Essay 1 wp.cune.edu/twokingdoms

INTERSECT

Thoughts and Themes on Teaching the Two Kingdoms

Do They Know Why We're Here?

In the opening discussion at our first Table Talk (TT), one teaser in particular from our list of eight T/F questions generated an animated and negative response. If you were not able to join us, see if you can pick out the culprit:

T ? F 1. Concordia is private liberal arts university with a church affiliation.
T ? F 2. Concordia is a Bible college in the 20th century American Bible college tradition.
T ? F 3. Concordia is higher education in a Christian environment.
T ? F 4. Concordia is Concordia [Music] [Athletics] [Church Work] Academy and University.
T ? F 5. Concordia University is Concordia Teachers College 2.0.
T ? F 6. Concordia is—*the college experience*—with a Christian flavor.
T ? F 7. Concordia is a spiritual learning community for all Christians and interested non-Christians.
T ? F 8. Concordia is _____.

The room was largely of one voice in rejecting the offending item, second from the top. Your moderator did not press the question of why we so readily rejected this identity—the crowd was getting a bit rowdy—though we do have our reasons. The Bible college is associated with the sort of anti-intellectual fundamentalism that characterized much of conservative Christianity for for decades.[1] These colleges prescribed a narrow, inflexible curriculum to cover their learning goals in, typically, a two year schedule. The Bible college movement was intentionally anti-science in response to the Scopes trial. And Bible colleges are now far fewer in number as many have changed to four-year fully accredited schools.[2] (Concordia granted its first bachelor's degree in 1939.)

Beyond negative reasons for our table talkers rejecting a Bible college identity are some contrasting features about Concordia they can likely affirm. Lutheran higher education has a strong tradition in Renaissance humanism. Its curriculum initially was and remains located in the liberal arts with attention to the power of language. And the Lutheran biblical hermeneutic is historical and grammatical rather than biblicistic and literalistic in the fundamentalist sense.

We agree, then, on what we are not. But surely this is less than half of knowing what and who we are—which is not to imply that we don't know what and who we are. Yet none of the other selections in the eight teasers above seemed to gain an edge during our TT.

Your moderator asserted then and maintains in this essay that we do have a firm and valid idea of who we are. According to the screen notes at our TT, we teach and serve with a solid grounding in the Biblical narrative that is informed by our Lutheran theological heritage. We're not merely a generic religious college with some vague church affiliation (T/F #1 above).

But the teaser exercise isn't aimed so much at our self-perception (though the Scriptures remind us to examine this frequently) as it seeks to help us consider how others, especially our students, perceive us and what we are to do with that perception. We know why we're here. So, are we conveying to them why we are here and that our rationale is important to why they and we are here?

I'll offer a qualified yes to this question. As a faculty, we frequently and rightly affirm the quality and Christian character of our students. The occasional exception to this quality simply "proves the rule." (There are, of course, exceptions.) By and large, our students recognize they are on a Christian campus. And with respect to our Lutheran ethos, we and the students seem to agree that at least part of this ethos which we convey

pretty well is the Reformation's biblical understanding of vocation as a dimension of the Gospel. The "qualified" part of my, "yes," is that we are well able to convey more dimensions of the Gospel than vocation. And we can expand our teaching not without some effort but without adding layers of requirements. More on that shortly.

> *Over the past decade we have been testing and re-examining what it means to be Concordia, as institutions must do from time to time.*

The first TT set us up for considering added dimensions of the Reformation's Gospel insights.[3] Our TT followed this sequence: a) teasers focusing us on our identity; b) discussion not on how you and I perceive Concordia but on how others perceive us; c) conveying to others—especially students, whether undergrad or grad—who we are in a positive and edifying way involves several parts and pieces but is manageable; d) we have the resources for expanding our conveyance of these Gospel insights in our teaching and service without compromising our instruction or disciplines; e) whether we're new to the faculty, working in student services, or a grizzled veteran in teaching or administration, we can assist one another. And we can do this in the weeks to come.

Some of the ways to go about this work are helpful, some less helpful. In his book, *Christ Across the Disciplines* (Eerdrmans, 2013), Roger Lundin discusses what American evangelicals call "integrating the faith" and the approach they have taken at many of their colleges in recent decades:

> A number of schools added seminars to train incoming faculty in the practice of integrating faith and learning, and many established tenure and promotion requirements that included faith and learning components.

While structure and order are useful (1 Cor. 14:40) as we put to work our faith active in love (Gal. 5:6), you notice the irony of turning a ministry of the Gospel into an institutionalized merit system. Consider what such an approach must inevitably teach students about the Gospel. We, instead, can approach our work differently, in the spirit of Hebrews 10:24, considering how to encourage each other and to stir one another up to love and good works.

We have not lost our way as may be the concern about other Lutheran campuses and other church related colleges. Over the past decade we have been testing and re-examining what it means to be Concordia, as institutions must do from time to time. We agree we are not a Bible college. Yet consider Wittenberg University. The campus of the Reformation where Melanchthon and Luther taught, while certainly not a "Bible college," did develop a curriculum overtly oriented to the Bible. They had to work with Biblically illiterate incoming students. They themselves had to get up to speed with the Biblical narrative and content. And one of their maxims was, *Ecclesia semper reformanda est*, the church is always reforming.

That tradition has passed along to us several "*semper ref*" parts and pieces. Among these, some upcoming TT themes will include:

- The Lutheran temperament—are Lutherans a bit too smug with their justification?
- How about the non-Lutherans among us?
- Integrate or intersect—which is it?
- What exactly are these "two kingdoms" anyway?

Consider joining us. -R. Moulds

1. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* by Mark A. Noll (Eerdmans, 1995) is a standard reading on this issue.
2. See the Association for Biblical Higher Education, www.abhe.org
3. See our list-of-ten in various handouts and at http://wp.cune.edu/twokingdoms/the-lutheran-tradition

A colleague responds: Is it possible to become so fearful of being regarded as a "Bible college" (pietistic Bible thumpers!) that we spend more effort proving what we aren't than being joyful advocates of what Jesus wants us to be? Impinging on the freedom of the Gospel isn't good, but, for example, when our students are comfortable with the custom of mocking an opposing basketball player who badly misses a shot by chanting "Air ball! Air ball!" over and over again, it may be all too clear that we most certainly are *not* a Bible college. Is that a good *not*? If not, what do we do about it?"