciation of literature, the fine arts, history, social and economic problems, government, science, and health. Also included in the purposes of general education were “encouragement of the high standards of performance and the dignity of labor. . . Participation in worthy home life. . . and development of interests which lead to enrichment through the wise use of leisure” (The University of Dubuque Bulletin: The Annual Catalogue of the College of Liberal Arts 1937-1938). The 1954-1955 Bulletin uses several paragraphs to emphasize the importance of a broad education in spite of the fact that many students seek a “short cut” to a vocation (The University of Dubuque College of Liberal Arts Bulletin 1954-1955). Finally, this tradition of requiring students to take a breadth of classes is reflected in the general education requirements – in the humanities, the social sciences and the sciences – that were in place in the 1990’s, and in the *pillars* of the new core requirements.⁹ In short, the liberal arts ideal has influenced, and continues to shape education at the University of Dubuque.

Three additional threads.

The training of pastors, the mission of Christian higher education, and the valuing of a liberal arts education are central threads running through our past. But they are not the only ones. There are at least three additional themes that have made us who we are over the years. Perhaps the most prominent of these additional themes is the University’s understanding of itself as an international and multi-ethnic community. We have already seen one unique aspect of this in

⁹ In addition to requiring specific courses to help students think critically and communicate effectively, the new Core Curriculum requires students to take World View Seminars and courses from a range of “pillar” areas: scholarship, spiritual growth, social development, professional preparation, aesthetic appreciation, global awareness and stewardship. These courses are designed to encourage broad student understanding beyond the major.

our look at the way the University identified itself as a part of the solution to the problem of Americanization in the 1920's. But the emphasis on being a campus of different races and of people from different countries is even more widespread in our history. In 1937, the Bulletin notes the institution's success "in training for Christian leadership foreign and native born leaders for the various language groups in our citizenry" (The University of Dubuque Bulletin: The Annual Catalogue of the College of Liberal Arts 1937-1938). In 1946, the University states one of its aims as maintaining "a student body of cosmopolitan character; we therefore encourage representatives of the various racial groups in the world to study on our campus" (The University of Dubuque Bulletin 1946-1947). This objective remains virtually unchanged at least through 1959. Although the emphasis is slightly different, the emphasis on diversity in the student body is reflected again in 1968, when the catalog states, "The University believes that its historic practice of admitting qualified students without discrimination as to race, nationality or faith is in accord with the ecumenical Spirit of the Church as this is reflected in higher education" (The University of Dubuque College of Liberal Arts Bulletin 1968-1970). And in 1984, the mission statement of the University makes the following claims: "The student body represents a wide range of nations, cultures, denominations and ages. This diversity provides a resource for all to utilize in learning to work effectively in a multi-cultural world" (The University of Dubuque College of Liberal Arts Bulletin 1984-1984). Although much has changed over the years, the University has continued to see itself as a community of people from a variety of cultures and nations.

Another strand that runs through our history, is an emphasis on providing professional education. I have emphasized the liberal arts character of our history above. But this has not prevented the University from providing education that is focused on specific vocational fields. The most obvious, of course, has already been mentioned: the training of pastors. But the institution has also established *applied* programs in a number of other fields through the years. The 1937-1938 catalog, for example, shows evidence of programs in religious education and sacred music to prepare religious education directors and church music directors. The 1946-1947 bulletin mentions those preparing for "teaching, music, medicine, law, engineering, business and other professions." In 1954, we read this:

Supplementing the courses in liberal arts, the University of Dubuque does offer courses in education for the preparation of elementary and secondary teachers, an excellent curriculum for preparation of men and women for positions in business and industry, a carefully planned program in home economics which includes preparation for teaching and for home-making (The University of Dubuque College of Liberal Arts Bulletin 1954-1955).

Similar statements are repeated in 1968. By 1984, the degrees offered include

degrees in business administration, nursing and music, as well as the traditional B.A., B.S. and associate degrees. In short, although our heritage is clearly strong in the liberal arts, it has also sought to provide specialized training within this liberal arts environment. Our current programs in aviation, business, education, environmental science, computer information systems and computer graphics are obvious examples of the continuation of this strand of our heritage today.

Last, but not least, the University of Dubuque has a heritage of providing education for those who otherwise would not be able to go to college. As early as 1909 the Dubuque German College recognized that it had a special mission to the German speaking youth. We have seen that the University has seen its mission to be helping recent emigrants become a part of their new nation. Along the way it was recognized that a special academy was necessary to prepare students for the college program. And we have a heritage of accepting and educating students who are the first of their families to earn a college degree. In all of these ways, the University of Dubuque has enabled individuals and groups to acquire an education that might not otherwise have been able to do so.

Summary

The University of Dubuque has a truly rich heritage. Since 1852 we have been at the task of training pastors for the pastoral ministry. Out of the seminary there grew a college with a strong commitment to both Reformed and Liberal Arts values. We have sought to be a consciously multi-ethnic community, even in the midst of a city that has at times been marked by significant ethnic strife and division. We have developed innovative programs to train individuals in professional and technical fields. And we have provided an education for many who may not otherwise have been able to attend college. Our tradition is rich. Our heritage has many strands. Our past provides much upon which we can build as the twenty-first century unfolds.

III. A New Beginning for a New Millennium.

In this paper, I have attempted to outline my understanding of our theological tradition and some of the key strands of our history as an institution. The past provides us with both a strong theological tradition and a rich heritage. It has not been my purpose to outline all of our history. As Reformed Christians, who recognize the effects of sin on all of life, we must readily admit that our history is a history of sinners who have been used by God. We have made mistakes that have had long-lasting consequences for us as an institution. Like many of its sister institutions, the University of Dubuque College of Liberal Arts drifted from being a clearly Christian institution to a generic liberal arts institution. At the same time, the University seemed plagued with conflict and

disagreement. As the institution neared the end of the twentieth century, it struggled to find its identity, to recapture its soul. The influence of the Christian tradition had become minimal in the life of the institution. Like many institutions facing difficult times, the University had to ask some very difficult questions. How are we to find healing for the sickness that threatens our very life? What really is our mission going to be? Is our Christian identity something we want to affirm? In 1998, after a process of study and input from various constituencies of the University community, the Board of Trustees adopted our new statement of *Mission, Vision and Action*. In that statement, the Board affirmed that we would continue to be committed to “our Presbyterian tradition.” These new mission documents reaffirmed both our Christian tradition and our liberal arts heritage. It called us to be a university that provided academic excellence and professional preparation. It also called for bold new efforts to put the University on a strong financial foundation. Since that time, many changes have been made, some of them very controversial. Programs were cut, others have been added. Funds were allocated to build on our strengths and to grow into our newly focused vision. Our benefactors, not least our Trustees, began to believe in what the University was becoming. Through decisive leadership, lots of meetings and work involving students, faculty, administrators, and trustees, and very generous gifts from trustees, alumni and friends, we are indeed experiencing a new beginning. We have begun to talk more about what it means to be a Christian and a Presbyterian university, and Christian commitment has become more evident in a variety of practices and traditions on campus. Commitment to the Christian mission by members of our community has been recognized to be important and has become a more prominent consideration as we hire new faculty, staff and administration. The core undergraduate requirements have been totally redesigned in a conscious effort to reinvent our curriculum in a way that is both centered in the Christian vision and adapted to provide a rich liberal arts education for men and women who will serve in today’s world. We have not yet become all that the statement of Mission, Vision and Action calls us to be, but we are moving in the right direction.

As I have indicated in my introduction, these glimpses of our past do not fully capture the tradition in which we stand today. This is true not only because there is much from the past that I have not been able to cover in this brief overview, but more importantly because the Presbyterian tradition is alive and changing. As such it both shapes us, and is shaped by us, today. As a Presbyterian university, we are part of our tradition and our tradition is part of us. We can be nurtured by it, but are not entirely formed by it. We also form, and reform, it as we seek to live out its values and insights today. Where do we go from here? How do we draw from the past to shape our University for today and tomorrow? What aspects should we emphasize? What must we retain? What must change? These are the questions around which our dialogue must turn. So

let our conversation be lively and creative. And may the sovereign God continue to bless our life together.

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