

Search for Identity



Being a series of discussions concerning both the present reality and the possibilities of a denominational College.

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Search for Identity (Part I)

Leonard Yarbrough

Cogito, ergo sum – Descartes, ca 1640 Vivo, ergo cogitum – Yarbrough, 1998

Upon accepting a position at a Lutheran College – which I did for two equally strong reasons, the first being that both my grown daughters wanted me here, and the second being the opportunity that I saw – I immediately wondered what I had done. This college prided itself as having been founded in the Danish “folk school” tradition of education. I presumed it at least meant being “Lutheran”. At the same time, I wondered why there had been almost no discussion about the Lutheran connection during the interviewing process. As a grandson and great-grandson of circuit riding Methodist ministers, I both wondered at this and also was concerned whether would I fit in to this “different” society, although to say I was or am a man of faith would be stretching the truth considerably. Accordingly, I undertook an inquiry first of my own faith, and then of the Lutheran folk school. I will not dwell on the artifacts of my personal search – some of this may show through in the ensuing discussions – but, rather I will delve into this second issue. I think that this will go far in helping understand why it is that the reality of in which I found myself and its identity seemed perplexingly obscure, when in fact it could have been brilliantly clear.

Notwithstanding the situation of the College, there was also an aura of resignation and despair about the future of the College that was at times palpable. This was, in my professional judgment, the consequence of an ill-defined sense of identity. Given the history of the institution, the commitment of its faculty and staff, this was curious. True, there was an apparent need for more resources – this is always true for any institution, so it was hardly a unique condition. At the same time, this seemed to be a symptom, not a cause. It is always a great temptation to treat the symptom, rather than the

cause; only when the cause cannot be isolated is this ever warranted. The question is then, should we treat the symptom, or should we isolate the cause and treat that instead? This was the fundamental question.

Before taking up the question of what a Danish folk-school is, it is useful to digress further and address what the classical academy is, or was. It seems clear that the Danish folk-school is merely an expression of the earlier, classical academy, but updated to reflect the culture and times of N. F. S. Grundtvig, the Danish theologian and philosopher who is second after Kierkegaard in stature, at least in Denmark. The classical academy presumed that education is necessary for all citizens entrusted with the business of the society (government) of the day. This is a statement that some question, for it is unquestionably true that not everyone was afforded the privilege of engaging in the business of the society of the day. Slaves and women, in particular, were excluded. Therefore, it is fashionable to reject the premise of the dominant males solely because they practised an exclusionary policy, which was the culture of the times. Rather than focus upon the then extant practices, about which nothing can be done, the premise itself will be examined to see if it is worthy, rather than engaging in a futile discussion about past wrongs.

The premise consists, among other things, of the idea that debate – conversation – applies to every aspect of society (life). That is, the Socratic method was developed and employed to consider matters of trust, justice, order, right, and so on. No subject was excluded, although the tenor of the discussions could be, and often was, troubling to the citizens of the time (Remember, Socrates himself was “terminated” on account of his leading the youth of the day to question the

shibboleths of the times). The Socratic method is, however, so useful for learning that it is still used to this day, although one may question whether it is now used with its full power by the several disciplines that comprise “education”.

Along with the Socratic method is the corollary that a healthy mind requires a healthy body. From this, we have both the traditions of the Olympic games and the scholastic sports programs at all levels. Only, these have been perverted to include those who are mostly athletically inclined, to the exclusion of everyone else. This gives rise to the “dumb jock” and the scrawny/over-weight “nerd”, both of whom are caricatures for which we can find ample evidence. Yet, it is unquestionably true that the brain, to function well, requires a healthy body, but all most of us are willing to do about this is to wring our collective hands and whine about it.

Enter N. F. S. Grundtvig. College literature states quite plainly that it is modeled on the ideals of N. F. S. Grundtvig. Surprisingly, there is not a single course offered by the College that explores what this tradition is. How very curious! So, I began the inquiry into Grundtvigian lore, being immediately struck by the fact that he was no pygmy, intellectually or physically. Rather, here was a lusty, passionate, hale persona who knew absolutely who he was, what his faith was, and what ought to be done by such people as he. At the very least, not a person with whom a wimp would be comfortable -- a formidable intellect!

Grundtvig began his career as a so-so scholar, studied for the ministry and then, seemingly as the consequence of a great love

affair, was galvanized into action, theologically hand philosophically. A dedicated Lutheran, he espoused that the power of faith was in the act of the sacraments, rather than in the form of ritual. Indeed, he railed against form for form’s sake, and believed that the institution of the organized church of the time endangered itself by reliance upon form and process, rather than in the profession of acts of faith.

He also believed that the profession of faith carried through to the whole community, not just to the congregation or a select few of the congregation. Further, Grundtvig, for whatever reasons, immersed himself in the Nordic culture (perhaps he saw himself as a latter-day Viking), and at least recognized that this was, like it or not, an important determinant of the character of Danish society, of which he and his faith were a part. So, his notion of the academy, so well established by the ancient Greeks, was up-dated to include the heritage of the Danes (in his view, this included the Nordic family, not just the residents of Jutlandt).

The impact of Grundtvig occurred during the period when the character of the “liberal arts” education had become firmly entrenched. The classical Greeks did not directly address what liberal arts education is; they merely spoke of education, a more inclusive, or global, view. C. P. Snow and his divisive **The Two Cultures** were far in the future. One can argue that the distinction “liberal arts education”, being made prior to the rise of the technological age, essentially shut out any really meaningful dialogue about the development of technology, and that situation continues today.

(The following discussion considers the character of the “liberal arts education”, followed by a discussion of the connection between that and the Grundtvigian folk-school”).

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Search for Identity (Part II)

Leonard Yarbrough

The fear of success is at least as great as the fear of failure, which is why we have so many do so little. – Anon.

So far, the concept of the Danish, or Lutheran, “folk school” was considered, concluding with an introduction to the issue of what exactly is the “liberal arts education”, the promise of which the College professes – at least in words, if not actions – to provide. (I must confess a bias here; I think it a much more empowering position to refer to the college as a community of scholars, which includes both those engaged in “teaching” and those engaged in “learning”. However, this latter exposition implies that both those engaged in leading the learning and those engaged in being the learners are at the same time both the faculty and the students enrolled in classes under the faculty. Our arrogance as faculty seems to preclude us from wanting to employ this broader expression of what we may be). So, what comprises the liberal arts curriculum, as it is known?

First, there is an obvious reliance upon the arts – art in all its manifestations (painting, sculpture, other “crafts”), music and theater (the so-called performing arts, which today include radio, television, and cinematography), languages, the humanities (which leads one to wonder whether the cart isn’t before the overloaded nag), history, theology, and mathematics. Mastery of these, it is thought by the liberal “artist”, makes the educated person into a renaissance person. Why and/or how did these particular arenas of endeavor/study come to be the *sine qua non* of education, and why should they continue to be so regarded by the “true scholar”?

This is apparently fairly easily discerned. They were the elements of what comprised the education of a well-rounded person at the time, so the hoary principle of “*Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*” seems an obvious explanation. There is also the very pragmatic consideration that for the most part, the powers that were at the time required persons educated in those subjects. That is,

persons were educated in those arts because those arts were indeed indispensable to the state, the ruler, the community, or whatever manifestation of society was in ascendancy at the time. I suspect that the secular authorities were never entirely comfortable with the academics, for academics tend to raise questions that those vested with authority do not always want raised, let alone addressed. This propensity exists even to the present.

As to the “How?”, this is also fairly easy to discern. Who is best qualified to pass on their craft, other than those already versed in those crafts? Thus rose the medieval and the modern university (which may be the one and the same). Whether or not we are conscious of it, we are shaped by our culture, and the scholar’s culture is no less strong than the barbarian’s culture. Further, we are comfortable with what we know, and ill at ease (as a rule) with that which we don’t know, and we find it painful to consider not knowing what we don’t know. It does not take a rocket scientist to determine that there is a very strong cultural bias to keep the definition of the “educated man” as it has been for the preceding generation(s).

Until the late eighteenth century, not much was made of or with technology. So, there is not much of a role for technology in the scheme of things, as defined by those whose duty is to perpetuate what constitute “liberal arts”. This may be in part because the culture that really established the basis for technology was that of a vastly different (and therefore inferior) culture, the Islamic world. We who are skilled in mathematics, engineering, and physics, owe a huge debt of gratitude to our Islamic brethren for preserving and extending the realm of knowledge in these and subsequent disciplines.

Sadly, the supreme authority of the Middle Ages, the Christian Church, did not recognize

them. Inasmuch as this body had itself performed yeoman service in keeping the reservoir of knowledge intact, it is unfortunate that it was itself unable to acknowledge the debt owed to the threatening faith and culture. Still, it was inevitable that this must be the case, and helping lead to, as stated last week, C. P. Snow's seminal **The Two Cultures**. The dichotomy continues today, with little apparent progress or willingness to either the "liberal artist" or the "technologist" to admit that they are engaged in destructive, futile, and mostly self-serving posturing— the remainder of the world is proceeding to do whatever it wishes to do, paying little heed to either, except when it affects the pocketbook.

This assertion strikes at the heart of all the academician holds dear — the need to be supported. If in fact society does not want us, need us, or even care about us, what is to become of us? The answer can be found, of course, as soon as we take the time to inquire into why students come to the academy today? Sadly, it is not for enlightenment and education (or the reverse order, as the case may be). It is for career enhancement. Oh, if more is gotten, well and good, but we no longer get untrained and unaware minds — we get street smart, toughened individuals. True, some may have engaged in higher education elsewhere and failed once, twice or more, but they are nonetheless

wise in the ways of the world. If what we have to offer is irrelevant (and they are the arbitrators, not we academicians), they are singularly unimpressed. Worse, they do us their ultimate insult as to tell us that, and we in turn do them our ultimate insult of ignoring what they have to say.

Regrettably, neither the liberal arts or the technocratic side has effectively raised the question of "If indeed what we are attempting to do has been overtaken by events, how can we synthesize an improved model of 'What comprises the Renaissance man?'" That is, what does a "post-modernist" education look like, had we the good fortune to be able to define it? Sadly, the question is seldom asked and cannot be answered by either side, as neither has the complete answer.

No matter — the question will be answered, whether or not we academicians engage in making the answer. As I see it, we as an institution have the following options: (1) continue business as usual, and likely continue to barely survive; (2) quit, thereby falling prey to the sin of despair; (3) confront our fears and craft a model of education appropriate to the twenty-first century. I find the last alternative the most appealing. I submit that, however, we must first answer the question posed above.

(The discussion continues, considering the further question of whether there is indeed something to be gleaned from the Grundtvigian model of the folk school). - © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

Search for Identity (Part III)

Leonard Yarbrough

Yesterday, I was young and foolish; today, I am old and foolish. Yesterday was better. –Graffiti on a park bench.

The discussion about the College's identity led to first an introduction to N. F. S. Grundtvig and the Danish "folk-school" and thence to a discussion of the development of the liberal arts model of education. At the conclusion, I postulated the possibility of synthesizing an improved model. I assert at now that one role of a modern Renaissance man is to generate agreement where agreement does not exist. What follows is an exercise to generate agreement. First, there is the matter of dealing with the matter of synthesizing a model from both the traditional liberal arts education and modern technological training. Then, there is a larger and probably more important question of "What is the place of faith?" in all this. The latter question is difficult, for it forces each of us to address issues with which we are often uncomfortable, ill-equipped to address, and sometimes leads us to have to expose ourselves to the opprobrium of society. In other words, it ain't necessarily pretty.

First, can we synthesize a post-modernist model of education? Actually, the question really is, "How do we synthesize this model?", for the need and possibility for doing this are already established. We have no choice, individually or institutionally but to do this. Before attempting to answer this question, it is instructive to return to the Grundtvigian model and see what it offers. Some citations from Grundtvig set the stage. First, ". . . Such a person, whether he be of one faith or another, or even of no faith in divinity whatsoever, will not be attracted to educated people whose wisdom is so apparent that it can be appropriated in an hour of memorization or even taught to smart dogs. He is attracted to the dim and profound natures whose thought is profound and intuitive, whose emotions run deeper than any probe, and whose enthusiasm carries beyond themselves. " Second, "Culture and competence must always be relevant to the

momentary life of the people; learning must be relevant to the total life of mankind. When learning is genuine, it encompasses culture and competence, but the latter can only encompass learning in an intuitive sort of way. Learning will be misleading, particularly among educators, if it is not juxtaposed by the culture of the people, which compels learning to recognize the life here and now; the culture of a people will become superficial if it is not kept alive by learning. . . Wise educational institutions must therefore be gauged to progressive enlightenment and culture."

I assert that that Grundtvig did not envision any namby-pamby sort of "drive-in" learning experience, or one that confuses "experiential learning" with scholarship. At the same time, he also insisted that whatever learning is afforded, it must be relevant to the time and culture or it is of little use whatsoever. By this standard, one cannot but conclude that much of what we now consider to be a classical liberal arts education would be regarded by Grundtvig as mere puffery or even buffoonery, and inadequate for the purpose of supporting life.

A third citation, "What all countries need is a civic and noble academy or, in other words, a higher institute for the culture of the people and for practical competence in all major subjects. This need must be met, and soon, for the sake of society as well as for the sake of learning. . . Such an institution must grow out of learning and it must have a living relationship to knowledge in order not to be hostile or static. Such an institution must be independent, however, so as not to become a tail or shadow. It has to be a real, spiritual force by which life and the moment manifest their inalienable rights, often unappreciated by the wise. The land of our fathers, in its natural and historic character, will thus be related to the life of reality and the

requirements of the moment. This will be the common core from which the institution will branch out into all major functions of everyday life, combining all civic efforts. In this academy all the civil servants of the state who do not need academic training but who do need life, perspective, and practical competence, and all those who wish to share a life of culture, will have a desired opportunity to develop practically and to get to know one another. Here also the literature of our country will become useful and that literature will find encouragement without which it will soon be a dying show-flower. When enlightenment is made fruitful for the people, the life of the people will, in turn, fructify scholarship.”

These three citations, and I am indebted to the delightful little work of selected writings of N. F. S. Grundtvig edited by Johannes Knudsen¹, provide both a potent backdrop and definition of the folk-school. It is for everyone in the community, not just a select few. It is to cover all relevant aspects of learning, not just those that seem desirable for historical, egalitarian, libertarian, or sectarian reasons. Or for any other reason whatsoever. Further, it encompasses that knowledge which is required in the present by present institutions and situations. Thus, it seems to me, there is an inherent imperative for us educators to constantly be inquiring into what is indeed relevant, what is no longer pertinent, and what must we anticipate for the future? By

(Next, the discussion will address a characterization of what is required for setting the College apart, and also a characterization of the present reality, both as it is and as it is perceived). © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

¹ **Selected Writings N. F. S. Grundtvig**, edited by Johannes Knudsen, translated by Johannes Knudsen, Enok Mortensen, and Ernest D. Nielsen, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1976.

this imperative, one might conclude that the College has both succeeded well in some areas and has failed miserably in others. Worse yet, we scholars do not and maybe even cannot address which is which, falling back instead upon measures that make us look good but in reality do not measure the success of our efforts.

This is mere carping, however. The real question is “How do we assure that the College truly meet the conditions for being a Grundtvigian academy?” This is a basis for a much-needed discussion, involving administration, faculty, staff, and students. The discussion, I submit, ought not be fettered by any conditions whatsoever, in order that all may have a say, and also that no idea be rejected out of hand or from fear that personal interests might be threatened. This would be a bold step, preparatory to and necessary for our entering the third millennium, and likely an unprecedented occurrence, given the present reality.

While the present College structure does not presently lend itself well to such an inquiry, this is not the limiting drawback. What is a more deadly deterrent to the inquiry is a lack of willingness to engage in such a conversation. Apathy may not be a deadly sin, but in partnership with fatigue, cynicism, and arrogance, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse are small potatoes.

Search for Identity (Part IV)

Leonard Yarbrough

We have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory – General Jubilation T. Cornpone, CSA

Having considered both the matter of a liberal arts education and the model of the academy as envisioned by both the ancient Greeks and the post-medieval theologian and philosopher Grundtvig, it is time to address the question of what distinguishes one from the many? My students, both in the senior business seminar and in the integrating seminar frequently ask this question. The context usually is about, “How can I stand out so as to be selected for a (highly desirable) job?” That is, “What do I need in order to be successful?” The question is no less pertinent for a college, be it a Harvard or a Grand View. The answer given to the query in class, I submit, applies equally well to the college.

There are any numbers of attributes that are useful for distinguishing one from the many. Indeed, we can fill the board with such an enumeration, only to realize that this listing is too much to comprehend easily. The fact is, and there is ample experience that demonstrates it, we humans do not manage more than just a few things well at any one interval of time. We cannot do all those things we identify, let alone do them well. In the end, we choose the three or four items from the board that are particularly appealing (or easy to do, which amounts to the same thing). Sometimes, that works well, and sometimes it does not. What is wanted, then, is what will work all the time. This is where critical thinking comes into play, and the first part of that is being able to detach oneself from the question so as to address it dispassionately.

Invariably, when the board full of traits and qualities is abstracted into at most three terms, the same three terms appear: integrity, impeccability, and intentionality. These three qualities, I submit, are sufficient to set one apart, so long as all thoughts and actions are shaped by them. Unfortunately, the rigorous application of any one of the three frequently appears as highly

uncomfortable, confrontational, and even insulting, to those who are not accustomed to such rigor. So, instead of facing a rigorous inquiry, we seek a more pleasant activity, such as lamenting a lack of resources. Still, what do we make of the three “I’s”

Integrity is a word often used in describing someone whom we admire, but seldom do we address what the word means. It is not a difficult concept – simply put, it means being true to one’s word. Further, it also means holding others to their word. The fact is, though, we humans do break our word, we do lie, we do make promises that we have no intention of keeping, and we also at the same time delude ourselves into thinking of ourselves as “good” people. How, then do we fit integrity into our lives, given that our first reaction is to shift elsewhere blame for our lack of integrity?

After all, breaking a promise is not in itself evil – it is the denial of responsibility that is evil, and that is what damns us. So, acknowledging failure to keep one’s word is as crucial as keeping one’s word. This sounds easy, but in fact is it takes firm resolve to do so on an on-going basis. It also requires knowing oneself; that is, “Who am I?” This comes from a strict application of the term “integrity”, for this leads one to being able to say, “I am my word”, or in an alternative form, “My word is who I am.” Saying that, those around us then become a part of the structure that keeps us operating with and inside of integrity, for they can (and do) hold us to our word, even as we hold them to their word.

So, what is the integrity of the college? Who do we say ourselves to be? What sets us apart? Sadly, I do not think that we can, with integrity, point to integrity. We have no true idea of how we appear to the rest of the community, although we may indeed have a notion. Our rules are

largely unstated, poorly stated, and incomplete at any given moment. Our records do not reflect the present reality. Were we in fact operating with and inside of integrity, I do not think we would allow anything to give the appearance of a lack of integrity. Instead, there are excuses – well meaning excuses, but excuses nonetheless – coupled with a request sometimes to be patient or understanding. “We are good people and our intentions are good.” We adhere to ritual and process, the antithesis of Grundtvig’s system of self-governance, even when we are honest enough to acknowledge that such adherence provides little in compensation. These observations are not accusatory; they reflect the inevitable conclusions that accrue from rigorous adherence to the standard of integrity.

What, then, is the impeccability of the college? This is the act of being free from fault or blame; that is, rigorous adherence to detail, so as to keep one’s integrity intact. It even extends to how one, be it a person or an institution, presents itself to the world. Physicality is important, for that is often the first characteristic noticed by others. Lack of attention to impeccability leads to unsigned memoranda, incoherent or confusing discourses, puzzling rules and procedures, lack of clear purpose, mice in residence halls, and roaches on the food bar. As a former businessman, government bureaucrat, and sometime entrepreneur, I find it tempting to simply ignore these lapses of impeccability. Such a response, of course, destroys my own impeccability and integrity. We leave messages that are so long and convoluted that the recipient has no idea of the request, or even if there were a request. We have

promulgated a structure for the college that has long since been out-dated.

In short, our impeccability has large gaps, and we cannot see it. Still, these are the issues of impeccability. Donors do give to improve appearances. It is much easier to get funds for physical things than for the non-physical things that shape the foundation for impeccability. So we focus on the things that make us look good, thinking that we are acting in integrity when in fact we are ignoring or avoiding it. Let me be very clear here: impeccability requires rigid adherence to integrity. The converse does not hold -- that’s mere regimentation, sometimes passed off as “equity”.

The preceding two paragraphs underscore the third quality that sets one apart – intentionality. This is the quality that allows one to say with certitude, “This shall be!” and there is absolutely no doubt but that what is said is going to occur. The converse, alas, is often a willingness to be content to merely survive, which is where the college has been for a number of years. I am personally distressed that we as an institution are in Tier IV among colleges and universities; I assert that we could just as easily be in Tier II. Of course, we would have to know who we are as an institution, we would have to settle for nothing less than that; we would have to demand excellence from our students, our faculty, our staff, and our administration. We would have to know what excellence is, in order to demand it. As it is, we whine and complain, without always knowing the basis of the complaint. We are not intentional.

(Now, discussion moves from the present reality to creating a vision from the future for the future, keeping the qualities of integrity, impeccability, and intentionality at the forefront). © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

Search for Identity (Part V)

Leonard Yarbrough

I can offer only blood, toil, tears, and sweat. -- Winston Churchill, 1940

The previous discussion concluded with a look at what we were not, as an institution, which is a needed part of determining the present reality. We must conclude that conversation with a look at what we are. Facetiously, one could state the present reality of being as “Doomed, noble people, needed for and on a true mission, filled with despair, resignation, and hope, lost and without a clue”, operating with a dynamic of fatigue, cynicism, and disillusionment. Within this statement of being, however, we see that there is much to work with. We are needed, and the desire to be needed is a strong human trait, and may even be considered to be an element of nobility.

The mission of the college is one with which we all identify – indeed, that is what keeps most of us here, for why else would we endure the indignities of low pay, long hours, archaic rules and processes, and lack of recognition? We do a good job at what we do – not an excellent job, for we as an institution have not yet embraced excellence as a standard, other than, perhaps, to give the term lip service. We have a unique location. Our heritage, however poorly we may consider ourselves to have honored it, is sound. Our work ethic is admirable and reflects honor on ourselves. Overall, we individually truly care for the success of our students. We do our best to care for both the mind and the body. Sometimes, I think, we ignore, forget or are unaware of our collective soul. Our paradigm for being is one of being an object acted on in a world of objects which act on us, and we cannot (or will not) dodge.

We do not, under the plaint of “lack of resources” take initiative, either for our future or much of anything else. We are afraid of failure, so afraid that it seems to be better to not try, in order that the risk of failure be avoided. We cannot articulate whom we are institutionally,

and so far we have not thought strategically, which is to say, we have not looked far enough into the future to see where we want to go.

This paradigm of being, I assert, must and can be altered. That is, instead of being re-active, we can be pro-active. It is useful, therefore, to stand in the future and create the future into which we wish to live. This does not necessarily mean that we must adopt such a future, merely that it is useful to engage in the exercise in order to see what may be possible.

Thus, standing in such a future, I see a college with 2500 students, one whose major departments are accredited by the discipline accrediting entities, whose students are eagerly sought by industry, government and academia, whose faculty are attracted by what we are and who are also sought by our sister institutions, and whose reputation is one of excellence, with integrity, impeccability, and intentionality. The year is 2006, just eight years away – two college generations. (After all, two generations is all that it normally takes for industrial giants to move from infancy to greatness. We can do the same, with commitment). How did we get here?

First, 2500 hundred students represents an annual increase of $(2500 - 1200 = 1300; 1300 \div 8 = 163)$ one hundred sixty-three students, which when distributed among ten departments equates to a bit over sixteen new students per year per department. Each two faculty recruiting a new student and each classroom recruiting one student per year can attain this. This is not a difficult or unattainable goal. Sixteen students will fund one faculty member at an increase of at least 33% above current average salaries, and a total faculty equivalent to current numbers can accommodate the increase in numbers of students. How, then, did we arrive at the level of 2500 students? By attracting an additional 200

hundred students at the start of this future academic year. What led to that increase? The recognition that the College offers its graduates an education that is unmatched anywhere else within the State of Iowa. How did that recognition come about? By the performance of the faculty, staff, administration and the graduates of the institution. What performance? Why, one that has become known for stressing integrity, impeccability, and intentionality.

Is the foregoing far-fetched? Not really, it is the same model that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration employed to successfully prosecute Project Apollo and land several men on the moon. By contrast, we do not have anything that is so technologically challenging to accomplish. All we really have to do is (1) align behind a common purpose, and assuring that our daily actions are devoted towards the attainment of this purpose; and (2) in parallel, assuring that we have the physical plant to house a student body of 2500. Again, standing in the future, when should this have been done? No less than three years prior to this time, when the last increment of classroom building was completed. Two years previous to that, the second increment would have been completed, with an initial increment completed five years prior to this time in the future. The schedule for putting in place residence halls for that portion of the student body that “live-in” would follow a similar pattern. Broken down in this fashion, the timetable can be developed rather quickly.

There is another timetable that needs be addressed – that of instituting a standard of excellence. It is my view that we are presently vulnerable in three areas: records, procedures, and governance. That these correspond to a lack of integrity, intentionality and impeccability is hardly surprising. Our records reflect the degree to how far out of integrity we are – we cannot with any degree of certitude tell a student where that student stands with regard to his/her academic progress. Rather than be alarmed over this situation, our reaction is that “We have not the resources to correct this problem.” I submit that the problem is in reality a failure to insist upon our integrity being paramount.

In the same vein, our procedures seem to have been designed with little thought for the future; rather, they seem to have been installed as a reaction to some past situation. When adherence to the procedures threaten to paralyze the institution, we both do nothing and castigate those who would ask for change. Our intentionality is at a low ebb. I have already expressed myself on the matter of governance – we as a faculty, administration, staff, and student body, operate in a mode of reacting, rather than in a mode of being pro-active. The student body is apathetic towards student government; the faculty is apathetic towards faculty governance; the staff is over-burdened and wishes not to be further bothered; and the administration is too wrapped up in its concern for its activities to notice that the governance of the institution is moribund. Our structure does seem to be based upon “divide and conquer”, rather than “let us join together in a great and risky adventure.”

(The next discussion focuses upon the transformation of the institution from its present reality to a future of academic excellence. Notwithstanding the apparent miasma of gloom, there is instead an opportunity for embarking upon a grand adventure, celebrating boldness, the risk of failure, and the human spirit).

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Search for Identity (Part VI)

Leonard Yarbrough

Life profits as little by dead words as by dead fish, as little by blunt quills as by pointed pens of steel, as little by shadowy words as by shadowy people. – N. F. S. Grundtvig

The Grundtvigian model of the folk school argues for a living statement of being, a community for the business of living, as well as the business of preparing the ensuing generations for living. The view is truly ecumenical – “...we arrive at a concept of a universal-historic development, art, and scholarship which encompasses all of human living.” (*op. cit.*) – and requires a willingness to take a bold stand for the sake of the community. If I understand Grundtvig correctly, his is an academy that integrates body, mind, and soul, by which the states of grace and compassion are ever present. Is that the model that depicts Grand View? I have thought many times that the College is a sleeping giant on the eastern side of the city. If only it would awaken and roar, “Enough of pusillanimous prattling! Let’s get moving.”

This is a wistful thought, and wistful thoughts are of little use when it comes to accomplishment. Still, the college consists of some sixteen hundred individuals. Even if we discount the added numbers of those who are directly concerned and interested in the activities of this sixteen hundred, this is a sizable force, properly harnessed and directed. (Cortez conquered a great portion of the New World with only five hundred followers). So far in our discussion, I have purposely steered clear of one topic, that of leadership. This must now be addressed, for it is this that translates idle wishes into action and accomplishment. I must be clear about this, for I do not mean authority (which all too frequently shrinks into a defense of prerogatives), nor do I mean legality, either, for this too often focuses upon proscription, rather than prescription and permission, which is empowerment.

While there are several useful models of leadership, my model is heavily influenced by Werhner von Braun, whose view was that he as a

leader simply made it possible for his team to do what it was they wished to do in the first place. Simple though this notion is, it takes a bit of consideration in order to transform the thought into an active and potent model. Over the years, the model has become:

A leader--

- stands in the future;
- creates possibilities;
- develops opportunities;
- articulates purpose;
- obtains alignment,
- enrolls and trains others;
- causes fulfillment;

And, then, gives it all away.

One could, and it has been done, write volumes about each of the foregoing statements. Yet, the foregoing, taken with a commitment to excellence, with and inside of integrity, impeccability, and intentionality, provides a framework for a powerful institution dedicated to education for the twenty-first century. The temptation is for the most of us to stand by watching, waiting, while our “leadership” does it all. Included in my view of leadership is the requirement that each of us involved in the enterprise follow the above stated actions, actively and on-goingly.

It is as much our accountability to provide those elements of leadership as it is of the designated persons in authority, who are, mostly, no more than figureheads if they do not have the active and intentional participation of us all in the common cause. Nor is leadership a “top down” activity. Von Braun sought advice and counsel from all levels of his organization, and he had no qualms about taking a good idea, whatever the source, for he was committed totally to having a man on the moon, as was every member of his

team. He also was willing to bend his personal views to accommodate the views of the team, where that in no way compromised the overall goal and vision of the team. At the same time, he was ever vigilant to attending to the needs of the team, for this is what sets apart the great leader. Without the team functioning at its best, a grand vision can become merely a shattered dream. Is our team being cared for? Can we emulate greatness? Can we afford not to?

President Thomsen has developed a strategic plan, which he has offered us as a chart to the future. We have reviewed it, as a staff and faculty, with varying degrees of commitment. The degree that we faculty have accepted ownership is difficult to discern. Speaking solely for myself, I have with the active and beneficial participation of my department and advisory committee developed our own strategic plan. This plan complements the College plan; it also goes beyond it in some respects, for I do not believe that we are bound by the strictures of the institution in planning our future. We have addressed the subject of organizational structure, albeit haltingly and even recklessly.

Each subordinate unit of the College probably would benefit from undertaking the same exercise. I also think that a forum is needed for addressing, institutionally, who we are and where we are to be in the future. This is an element of enrollment and alignment that I perceive to be lacking; we are not bound together toward a common cause, although we do from time to time hear others give voice to such sentiments. They speak for themselves, not for all of us, I fear.

(The seventh and final discussion addresses the question of faith. Ordinarily treated from the pulpit, its place in the secular world is seen more by example than by discourse. Yet, it is a potent force. Is the College willing to live into its heritage? Has it any choice?)

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Even I, in the belief that I have a good plan for my department, have been so arrogant as not to share it with our students, the prime beneficiaries of such a plan. This is a situation that I plan to correct, but it says much about how we, as leaders, fail to think things through and then take appropriate action. Why, then, should I be surprised that I have not been consulted about my views about the future of the College? It is not my place to be concerned, as that is not my responsibility or accountability, or so it seems. I know this is so, for I have been told that. Those who have said so have to be right, for they are good and sincere people. I know this is so, for they tell me so. I also believe them to be that, for I hold them to honor their word, even when they forget it.

To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr., “I have a dream, a dream of Grand View College standing as a beacon in the darkness of ignorance, offering in return for a commitment to excellence, within and inside integrity, impeccability and intentionality, the opportunity for each one of us to develop to the fullest those God-given talents and gifts that set us apart from animals. I have a dream where we are sought for having the ability to bring out the latent talents of gifted, generous students, faculty, staff, and administration; where even the least gifted of us stands as a giant, and whose words are known to be from the heart, without guile, and straight to the point. I have a dream that we think not at all of failure, but only of success, of the dignity and glory of the human spirit, and of the grace and love of our Creator.”

Search for Identity (Part VII)

Leonard Yarbrough

We must all hang together, or we will surely hang separately. – Ascribed to Benjamin Franklin

This, the concluding discussion, turns to the ultimate manifestation of the dream, which I assert is faith. The topic has been touched upon previously, but now it must be addressed directly. It is also recognized to be an essential quality of leadership, a “moral aspect¹” without which leadership devolves into tyranny or blind adherence to ritual. It is, without question, faith, which brought a disparate a group of individuals together that landed men upon the moon. The dream was enunciated at a time when many thought that such could not be done – we had not the technology, the knowledge, or even the resources, to do this. Yet, it was done and is now widely regarded as one of the legacies of human accomplishment, certainly for this dying century. A single, simple idea – go do it! Such is the power of faith, and yet I assert as individuals we do always view that our individual undertakings are expressions of our respective faiths. Even the term conjures an image of some religious doing whatever it is that the religious do. It even brings up thoughts of specific sectarian views, which is a divisive thing, and not unifying. The faith of accomplishment, I assert, is in fact the faith addressed by N. F. S. Grundtvig when he spoke of the “folk-school”.

What are we to do? I must confess that when I consider the question, I am troubled by (1) my own lack of faith (and that is my super-critical judgment rearing its head); and (2) my strong desire to treat that as personal, private, and privileged. At the same time, those more secure in their own respective faiths, so seems it to me, are willing or even eager to speak their faith, as well as to practice it openly and unashamedly. This occurs from time to time in the form of forums for discussion and debate, as well as in the form of specific, thoughtful, and effective actions taken. Such persons quite evidently do not consider themselves to be objects acted upon by objects in a world of objects. Rather, as George Bernard Shaw wrote

so eloquently, they regard themselves as “forces of nature” willing to be used for a grand undertaking.

Faith, as an expression of an undertaking, requires no more than acceptance of that which one chooses to believe. Proof and evidence are unnecessary; indeed, the resort to proof and evidence is itself evidence that what is taken as faith is probably not faith. In the arena of business, we frequently refer to faith not as “faith” but as “attitude”; further, it is the only thing over which we can with certainty say that we each as an individual have full control. Yet, the exercise of this control requires acceptance of responsibility for one’s own actions, as well as attitudes, thoughts, values. This in turn brings the discussion back to integrity, the honoring of one’s word. What, then does this have to do with faith. Evidence, many will say, leads us to expect one consequence of faith to be divisiveness, that is, a lack of unity.

The discussion on leadership, however, is a consequence of a response to a call for unity of purpose. How, then, does one achieve unity of purpose? I can only say that in my experience, this is achieved through conversation with the involved parties, wherein the question is directly addressed, “Are you willing to commit to this thing?” whatever the thing may be, and insisting upon a commitment. This also requires that the “thing” be clearly defined; lack of definition will indeed kill an otherwise grand idea. The question is usually asked; the insistence on an answer is often neglected or assumed to be in the affirmative, thereby setting the stage for misunderstanding and failure later. Especially so, if the definition of purpose is fuzzy or obscure.

This is a curious point – most great accomplishments are the result of an expression of a simple idea. The dream of M. L. King, Jr., was a simple expression; so was the Gettysburg

Address; so were the Magna Carta, and the Declaration of Independence. Comparison of those expressions with, for example, the College mission statement(s) appears almost an exercise in farciality. Whereas the former are inspirational, the latter is soporific, although the thoughts expressed individually are “good and sincere” thoughts. (They are also less “mission” statements than they are charters for the respective branches of the college). We conclude that goodness and sincerity are as insufficient, though desirable, attributes for faith as they are for mission statements.

Faith, then, is as much a matter of being as it of doing. Inevitably, I find that whenever the question of being arises, I have to deal with two components. The first is personal, the question of identity; the second is external, and is the question of how others see who I am. While I expect that the two converge, often I find they do not, and whenever they do not I invariably find that somewhere, in some way, I have not been or am not being true to my word. So, I either abandon what I have said I am or will do, or I will re-new my commitment so as to re-align my word with my being. I do not always wish to do that; it does not always seem to be a good idea; I fear that I may look bad. Also curiously,

(So ends the discussion; in the ending is found a beginning. What beginning? The opportunity begs an answer – and the courage to begin the debate of what can be, recognizing the reality of what is, rather than the unreality of what is wished to be).

the correction once made is almost always never anywhere as bad as I anticipate it to be. Consequently, it is no longer a matter of questioning whether I should make the correction – I just do what is appropriate for the correction.

This concludes the series of discussions. I have shown, however haltingly, a need for an open and complete discourse on the identity of the College, both as it is in the present reality and as we wish it to be in the future. Saying whatever we wish it to be in the future is will be an act of faith, and it will – if it is to be accomplished by all of us acting in concert – require commitment and action within and inside of integrity, carried out with impeccability, and with intentionality.

**Go to the people.
Learn from them.
Love them.
Take what they have.
Build on what they know.
But of the best leaders,
When their task is accomplished,
When their work is done,
The people will remark
We have done it ourselves.**

- 2000 year old Chinese poem.

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