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Lutheran Higher Education in a Secular Age:
Religious Identity and Mission at ELCA Colleges and Universities

by

BRIAN A.F. BECKSTROM

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

*Lutheran Higher Education in a Secular Age:
Religious Identity and Mission at ELCA Colleges and Universities*

by

Brian A.F. Beckstrom

This exploratory mixed methods case study examined the relationship between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission at five colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through the lenses of secularization theory, missional leadership, ecclesiology, Trinitarian theology, adaptive leadership, and challenges in the higher education market.

Results indicated that humanism is the primary means of describing religious identity and mission at ELCA schools and there are widely varying assumptions about what it means to be a college or university of the church. Advocates and skeptics of the institution's religious identity and mission interpret reality through the lens of secularization despite the fact that it has been called into question. This leads to an unproductive tug of war between groups who believe that either acquiescence or resistance to secularism is the proper response.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give thanks to God for calling me to this project and providing the opportunity to complete the Doctor of Ministry program. This has been a labor of love made possible by wonderful communities and people.

My passion for Lutheran higher education was stoked during my time as a student at Gustavus Adolphus College. Working at Gustavus for five years reinforced my passion for Lutheran higher education which has become my vocation. Gustavus is also where I encountered Dr. Darrell Jodock, one of the preeminent scholars of Lutheran higher education, who has become an important mentor to me.

Luther Seminary has been another important place in my life. I am especially grateful for my cohort members who have inspired me and become wonderful friends. I am also grateful to our faculty, especially Dr. Dan Anderson, Dr. Alvin Luedke, and Dr. Dwight Zscheile.

I have had the privilege of serving with amazing faculty, staff, and students at Wartburg College for the past nine years. The Rev. Dr. Ramona Bouzard has been an amazing boss, colleague, mentor, and ministry partner during that time. There is simply no way I could have completed this project without her assistance.

And finally, to my family. My parents and extended family have had a big influence on this project, particularly my father, the Rev. David A. Beckstrom. My wife Josie has taught me more about grace than anyone I know. She has endured many moves

as I discerned my calling and has had to listen to me talk about this project more than anyone should. Josie and our kids, Soren and Linnea, have sacrificed a lot so that I could complete this program and follow God's call in my life. One of my biggest sources of inspiration has been our kids. I want them to have the unique opportunity to experience Lutheran higher education. I hope this project plays some small role in making that a reality.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
FTE	Full-time equivalent
IRB	Institutional Review Board
Luth	Lutheran
OLS	Ordinary least squares regression analysis
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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CHAPTER ONE:
LUTHERAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN A SECULAR AGE

Many of the colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) were founded to educate church leaders to serve ethnically specific populations within the context of Christendom. Identity, mission, and outcomes were clearly defined by the narrowness of the focus. At the time, there was less need for the institution to reflect on the religious aspects of its mission as nearly everyone came from the same Lutheran and/or Protestant tradition.

Today the context has shifted dramatically. ELCA membership is in decline and schools can no longer depend on congregations to provide enough students to fill their classes. Lutherans are still the largest group on many campuses, particularly in the Midwest, but the degree of their affiliation varies widely. The number of religiously unaffiliated students continues to rise as does the experience of being raised in more than one denominational tradition.

Generally speaking, students are much more “loosely connected” to religious institutions than when these ELCA institutions were founded.¹ There are also fewer ELCA faculty and staff on campus to mentor those students.

¹ Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 202.

Other demographic changes in the wider culture have brought changes to ELCA schools. The United States is more racially diverse than ever,² while the ELCA is one of the most white and homogeneous denominations. ELCA colleges and universities have made efforts to embrace diversity yet still maintain a sense of Lutheran identity. Some schools have been more successful than others, but all ELCA colleges and universities are more diverse than the denomination, which is ninety-eight percent white.³

These changing cultural factors make it more challenging than ever for Lutheran colleges and universities to articulate their religious identity and mission. Schools have responded to this in a variety of ways. Some have embraced secularism, while others have tried to retain a sense of non-exclusive Christian identity.⁴ This study explores how ELCA colleges and universities communicate these traits officially, in contrast to how the school's religious identity and mission are perceived by the campus community.

² D'Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, "10 Demographic Trends That Are Shaping the U.S. and the World," *Pew Research Center* (blog), March 31, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>. accessed 7.4.17.

³ Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups," *Pew Research Center* (blog), July 27, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>. accessed 7.4.17.

⁴ Resources that have informed my understanding of the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges include; Alyssa N Bryan and Christy D. Moran, "The Challenge and Promise of Pluralism: Wartburg College Responds to Religious Diversity on Campus. A Report for the Wartburg College Community," 2007; Tom Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), Tom Christenson, *Who Needs a Lutheran College?: Values Vision Vocation* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2011); Darrell Jodock, "The Third Path: Gustavus Adolphus College and the Lutheran Tradition," accessed August 16, 2008, https://gustavus.edu/faith/pdf/Third_Path_Article.pdf; Lilly Seminar on Religion and Higher Education. and Andrea Sterk, *Religion, Scholarship & Higher Education: Perspectives, Models and Future Prospects: Essays from the Lilly Seminar on Religion and Higher Education* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Ernest L. Simmons, *Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction for Faculty* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998).

Research Question

The research question for this project is: What is the relationship between espoused and perceived institutional religious identity and mission at selected ELCA colleges and universities? There are two primary independent variables in the study. The first variable is the espoused religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges as defined by the institution in its public statements, particularly on its website. The second independent variable is the lived identity and mission of the institution as reported by the campus community (faculty, staff, and students). These perceptions were measured quantitatively through five additional independent variables; familiarity with the religious identity and mission of the institution before joining the community, preferred future for the organization, perceived influence of religious affiliation on campus, and overall satisfaction.

It was interesting to analyze how the schools articulate their mission and identity and whether or not that message is reflected in the experiences of study participants. I was also curious to see if the perceptions of the campus community may influence or modify the way the institution articulates its religious identity and mission.

There are many intervening variables in this study. One is the religious affiliation and commitment of individual participants. Will Lutherans have different perceptions of the mission and identity of the college than those who are affiliated with other denominations and the unaffiliated? What influence does an individual's role on campus (student, faculty, or staff) have on perceptions of religious identity and mission? Does length of time at the institution or level of overall satisfaction make a difference in perceptions?

Other intervening variables are gender, race, length of time at the institution, and its geographic location. It is natural for colleges to draw more students, faculty, and staff from their own region. On the east and west coast this increases the likelihood of a more secular constituency than in more church-ed regions of the country like the South and Midwest. Another significant geographic variable is the higher concentration of Lutherans in the Midwest.

Certain characteristics of the institutions are also intervening variables. Each school has its own unique history and ethnic identity. They are descendants of different church bodies that joined together to form the ELCA, and some are the product of either merger or schism between Lutheran colleges. Differences in polity, piety, and even language still persist from those days. For instance, former colleges of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) refer to themselves as “Colleges of the Church” while those affiliated with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) refer to themselves as “Church-Related Colleges.”⁵

Another intervening variable is the academic selectivity of each school. More “prestigious” schools are able to “shape” each class of incoming students because they have a higher number of qualified applicants to choose from. There are several ELCA colleges that would fall into the highly selective category, and this could make a significant difference.

These selective schools also tend to have fewer financial pressures because they have larger endowments and wealthier students. Most Lutheran institutions have modest

⁵ Richard W. Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Pub. House, 1985), 316, 341.

endowments, which makes them dependent on tuition revenue. The current volatility of the higher education market means that institutional survival is a motivating factor for many ELCA colleges.

Importance of the Research Question

There are many intriguing variables to explore, but ultimately this project is important to me because my life and faith were transformed at a Lutheran college. I have also worked in Lutheran higher education for most of my career and anticipate staying in this area of ministry. My current institution will benefit from this research because it will prepare us to better understand and articulate our own faith identity and mission.

Lutheran colleges also represent a unique subset within American higher education. They are a “third path” between Bible colleges and secular institutions. At ELCA colleges, faith is part of the educational process, but there is no expectation of religious conformity.⁶ This makes them valuable to the broader church. Because Lutheran colleges do not require community members to be Christian, they are in an excellent position to provide a place where the church intersects with the world. This is an environment in which people of many different faith backgrounds and cultures can engage in transcultural subject to subject relationships around questions of ultimate meaning, purpose, and vocation.⁷

⁶ Jodock, “The Third Path: Gustavus Adolphus College and the Lutheran Tradition,” 2.

⁷ Daniel R. Anderson, “A Theory of Transculturation,” *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* January 2015 (2015): 107–22.

Related Questions

There are many related questions that flow out of this project, including, how have different ethnic and ecclesiological streams shaped Lutheran colleges and universities? Does the campus ministry have any effect on perceptions of the institution's religious identity and mission? How do colleges engage students in their faith mission when many are religiously unaffiliated and/or disinterested?

Historical Background

One of the most unique aspects of American higher education is the number of religiously affiliated institutions of higher education. In 2013 there were seven hundred and ninety-four colleges and universities in the United States affiliated with religious institutions. The majority of these schools are Christian and have existed for more than 100 years.⁸ The strength of these connections does tend to vary by institution. During the era of Christendom even public colleges and universities had a sort of general Protestant identity.⁹

In chapter two I will look at the history of Christian higher education in the United States because it provides important context to the discussion about institutional

⁸David Quinn, "Christian Colleges in the United States," accessed July 26, 2016, <http://www.davidmquinn.com/2012/07/how-many-christian-colleges-are-there.html>; "Digest of Education Statistics," National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_303.90.asp.

⁹ Important historical sources include; George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994); William C. Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

religious identity and mission.¹⁰ Around the turn of the Twentieth century there were numerous books that argued many church colleges had lost their “souls” and succumbed to secularism.¹¹ More recently other scholars have taken a more nuanced stance toward the religious identity and mission of these schools.¹² Recent events at Evangelical colleges have raised questions about whether or not diversity is compatible with dogmatism in a pluralistic world.¹³ Despite such controversies there is little doubt that religion is back on college campuses as even secular schools have begun recognizing the

¹⁰ Derek Bok, *Higher Education in America*, Revised edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian, *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997).

¹¹ Examples of literature that warned about the rising tide of secularism include; Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001); James Tunstead. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998); Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*.

¹² More recent scholarship that has focused on constructive proposals for the future of faith related institutions in a pluralistic age include; Bryan and Moran, “The Challenge and Promise of Pluralism: Wartburg College Responds to Religious Diversity on Campus. A Report for the Wartburg College Community”; Eric Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities* (Eugene: Pickwick Publishers, 2012), Timothy T. Clydesdale, *The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students about Vocation* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Ann Hill Duin, Eric Childers, and University of Minnesota, *Project DAVID Vocation and Reinvention in Liberal Arts Colleges*, Cultivating Change in the Academy E-Book Series; (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota, 2014), David, Hughes and Adrian, *Models for Christian Higher Education*.

¹³ S. Alan Ray, “What the Wheaton Controversy Means for Colleges’ Religious Identity,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 62, no. 19 (January 22, 2016).

importance of student spiritual development.¹⁴ In some cases, formerly church affiliated colleges have reintroduced some sort of religious programming on campus.¹⁵

Lutheranism is often said to be the faith that was founded on campus. Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and other leaders in the Reformation came from academic backgrounds. So, it is no surprise that the distinctiveness of Lutheran higher education was a topic discussed from the very start of the Reformation.¹⁶

Literatures and Theoretical Lenses

There are a variety of theoretical lenses that inform my research. I have identified them in italics. Lutheran colleges face an *adaptive leadership challenge* as they grapple with their *identity* and *mission* in a post Christian world.

Adaptive Leadership Challenge

Ron Heifetz and Martin Linsky distinguish technical problems from adaptive challenges in several ways:

- Adaptive challenges arise when the environment is rapidly changing while technical problems occur within stable situations.
- Technical problems can be solved with existing knowledge, but adaptive challenges require new learning and behavior.

¹⁴ Examples of recent scholarship on the positive role of faith in the development of college students includes; Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, and Jennifer A. Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011); Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty, *Christianity and the Soul of the University: Faith as a Foundation for Intellectual Community* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2006); Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian, *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997); Nicholas. Wolterstorff, Clarence W. Joldersma, and Gloria Goris Stronks, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004),

¹⁵ Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen and Douglas G. Jacobsen., *No Longer Invisible: Religion In University Education* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11.

¹⁶ Susan Spruell Mobley, "Making a University Lutheran: Philipp Melanchthon and the Reform of the University of Tübingen in the 1530s," *Logia* 21, no. 2 (2012): 41–45.

- Adaptive challenges demand the participation of everyone while technical problems can be solved by an expert.¹⁷

American higher education faces an adaptive challenge. The environment is changing rapidly as competition from online schools increases and the number of high school graduates decreases. Student expectations are on the rise and families are willing to pay less than they were before. Some experts predict that the bottom twenty-five percent of each tier¹⁸ in the higher education market will disappear within the next decade.¹⁹

Lutheran colleges are not exempt from these adaptive pressures. There are fewer Lutherans students to recruit from, financial support from the church has almost completely dried up, and the liberal arts are a harder sell than in the past.

Adaptation is being touted as the best hope for colleges and universities in the current age. Institutions that are able to nimbly shift resources to new markets will be the ones that survive.²⁰ Interestingly the colleges that have been most successful in this regard are those whose innovations have been guided by a strong sense of mission and

¹⁷ Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, Kindle edition, 2002, 13–20.

¹⁸ Tiers are classifications for colleges and universities created by the Carnegie Foundation. Tiers are based on institutional size, curriculum, degrees granted, etc. “The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education,” accessed July 28, 2016, <http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/definitions.php>.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Selingo, “Colleges Can Still Save Themselves. Here’s How,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 60, no. 14 (December 6, 2013): A72–A72; Alice M. Obenchain, William C. Johnson, and Paula A. Dion, “Institutional Types, Organizational Cultures, and Innovation in Christian Colleges and Universities,” *Christian Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (January 2004): 15–39.

²⁰ Resources on the subject of institutional adaption and change: Beckie Supiano, “A Small Catholic College Broadens Its Mission as It Grows,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 1, 2009; Dwight J. Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2014).

identity.²¹ This fact makes it all the more urgent for Lutheran schools to understand who they are and how they are called to live it out.

Identity and Mission

Organizational identity is a difficult concept to define because it lacks a clear scholarly consensus. The primary dispute centers around whether an organization's identity is an organic expression of its culture or can be adjusted and reinterpreted as circumstances dictate?²² My answer to that question is yes.²³ Organizational identity is an expression of an institution's culture and values, and it is constantly evolving and being reinterpreted by the community. Much of the debate about the identity of Lutheran colleges and universities is influenced by which side of this ideological divide one stands. Do you believe that identity should be based on continuity with the organization's past or a willingness to reinterpret with changing circumstances? I see no reason to believe that these two concepts must be mutually exclusive and will explore this more fully in this section.²⁴

²¹ Beth McMurtrie, "Why It's So Hard to Kill a College," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 61, no. 40 (July 10, 2015).

²² Bjørn Stensaker, "Organizational Identity as a Concept for Understanding University Dynamics," *Higher Education* 69, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 104, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9763-8>.

²³ I rely heavily on Zygmunt Bauman for understanding the notion of identity. Zygmunt Bauman and Benedetto Vecchi, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, Themes for the 21st Century (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004).

²⁴ Sources for the exploration of Lutheran identity; Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*. Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*. Christenson, *Who Needs a Lutheran College?: Values, Vision, Vocation*. Dovre, *The Future of Religious Colleges: The Proceedings of the Harvard Conference on the Future of Religious Colleges, October 6-7, 2000*. Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*. Mobley, "Making a University Lutheran: Philipp Melancthon and the Reform of the University of Tübingen in the 1530s."

Mission is the organization's reason for being. It is the lived experience of an institution's identity, expressed through the dominant behaviors and beliefs of the community. Mission is sometimes seen as a rigid hierarchical vision that is imposed from the top down.

My understanding of identity and mission in this study is more fluid and dynamic than defined by many.²⁵ I am “reframing” institutional identity and mission through a symbolic perspective.²⁶ This allows for a certain institutional adaptivity and creativity while still holding up “vital agreements” that bind the institution to itself. For me the identity of an institution is defined by which vital agreements it deems to be important.²⁷ Instead of forcing a sort of institutional mission on all community members, I see the institution as a centered set in which the purpose of leadership is to continually define the middle rather than “police the boundaries.”²⁸

²⁵Sources that have been helpful in defining my own position on the issue of identity and mission include; Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*; Eric Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012); James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2004); Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2006); Landon Whitsitt, *Open Source Church: Making Room for the Wisdom of All* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2011).

²⁶ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 5th edition. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 16–17.

²⁷ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 129.

²⁸ Anthony B. Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 8.

Biblical and Theological Lenses

This project is guided by a number of biblical and theological lenses that will appear throughout this thesis. I will outline them briefly to provide a sense of how I will be interpreting the exploration of my research question.

Biblical Lenses

My biblical lenses include an understanding that humankind is made in God's image (*imago Dei*) and is therefore beloved by God and seen as good. Because creation is fashioned in the image of a triune God it also bears the ontological imprint of the Trinity (*imago Trinitatis*). God creates in God's own image²⁹ and when God surveys the creation God reflects that "it is good,"³⁰ in fact it "is very good."³¹ We also must acknowledge that God is at work through all people. In fact, it seems as if God often prefers the outsider to the insider when it comes to carrying out God's mission in the world.³²

Thus, all people have an awareness of God through the simple fact that they are human (Acts 17:22-31). When Paul approaches the Athenians at the Aeropagus he begins with the assumption that they already have knowledge of God as evidenced by their worship of an unknown God.

This leads to my second biblical lens—the value of the other. God commands Israel to be hospitable to strangers, and non-Jews are often part of carrying out God's mission. This theme is carried into the New Testament with Jesus' inclusion of outsiders,

²⁹ Genesis 1:27.

³⁰ Genesis 1:12.

³¹ Genesis 1:31.

³² The parable of the Good Samaritan is a prime example (Luke 10:25-37).

foreigners, and the unclean. There seems to be a sense that those who are different are in fact necessary for God's mission.

There are a number of places in Scripture where outsiders end up participating in God's work of healing creation. Pharaoh has dreams presumably sent by God and listens to Joseph's interpretation of his dream that there will be a famine. Pharaoh averts the famine by putting Joseph in charge of his granary and Egypt is able to feed an entire region.³³ Ruth refuses to leave her mother-in-law Naomi and accompanies her back to Israel. The parable of the Good Samaritan and the Samaritan woman at the well are instances of God at work through those who do not fit within religious boundaries.³⁴ In fact these Samaritans actually end up changing the chosen people, including Jesus. Of course, we cannot forget Paul's conversion from persecutor to proclaimer of the Gospel.³⁵

God's mission does not preclude the presence of non-Christians; in fact, it may demand it. If we are called to embody the nature of the triune God, then our colleges and universities must embrace all people without expectation or coercion. In fact, they may be God's primary agents in bringing about change in the lives of the faithful.

³³ Walter J. Harrelson, ed., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), Genesis 43.

³⁴ Harrelson, Luke 10:25-37, John 4.

³⁵ Harrelson, Acts 9.

Theological Lenses

My theological lenses are missional theology, missional ecclesiology, and contextual theology.³⁶ The triune nature of God is the primary identity of the church, determining its mission and practice.³⁷

ELCA colleges and universities are often hesitant to embrace the theological aspects of their identity and mission in a pluralistic world. I will argue that a Trinitarian understanding of God not only allows colleges and universities to retain their Lutheran-Christian identity, it opens up the possibility of embracing diversity and pluralism. ELCA colleges have often viewed their Lutheran Christian identity as an exclusivist vestige of the past, but when understood through a Trinitarian lens, it puts our schools in a better position to be open and engaged with all of God's creation.

Missional Leadership

Lutheran colleges and universities historically were led by members of the clergy. Because of their theological training college presidents interpreted the world through theological categories, and their discourse presumed that God was an active subject in the life of the college.³⁸

³⁶ Important sources for missional theology, ecclesiology, and contextual theology include; Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013); Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000); Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007); Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

³⁷ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 17–19.

³⁸ Dovre, *The Future of Religious Colleges: The Proceedings of the Harvard Conference on the Future of Religious Colleges, October 6-7, 2000*, 214.

Today none of the ELCA colleges are led by a clergy person. As higher education became a more specialized field professionalization of college leadership ensued.³⁹ This is not necessarily a negative development. Leading a college in today's volatile higher education market requires a particular skill set that few pastors have. But the lack of a theological voice within the leadership of nearly every ELCA school is bound to have consequences. It is not that executive leaders (Presidents and Vice Presidents) are incapable of theological reflection, but it is not necessarily the lens through which they view the world.

Most executive leaders of colleges and universities are not trained theologically. Many received their advanced degrees at secular colleges and universities where faith was not integrated into their education, yet they lead institutions that claim the integration of faith and learning as a central value. The academy has been deeply shaped by the modern worldview which often excludes God from their formation. In addition, the American population is overwhelmingly deistic in the sense that God is not seen as an active subject in the world. It is not that God is viewed with hostility, but the idea that God might actually be at work on campus would be a foreign notion to most campus community members. Judging by the composition of most presidential cabinets—which includes fundraisers, student life executives, enrollment management specialists, and financial managers—functionality is valued over theological leadership.

We cannot understand ourselves as Christians, the church, or church colleges without first understanding the identity of God whose nature is triune—three persons

³⁹ Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*, 24–28.

existing in perfect harmony and unity of purpose.⁴⁰ There are two primary aspects to the triune nature of God. The first is the *missio Dei*. God sends Godself into the world through the act of creation. God sends the Son to heal and reconcile creation. God sends the Spirit to guide the church, and the Spirit sends the church into the world.⁴¹ God is by nature a sending God, a missional God.

But there is more to God's nature than the *missio Dei*. The relationships within the Trinity give us a fuller picture of who God is. Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:20-23 captures the unitive and relational nature of the triune God:

²⁰I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 14:25-27 draws out the Spirit's role in God's mission.

²⁵I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

The relationships among the persons of the Trinity reveal something about the nature of God's relationships with the world. The persons of the Trinity relate to one another *perichoretically* in a mutuality that has been described as a dance, whirl, or

⁴⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981), 175.

⁴¹ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*, 125.

rotation. Within this perichoretic relationship there is no coerciveness or struggle. The three persons exist harmoniously and leave space for others to enter into the dance.⁴²

The missional nature of God is perichoretically shaped, meaning that it is non-coercive and loving. This is a wonderful foundation for the church's mission, and by extension, the mission of Lutheran colleges and universities.

Missional Ecclesiology

The identity and mission of the triune God extends to the church which is a community "created by the Spirit" and in God's image. The church is by nature perichoretically missional because that is God's nature. So, the identity and mission (*ecclesiology*) of the church is bound up in the nature of a missional, perichoretic God.⁴³

I argue that Lutheran colleges and universities must find their own identity and mission through ecclesiological reflection. These institutions once found their identity through a culturally conditioned ecclesiology, but after countless mergers, that sense of identity has dissipated. It is also inadequate for a pluralistic world because it was built on ethnic identity more than anything else. The identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities must be grounded in the ongoing active participation of the triune God in the world and on campus.

⁴² For more information about the link between the Trinity, perichoresis, and ecclesiology see; Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*; Jürgen Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," in *Trinity, Community, and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2000), 111; Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*; Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

⁴³ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*, 31; Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 110–11; Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 143.

I believe Lutheran colleges and universities can be transformed by a Trinitarian missiological ecclesiology, finding the resources they need to understand their identity and mission. One of the beautiful things about the Trinity is that it allows for both unity and diversity and acknowledges the contributions of all people to God's mission.

Contextual Theology

The final theological lens I used was contextual theology.⁴⁴ Contextual theology acknowledges the role of culture and experience in mediating reality. Truth may be objective, but our perceptions of reality are subjective and culturally conditioned. Acknowledging and understanding how our own perceptions are influenced by our cultural and historical experiences is an important aspect of the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities.

Contextual theology compels us to consider the intercultural effects of religious identity and mission, particularly in regard to how we treat those of other cultures and traditions. This is an extremely important aspect of the discussion because of the negative perceptions of Christianity and the history of western cultural imperialism. Dominance of one culture over another is inconsistent with the nature of the Triune God upon which the church is ecclesialogically patterned.

Methodology

These lenses serve as an interpretive framework for the analysis of my data. I have conducted an exploratory mixed methods case study focusing on the religious identity and mission of five ELCA colleges and universities. In the first phase of research

⁴⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

I administered a quantitative survey at five ELCA institutions. In the second phase I selected two schools for a more in-depth qualitative analysis. I chose one institution from the Midwestern United States and one from the West Coast in order to ascertain if geography had an effect on religious identity and mission.

Conclusion

The next chapter will provide historical context for our examination of the religious identity and mission of Lutheran colleges and universities. The following two chapters will examine the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses in more detail. After a chapter dedicated to the research methodology of this study, I will examine and interpret the gathered data and summarize the findings.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY

Lutheranism and higher education have been inextricably entwined from the very beginning of the Reformation. Martin Luther was a university professor at Wittenberg when he unwittingly set in motion the events that would lead to a break with the Roman church. Wittenberg and other German universities were incubators for the reforming impulse, so to say that the Lutheran church was born at the university is not mere hyperbole.

Luther's actions may not have been intended to challenge the authority of Rome but once the ball began rolling it inevitably affected many institutions. The Church was not merely a denomination, it was the backbone of a social structure that encompassed all areas of life.

When Martin Luther challenged the Roman Catholic Church and started the Reformation, he was challenging not only its theology, but also its education. Indeed, the Reformation and education were intrinsically linked: Luther was a University professor; the Reformation began at a university.¹

Lutherans may be inclined to a certain reverence for higher education but that does not imply they agree on its mission and purpose. According to Sydney Ahlstrom,

¹ Mobley, "Making a University Lutheran: Philipp Melancthon and the Reform of the University of Tübingen in the 1530s," 41.

there are at least three different strains of Lutheran educational philosophy that have influenced its present shape: scholasticism, pietism, and the critical tradition.²

Scholasticism ought not be confused with the scholastic curriculum of the medieval university that will be discussed later. Luther and the reformers critiqued the medieval university curriculum but maintained much of its basic structure. Scholasticism in this context refers to a deep commitment to the confessions of the Lutheran Church forged through ongoing theological conflict with the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, Anabaptist groups, and Calvinism. In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to scholasticism as *confessionalism* throughout this document.

Confessionalism was a highly formalized and systematic rendering of the principles of the Reformation; so, it is probably no surprise that a more “heart felt” theological movement called pietism rose up to counterbalance this somewhat dogmatic understanding of education. Pietism sought to breathe new life into Christian faith through an emphasis on personal piety and missional engagement.

The third influence on Lutheran thought is the critical tradition that arose particularly in Germany. It was characterized by a deeply “investigative spirit” that challenged traditional assumptions through a quasi-scientific method of inquiry.³

Several of these influences have impacted Lutheran higher education in the United States. Sometimes they have coexisted peacefully. At other times, they have battled for the soul of their host institutions. On campus, confessionalism lives on

² Sydney Ahlstrom, “What’s Lutheran about Higher Education? – A Critique,” in *Papers and Proceedings of the 60th Annual Convention* (Lutheran Educational Conference of North America, Washington, DC, 1974), 8–16.

³ Hughes and Adrian, *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 72–73.

through a concern with Lutheran identity and theology. Pietism's voice asks about the nurture of Christian faith and spirituality particularly through campus ministry.

Ethnic and confessional differences have further muddied the waters, making the current confusion about identity and mission an understandable outcome. These differences lie just below the surface on campus yet enlist present constituents in ancient battles they may not even recognize. For this and many other reasons, it is important that this study includes a brief history of Lutheran higher education.

The Reformation and Higher Education

Exploring the history of Lutheran higher education by beginning with the Reformation may seem overzealous, but Luther's role in reforming the university system of his day helps to explain the persistent Lutheran interest in higher education. There is also another reason to begin with the Reformation. There are striking parallels with the current climate of higher education and religious life.

Phyllis Tickle has argued that every 500 years the church has a "garage sale" to get rid of unwanted items and refashion itself.⁴ There is ample evidence to suggest that may be the case for the contemporary church as we pass over the threshold of the Reformation's 500th anniversary. *Disruptive innovation* is affecting religious organizations and higher education as newer more creative ways of finding spiritual

⁴ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 16.

meaning and pursuing education begin to disrupt established patterns of denominations and colleges.⁵

The Reformation was a *disruptive innovation* hastened by the emergence of a new communication technology called the printing press and the artwork of Lucas Cranach. These new tools allowed the reformers to challenge the established Roman Catholic Church by reaching out directly to a wider and more diverse audience than had ever been possible. People all over Europe were able to read Luther's ideas for themselves. His translation of the Bible into the vernacular broadened this access, and even those who were illiterate could experience the story themselves through Cranach's paintings and illustrations.⁶

Today's digital revolution has had a similar effect on our culture. Ideas can traverse geographical, educational, and cultural boundaries in unprecedented ways. People are able to connect with one another through networks that did not exist even a decade ago. There also seems to be a growing distrust of institutions that is affecting both religion and education in ways that are reminiscent of the Reformation era.⁷

People do not necessarily have to rely on religious professionals for their spiritual development. Online education, particularly the development of MOOC's (Massive Open Online Classes), has made education available to those who never had access to it before.

⁵ Jeffrey J. Selingo, *College Unbound: The Future of Higher Education and What It Means for Students* (Seattle, WA: Amazon Publishing, 2013), 42. Dwight J Zscheile, "Disruptive Innovations and the Deinstitutionalization of Religion," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 14, no. 2 (September 2015): 15.

⁶ Tom Gjelten, "How Technology Helped Martin Luther Change Christianity," NPR.org, November 20, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/11/20/502437123/how-technology-helped-martin-luther-change-christianity>. accessed 11.12.16.

⁷ Zscheile, "Disruptive Innovations and the Deinstitutionalization of Religion," 9.

Many are questioning the value of higher education even as the industry struggles to adjust.

The old way of doing things is clearly breaking down and higher education exists in a sort of liminal state. There are many who would like to throw the baby out the bathwater and start over entirely, while others caution against overreaction.

Luther faced a similar educational crisis in his time as the medieval system of university education was upset by the Reformation. Luther certainly wanted educational reform but was not an advocate for scrapping the whole system.

In 1524 Luther wrote a famous essay about education entitled, “To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools.”⁸ The Reformation was in full swing at this point. Luther had been excommunicated and Europe was reeling. Schools were distrusted by many who were sympathetic to the Reformation because their primary purpose had been to produce priests, monks, and nuns. This type of education seemed to have limited value to many, but no other alternative to the idea of producing religious leaders had gained any traction.

Education for younger children was provided by monasteries and convents at the time. Students who showed promise for ecclesiastical work might continue their education as they got older in the same location, or even be sent to the University.

The purpose of medieval scholastic education was largely to prepare students to “excel in the formal academic disputations which were the principal public

⁸ Martin Luther and Timothy F. Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 704–35.

exercises of the faculty of arts and the key to success in the three higher faculties,” especially in theology...the so-called queen of sciences.⁹

Children from wealthy families might have also had an opportunity to advance to university to study the arts, medicine, or law, but these were mostly ancillary deviations from the primary educational mission of producing a learned clergy. As the Reformation took hold this system was dying, and its schools were simply falling apart.

(W)e are today experiencing in all the German lands how schools are everywhere being left to go to wrack and ruin. The universities are growing weak and monasteries are declining.¹⁰

Luther certainly was critical toward the monastic schools, referring to them as “asses’ stalls” in his typically elegant manner.¹¹ He even argued that the ruin of the monastic schools was the judgment of God. But he still believed that education had value and could be reformed. He was fighting a battle on two fronts; first against the monastic school system, and second against those who wanted to dispense with education entirely.

But if training ecclesiastical office holders was not going to be the exclusive purpose of education, what would it be? The curriculum of the medieval educational system was largely borrowed from the Greeks and included the study of the seven traditional liberal arts. Students were introduced to these classical disciplines at different ages, “Grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic comprised the trivium of the medieval elementary

⁹ Mobley, “Making a University Lutheran: Philipp Melanchthon and the Reform of the University of Tübingen in the 1530s,” 42.

¹⁰ Luther and Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 705.

¹¹ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 12.

schools; music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy comprised the quadrivium of the secondary schools.”¹²

Students that completed this regimen with high marks would then go on to the university. Luther did not really have a problem with the subjects being studied, nor with producing an educated clergy. His objections were pedagogically and civically motivated. There is no doubt that he was also influenced by a new educational philosophy called humanism which was sweeping through Europe.

One of the key criticisms of the humanists was that students were given commentaries on the subjects and authors they were studying instead of working with original texts and sources. Essentially, they were being indoctrinated by their teachers through endless repetition and rote memorization. They also rarely studied Scripture, instead focusing on the works of Aristotle to develop a scriptural hermeneutic.

Like Luther the humanists did not want to give up on education. They wanted to expand its role beyond producing clergy who could debate the intricacies of theology but little else.

For humanists, education should serve as the foundation for “the life of practical action in society.” Humanists wanted to reform the curriculum to train students not to win academic disputations but rather to acquire “skills useful in the discourses of everyday living.”¹³

Luther was not as deeply influenced by humanism as his colleague Philip Melancthon. He thought humanists neglected the importance of training an educated clergy, even if the type of training being offered in the medieval universities was not

¹² Luther and Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 713, fn 15.

¹³ Mobley, “Making a University Lutheran: Philipp Melancthon and the Reform of the University of Tübingen in the 1530s,” 42.

sufficient. We can see Luther's attempts to balance an expanded role for education with the need to train clergy through his writings, although he never explicitly developed an educational philosophy.

Luther's vision for education included a learned clergy that was competent in ancient languages,¹⁴ but he also saw an important role for education in preparing all people for their vocation.

(Luther's) doctrine of vocation rooted in the concept of the priesthood of all believers, opened the way for the promotion of all kinds of education as preparation for service to God and society. The professions, as Luther saw them, were not merely for earning a living but rather the areas in which each person contributed to the welfare of his brothers and sisters.¹⁵

Luther further explicated his educational philosophy through the doctrine of the two kingdoms.¹⁶ Luther believed strongly that God was at work in two kingdoms, the heavenly and the secular. God rules in the secular kingdom through government, law, and civic life. God rules in the heavenly kingdom through grace and mercy. The two kingdoms are often misunderstood as being mutually exclusive, as if God were active in one but not the other. But Luther did not understand them this way. As such he held that preparing people to be good citizens, lawyers, bankers, husbands, wives, etc. was just as important as educating clergy to proclaim the word of God.

The degree of influence that Luther had on the German educational system is contested. Some say he had little effect,¹⁷ while others argue that Melancthon may have

¹⁴ Luther and Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 720.

¹⁵ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 16.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 31: Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1957), 297–306.

¹⁷ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 12.

actually had the bigger impact.¹⁸ It seems to me that Luther's impact on higher education might be understated because his proposed educational structure is essentially what exists in the United States.

Writing in 1524, long before the first Lutheran immigrants left Europe, Luther affirmed the medieval system's emphasis on the liberal arts,¹⁹ suggested that all children should receive an education at least through the gymnasium (early high school level), and that the most promising pupils should then continue on to the university.²⁰ This is the system that Lutheran immigrants sought to introduce in the United States, although it took some time to develop. Lutherans created their own educational system in order to work around the separation of church and state, which had both advantages and disadvantages.

Higher Education in the New World

Scholars of American education interpret the historical record according to whether they are writing from a secular or a Christian perspective. William Ringenberg and Derek Bok have written two of the most respected accounts of the development of higher education in the United States. Both authors identify three eras in this history while emphasizing different aspects. Both also agree that American higher education once had a common mission that has gradually diminished. Prior to the Civil War that

¹⁸ Mobley, "Making a University Lutheran: Philipp Melancthon and the Reform of the University of Tübingen in the 1530s," 41–45.

¹⁹ Luther and Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 713, 733.

²⁰ Luther and Lull, 727–28.

mission was to train men for the “learned professions and positions of leadership in society.”²¹ During most of that time the primary profession was ministry.

Writing as an evangelical Christian historian, Ringenberg takes a chronological approach to the story, making note of the increasing secularization of the academy. According to *The Christian College*, there were three primary periods of stability in American higher education, interspersed with periods of volatility.²²

The first period of stability was the Puritan era (1636-1758) that ended with the death of Jonathan Edwards. An ensuing time of transition followed Edwards’ death, lasting until the next period of stability during the Second Great Awakening (1795-1820). That was followed by another period of transition (1869-1925) that included the development of the modern research university and the fundamentalist modernist controversy.

We are presently in the third era of stability in American higher education in which Christian higher education is being recovered.²³ If that seems a bit optimistic we must recognize that the latest edition of his book was published in 2006 just as the most massive disruptions in higher education were taking place.

Bok writes from a secular perspective as a scholar of higher education rather than as a historian. He is the former President of Harvard University and has been a constructive critic of American higher education. Bok identifies three significant

²¹ Bok, *Higher Education in America*, 28–29.

²² Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 18.

²³ Ringenberg, 18, 209–42.

movements that have shaped the current state of American higher education affairs rather than dividing American higher education into historical epochs.

The first (movement) was inspired by the need to prepare students for a useful occupation...the second movement featured an explicit emphasis on research...The third movement in American higher education grew out of the earlier effort to educate an elite. Its center lay in the humanities.²⁴

It would probably be difficult to find two scholars from more different backgrounds, and yet there are obvious similarities. Both have noted the change in pedagogy and population in American colleges and universities. It remains to be seen what effect the broader American context has had on Lutheran higher education.

Colonial Lutheran Higher Education

In 1638 Sweden established a colony in the United States and the first significant population of Lutherans landed on American soil.²⁵ The Swedes were soon followed by waves of Dutch, German, and other Scandinavian immigrants. The Swedish community which was established in what is now Delaware was fairly successful but was eventually absorbed by other colonial powers and the Anglican religious community.

Early Lutheran immigrants to the United States found themselves in a very different religious environment. The Calvinistic theology of the Puritans dictated life in the colonies and transcended Protestant religious boundaries.²⁶ During this first epoch of

²⁴ Bok, *Higher Education in America*, 28–29.

²⁵ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 24.

²⁶ Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life*, Sixth edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 43.

Christian higher education in the United States, English structures and Puritan theology tended to dominate.²⁷

The early influence of puritanism and Reformed theology is extremely significant for the development of higher education in the United States. European settlers were accustomed to the practice of Erastianism by which the religion of the land was determined by its ruler. Other groups were tolerated to an extent but, as the massive Puritan migration implies, this forbearance had limits. Arriving in the “new world” was an opportunity for the Puritans to finally create the kind of fully Christian society they longed for. Although the Puritans were eventually absorbed into different American denominations, their depiction of America as a “city on a hill” persists to this day.²⁸

Puritans were not explicitly given free reign by their English charter, but as the dominant religious group in the colonies, they profoundly shaped social norms and institutions. Some may have had Anglican roots, but their biggest theological influence was the Reformed theology of John Calvin, who stressed the sovereignty of Christ over all creation.

If one wishes to go to the heart of the Reformed heritage one must recall that this tradition has exalted the sovereignty of God over all creation...ever since John Calvin sought to transform the city of Geneva into a model kingdom of Christ.²⁹

Luther would have agreed with Calvin on the all-encompassing nature of God’s sovereignty, but Luther believed that in the temporal world God exercises sovereignty

²⁷ Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 18.

²⁸ Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 15.

²⁹ Hughes and Adrian, *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 5.

through the orders of creation. Luther would have considered the attempt to create a “Christian” society to have been unrealistic and unnecessary. Luther believed that God was at work even in those who were not necessarily faithful people.

Lutherans acknowledge that the world as it is – deformed and estranged from God –is nonetheless God’s creation and therefore worthy of study and understanding on its own terms. At the same time, they revel in the promise of God’s transforming grace. In the present world, however, the Kingdom of grace never triumphs over the Kingdom of nature. Instead, these two dimensions always coexist in dialectical tension.³⁰

Part of the difficulty in articulating the identity of a Lutheran college or university is surely the fact that they are judged by the Reformed educational worldview established by the Puritans; namely a uniform Christian approach to scholarship and educational life.

In this context notions like “secular” and “secularization” make a great deal of sense: secularization occurs when any dimension of human activity escapes the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. From this perspective, Christian colleges or universities that fail to subordinate learning to a Christian worldview may fall victim to the process of secularization.³¹

The Reformed worldview may have been better suited to the free market religious economy of the United States.³² Denominations did not exist at the time of the Reformation, so having a unifying educational vision and a healthy distrust of institutions was likely an advantage. This advantage has persisted into modern times as those Reformed institutions that require theological uniformity have had an easier time articulating their identity.

³⁰ Hughes and Adrian, 6.

³¹ Hughes and Adrian, 5.

³² Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 59–66.

Lutherans have also fared well in American higher education and there are certainly drawbacks to the Reformed model that can be used to impose a theological uniformity on the community. But it is much easier to establish identity and mission when the community is founded around a common “Christian worldview” than it is when a dialectical tension between faith and learning is your foundation.³³

The dominance of Reformed educational philosophy, the lack of Lutheran immigrants, and religious assimilation made it hard for Lutherans to gain traction in higher education before the Revolutionary War. Even so, here were some exceptions.

Lutheranism took an important step forward as the *Ministerium of Pennsylvania* was founded in Philadelphia on August 26, 1748. This marked the first organized group of Lutherans beyond individual congregations, and the Ministerium would be the driving force in Lutheran higher education for years to come.³⁴

It is important to note that the term *synod* can be used to refer to a denomination like the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod or Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In the ELCA the term synod refers to geographical clusters of congregations.³⁵ In this case the *Pennsylvania Ministerium* and subsequent synods are probably best understood as

³³ Evangelicalism is another important strain of Christian higher education in the United States. Evangelical and Pentecostal colleges emphasize learning as an opportunity for faith development and conversion. I elected not to discuss this important area further due to the fact that it developed later than the Lutheran and Reformed traditions.

³⁴ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 30.

³⁵ Thomas Ries, “Correlations between Strategic Planning and Financial Performance: A Focus on Lutheran Colleges and Universities” (University of Minnesota, 2014), 47.

denominational entities. Generally speaking, denominations developed in the United States around the Revolutionary War period.³⁶

The establishment of the *Pennsylvania Ministerium* created an organized group that could compete in this strange new world where there was no official state church.³⁷ In Europe, the responsibility for establishing a college or university tended to be a civil matter. The ruler of a particular area established the university, provided most of the funding, and affiliated it with his own religious preference.

In the United States, local civic leaders, lay people, and groups of clergies were the ones who established colleges and universities. Institutions often located or relocated according to the amount of financial support different communities were offering.³⁸ Many Christian colleges did not begin with a particular religious affiliation. At most they would have been connected to a group like the Pennsylvania ministerium, but not necessarily from the beginning.³⁹

Seven years prior to the founding of the Pennsylvania synod a young pastor named Henry Melchior Muhlenberg was sent to minister to German immigrants in the United States. Muhlenberg came from the University of Halle in Germany, which was the epicenter for Lutheran pietism. Although Muhlenberg's charge was in part to restore the

³⁶ Craig Van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 15–16.

³⁶Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 57.

³⁸ Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 54. Why did it skip 36?

³⁹ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 34.

German Lutherans to their confessional identity, his pietistic background meshed well with the evangelical ethos of the United States.⁴⁰

Muhlenberg was able to create a foothold for Lutherans in higher education through several cooperative ventures with other denominations, most notably Hartwick Seminary and Franklin College.⁴¹ Muhlenberg never was able to realize his desire to found a Lutheran college or seminary, but his revival of existing congregations and organizational skills provided the foundation for Lutheran education. It would not be until after the Revolutionary War that Lutherans were finally able to found a school of their own.⁴²

The period just before the Revolutionary War was one of the most prolific in the history of American higher education. There were only three American colleges (Harvard, William & Mary, and Yale) up until the period of the first Great Awakening in the 1730s to 1740s. The fervor of this revival movement spurred the need for more clergy to serve the growing Christian population. Another six major universities were added before the Revolutionary war: Princeton, Columbia, Pennsylvania, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth.⁴³ The beginning of the Revolutionary War brought a halt to this rapid expansion of colleges, and when the nation emerged from the war, it would be a much different place.

⁴⁰ Solberg, 28–30.

⁴¹ Solberg, 38–42.

⁴² John Kunze, Muhlenberg's son-in-law, founded a "Seminarium" in 1773 but it never grew into a college or university. Solberg, 35.

⁴³ Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 39–41.

Lutheran Higher Education after the Revolution

Prior to the Revolutionary War the separation between church and state was not enshrined in law.⁴⁴ The colonizing nations were most interested in extracting as much wealth as possible from the new world, therefore they often turned a blind eye to the religious choices of the colonists. Certain groups may have exercised influence over the religious choices of others but the state generally did not, except in the case of Virginia.⁴⁵

After the Revolutionary War, when the majority of Lutherans emigrated, it became more of a reality. Despite this increasing separation, most colleges and universities, including public institutions, retained at least a quasi-Christian identity.⁴⁶

The Revolutionary War was truly a breakpoint for Christian higher education in the United States. It marked the end of the Puritan hegemony and the introduction of many new religious traditions and ethnicities. It also severed ties with England, forcing the Americans to develop their own ecclesiastical and educational structures.

Lutherans burst onto the higher education scene in the period between the Revolutionary and Civil wars. During this time, they founded more than twenty colleges but began with a seminary to train pastors to serve the growing Lutheran population.⁴⁷ At this point Lutherans were still fairly separated from American culture by language and

⁴⁴ Craig Van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 14. The English Parliament passed The Act of Toleration in 1645 but that did not stop many of the colonies from giving preference to a particular church.

⁴⁵ Hudson and Corrigan, *Religion in America*, 44–45. Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 80.

⁴⁶ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*, 236–58.

⁴⁷ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 52–53.

their continuing attachment to Europe. That relationship had been altered significantly for English immigrants with the war, but the predominantly German Lutherans were still dependent on European universities for clergy.

The key figure in the founding of the first Lutheran colleges was a young German Lutheran pietist named Samuel Schmucker. He was educated in the United States at the University of Pennsylvania and later studied at Princeton Seminary. The combination of his American education, pietism, and sympathy to some aspects of Reformed theology, made him the ideal person to catalyze Lutheran higher education in America.⁴⁸

The institution that Schmucker helped to found is actually two institutions; Gettysburg College and Seminary.⁴⁹ Because the German gymnasium model was used for so many levels of Lutheran schools, it can be hard to keep all the institutional permutations clear. Like Gettysburg, almost all were founded with an academy that provided preparation for students to enter the college and eventually the Seminary.

Schmucker was passionate about the Lutheran confessional identity, but as an American he was also a pragmatist. There would be many battles over how much of the language and customs needed to be preserved at each new Lutheran institution. But Schmucker made it clear that he wanted the institution to conform to the nonsectarian character of other American colleges.

Schmucker's expressed intent that the college should be "unsectarian in instruction," though under Lutheran auspices, reflected not only his personal conviction, but also the common emphasis in the founding of collegiate

⁴⁸ Solberg, 53.

⁴⁹ Gettysburg Seminary has now merged with the Lutheran School of Theology, Philadelphia to become United Lutheran Seminary. "United Lutheran Seminary Launches Presidential Search — Gettysburg Seminary," accessed February 24, 2017, <http://www.lts.edu/about-us/news/2016/presidential-search>.

institutions by Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Reformed and others. Only in the 1840s and 1850s did the “era of good feelings” among American denominations begin to break down into competitive and often destructive rivalries.⁵⁰

It is more than a bit ironic that nearly all American Lutheran colleges and universities were founded to train clergy, considering Luther’s criticism of that same singular focus in the medieval universities. But after the founding of Gettysburg, a number of Lutheran schools, including Thiel College which was just on the other side of the state, were founded with a mandate to train more clergy. Gettysburg proved to be an incredibly effective incubator for Lutheran higher education. Within the span of a hundred years, fifty-two of its alumni became College presidents, and three-hundred-eighty-six graduates served as professors.⁵¹

The opportunity for so many graduates to become leaders in Lutheran higher education was hastened by increasing Lutheran immigration, particularly the arrival of Scandinavian and additional German emigrants. The increasing diversity of American Lutheranism, coupled with theological disagreements, was what drove the proliferation of Lutheran colleges and universities. Just before the Civil War, battle lines had clearly been drawn between so called *American Lutherans* and *Old Lutherans*.⁵²

The American Lutherans were actually the original immigrants who had adapted to life in the United States. Many had abandoned German and other European languages in favor of English. They were also more pragmatic than the new arrivals. In contrast, the

⁵⁰ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 58.

⁵¹ Solberg, 62.

⁵² Solberg, 62.

Old Lutherans who were arriving held fast to the confessional principles of Lutheranism, particularly the unaltered Augsburg confession. They also insisted that the church needed to keep the old languages alive.⁵³

This battle moved westward from Pennsylvania into Ohio where two German Lutheran schools, Capital and Wittenberg, were founded “less than 50 miles apart and within 5 years of one another.”⁵⁴ Capital represented the Old Lutheran tradition while Wittenberg was the vanguard for the westward movement of the American Lutherans. This pattern of Lutheran institutions being founded in proximity to one another rather than cooperatively persisted until the twentieth century. The lack of cooperation was driven by ethnic and theological differences seen as insurmountable.

Lutherans were often caught with a foot in both worlds throughout early American history. Non-Lutheran scholars have often missed the existence of the American Lutherans, focusing only on the ethnic and theological isolationism of the Old Lutherans.⁵⁵ In reality there was an ongoing conflict within American Lutheranism about the proper degree of assimilation.

The picture did become more complicated as Scandinavian immigrants began to arrive in larger numbers. There was some cooperation between German and Scandinavian Lutherans on the frontiers of civilization, most notably in Illinois. It seems as if early Lutheran immigrants were only able to cooperate when necessity demanded it.

⁵³ Solberg, 62.

⁵⁴ Solberg, 64.

⁵⁵ Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 100–101.

An ambitious project in Illinois almost pulled off the unthinkable feat of uniting several different Scandinavian and German populations in the founding of a new university. One of the peculiarities of American Lutheran higher education is that, despite its heavy reliance on European models, it has never produced a truly comprehensive university as is the norm in Europe.

The desire to establish a Lutheran university in the European tradition from which so many pioneer Lutheran educators have emerged has been voiced repeatedly but never realized. The divided character of the Lutheran constituency in North America, both in language and theology, has been at least partially responsible. Also, the early preoccupation of Lutherans with the preparation of the clergy led them instead to stress undergraduate studies in the classics and the liberal arts.⁵⁶

This almost changed on June 2, 1853 when Illinois State University opened its doors in Springfield, Illinois. Despite the name, this was from the beginning a Lutheran enterprise that united German, Swedish, and Norwegian immigrants. The experiment lasted sixteen years before ethnic and theological tensions divided the institution.

The Swedes and Norwegians left the university because of a perception that the institution was not orthodox enough. This group eventually went on to found Augustana College in Rock Island that eventually split along ethnic lines as well, with the Swedes remaining in Illinois, and the Norwegians pushing further west to form a second Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD.

Out of these efforts in Illinois eventually three other colleges were formed. Carthage College and Midland University were founded by German Lutherans, while Augsburg University in Minneapolis was organized by Norwegians. Although Illinois

⁵⁶ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 163.

State University does not survive to the present day, its legacy as the launching pad for five Lutheran colleges is quite impressive.

The pattern of establishing competing institutions continued as Lutherans headed west. In Minnesota and Iowa alone, there is a Swedish college (Gustavus Adolphus), a Danish college (Grand View), a German college (Wartburg) and four different Norwegian colleges (Luther, Augsburg, St. Olaf, Concordia). Sometimes it was not even ethnic differences. Pennsylvania has three different German Lutheran institutions; Gettysburg, Thiel, and Susquehanna.

The Norwegians are probably the best example of the competition within American Lutheranism. Just within this one ethnic group numerous traditions existed. Luther College represented the Norwegian confessional heritage, Augsburg the pietistic movement, and Concordia and St. Olaf were founded by private groups and later adopted by Norwegian synods. To make things even more complicated St. Olaf and Augsburg ended up in the same synod vying for the right to be its recognized College.⁵⁷

Amidst all this Norwegian turmoil, other Scandinavian groups operated less conspicuously. In addition to the aforementioned Grand View College in Des Moines, a different branch of Danish Lutherans founded the recently defunct Dana College in Blair, Nebraska. The Finns founded Suomi College, recently renamed Finlandia, in Upper Michigan. The Swedes added Bethany College in Kansas and Gustavus Adolphus in Minnesota to the now defunct Uppsala College in New York.

Not even the Civil War seemed to be able to halt the growth of Lutheran colleges. Although none were founded during the war itself, Gustavus Adolphus was born the year

⁵⁷ Hughes and Adrian, *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 83–86.

before and Thiel the year after the war ended. Most of the Lutheran population was concentrated in the North, often far removed from the conflict. There were exceptions including Newberry College (1856) in South Carolina which was destroyed by the Union Army, and Roanoke College (1842) in Virginia which was spared.

After the war, two more southern Lutheran colleges came into existence with Lenoir-Rhyne in North Carolina and Texas Lutheran in Seguin. Texas Lutheran ended up successfully uniting several different ethnic groups as it evolved, perhaps owing to its isolated nature. Pacific Lutheran University followed a somewhat similar path. Founded by Norwegians, it absorbed a defunct German Lutheran college from Spokane, and is now located in Tacoma, Washington.

This fecund era for Lutheran Higher education was about to come to a grinding halt with the first World War. And the colleges and universities that emerged after the Great War would begin to take on a different character.

War and Rebirth

American Lutheran churches have typically grown through procreation and immigration. By the early part of the twentieth century, the flow of Lutheran immigrants had slowed but ties with Europe remained strong. Lutherans still seemed to have a foot in both worlds, but that ended abruptly when the United States entered World War I.

Perhaps more than any other single factor World War I was responsible for forcing Lutheran churches in America to cut their cultural ties with Europe and become wholly American. A surge of national frenzy swept the country, calling into question anything “foreign”, especially persons or practices related to Germany.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 285–86.

The Second World War of course intensified the separation, particularly for German colleges. It has only been in the last thirty to forty years that German Lutheran colleges have reclaimed their ethnic heritage after years of downplaying it.

After the first World War, Lutheran colleges entered a period of revitalization that led to more cooperation across ethnic boundaries and the educational renewal of existing institutions. Wagner College in New York and Valparaiso University in Indiana were emblematic of this transition.

Wagner was originally located in western New York with the same mission as most Lutheran colleges, preparing pastors. Due to financial difficulties, Wagner accepted an offer to move to Staten Island through financial incentives offered by a wealthy benefactor with the surname Wagner. They also began to expand their curriculum to appeal to a broader constituency.

Valparaiso was founded by local clergy from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod but currently exists as an independent Lutheran institution. Although it is not an ELCA school, it is worth mentioning because of its impact on the denomination. It is also important because it is one of the few places where LCMS and ELCA interests still coincide.⁵⁹

Valparaiso was founded as a Methodist school but then sold to a private investor. For some time, it functioned successfully until World War I created financial difficulties.

⁵⁹ Ries, "Correlations between Strategic Planning and Financial Performance: A Focus on Lutheran Colleges and Universities," 44–45. I've chosen to confine my historical research to the twenty-six institutions affiliated with the ELCA and the one independent Lutheran University in the interests of time. There are also nine Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod schools, one affiliated with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and one with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Dr. Ries is currently President of LCMS affiliated Concordia University – St. Paul.

Following the pattern of so many other Lutheran schools, a local group of LCMS clergy were the catalysts behind Valparaiso's rebirth as a Lutheran institution. Unlike many other Lutheran schools, its primary mission was to prepare lay people for their vocations in the world.

Many other existing Lutheran colleges began to expand their curriculum after World War I, finally recognizing the importance of educating more than just future clergy. Perhaps because they were absorbed with these curricular transitions there were no ELCA affiliated institutions founded after World War I until California Lutheran University in 1959. Once again, a local group of Lutherans was the driving force behind the founding of the school, but from the beginning it was a cooperative venture across different ethnic populations. Since CLU's establishment no additional ELCA Lutheran colleges have been founded.

Part of the reason for this fact is that after World War II, it was all Lutherans could do to make room for all the returning servicemen and women on the GI bill. This was a financial boon to institutions that had long focused on narrow populations. It also forced the colleges to begin to grapple with issues of diversity, even if it was mainly religious differences at first.

The children of the World War II generation proved to be much less "silent" than their parents. The so-called "baby boomers" arrived on campus in great numbers which was good for the schools. They also arrived with many challenging questions and concerns about the world they were inheriting from their parents. The anti-war protests of the 1960s and cultural revolution impacted Lutheran colleges in significant ways. They responded to these challenges with creative programs like the para college at St. Olaf and

the Chrysalis program at Wartburg. These educational experiments allowed students more freedom and they also began to demand more autonomy in other areas of life.

It would have been very easy for the colleges to respond to these changes in a dogmatic fashion, and in some cases they did. But slowly and surely the changes began to occur. Towards the end of the 1960s into the early 1970s the colleges began to do two seemingly contradictory things. They eliminated mandatory chapel and hired campus pastors. Up until this point ordained members of the religion faculty had served as de facto campus pastors, and most of the faculty were Lutheran. The move toward specialized campus ministry was part of a broader response to the perceived loss of religious identity and mission at Protestant colleges and universities.⁶⁰

This changed dramatically in the 1970s. California Lutheran is an example of the change in religious identity that nearly every Lutheran college faculty underwent at this time. At the beginning of the 1970s, sixty percent of the faculty were Lutheran; eight years later it was only forty-five percent.⁶¹ The percentage of Lutheran students at all Lutheran colleges had begun declining earlier even as enrollment was increasing. “While enrollments at Lutheran colleges increased by 54% between 1960 and 1970, the percentage of Lutheran students in attendance declined from 66% to 49%.”⁶²

These trends have continued to the present with the percentage of Lutheran students steadily declining as the church contracts and the higher education market

⁶⁰ Kathy Winings, “Campus Ministries and New Paradigms for Educating Religiously,” *Religious Education* 94, no. 3 (1999): 330.

⁶¹ Hughes and Adrian, *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 111.

⁶² Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 332.

becomes more competitive. Increased pressure from public universities has been one of the necessitating factors in this shift.⁶³ Most Lutheran schools are also tuition driven because they do not have large endowments. At the same time, church support for higher education has almost entirely disappeared. Many Lutheran institutions responded to these challenges beginning in the 1980s by downplaying their religious affiliations altogether in an effort to appeal to more students.

An unintended result of the hiring of campus pastors has been the siloing of religious faith. Changing student and faculty demographics have certainly also contributed to the compartmentalizing of religion on campus, but the perception that there are now professional religious people on campus to handle faith issues has contributed to a growing indifference toward the college's religious identity in the general population.

Conclusion: Secularization or Reformation?

Much of the conversation about Christian higher education in the latter half of the twentieth century has focused on the secularization of the academy.⁶⁴ This conversation has mostly happened among Evangelical scholars with a Reformed theological perspective.

By the late twentieth century, even at most church-related colleges, secular modes of thought had come to dominate over the Christian worldview. Students of the subject use terms like “nonaffirming colleges,” “Protestant-change colleges,” and

⁶³ Solberg, 337.

⁶⁴ See Burchaell, *The Dying of the Light*. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*.

“Post-Protestant colleges” to describe these previously Christian institutions that have become largely nonreligious in nature.⁶⁵

The Reformed concern with preserving a Christian worldview is not necessarily the same as a dialectical Lutheran understanding of higher education in which faith and reason stand in tension. In the Reformed model secularization is an enemy that must be resisted. For Lutherans secularization can exist in tension with religious identity and mission.

The impulse to join in this secularization conversation has still understandably been strong among Lutherans because we live in a culture where the Reformed vision of Christian higher education is dominant. Engaging in this broader conversation in American Christian higher education carries on the tradition of Muhlenberg and Schmucker who were not hesitant to engage the theological voices around them, even those that were not explicitly Lutheran.

It is important for Lutherans to keep our voices in this conversation because we have some unique things to contribute, while at the same time remaining open to the learning we can gain from both Reformed/Evangelical and secular traditions. It is also critical that we view this through our own unique history. Although it certainly has not been as acrimonious as the original controversy, the conversation about the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges has overtones of the clash between the American and Old Lutherans of the eighteenth century.

One of the most significant contributions to the conversation within Lutheranism and beyond was Robert Benne’s book *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and*

⁶⁵ Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 113.

*Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions.*⁶⁶ Although only two of the institutions profiled (St. Olaf and Valparaiso) are Lutheran, Benne was a professor at ELCA affiliated Roanoke College and is a lifelong Lutheran. He argues that the process of secularization is real, even if it is not as hopeless as some critics contend.

There are, I will argue, a number of places on the continuum between a fully Christian college and a fully secularized one. More colleges find themselves in the gray areas between the brightness of the fully Christian college and the darkness of full secularization than find themselves on either pole.⁶⁷

Benne outlines that continuum later on in the book (see table 1, next page).

⁶⁶ Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*.

⁶⁷ Benne, 13.

Table 1: Robert Benne’s Typology of Church-Related Colleges

	Orthodox	Critical-mass	Intentionally Pluralist	Accidentally pluralist
Major Divide	The Christian vision as the organizing paradigm		Secular sources as the organizing paradigm	
Public Relevance of Christian Vision	Pervasive from a shared point of view	Privileged voice in an ongoing conversation	Assured voice in an ongoing conversation	Random or absent in an ongoing conversation
Public Rhetoric	Unabashed invitation for fellow believers to an intentionally Christian centered enterprise	Straightforward presentation as a Christian school but inclusive of others	Presentation as a liberal arts school with a Christian heritage	Presentation as a secular school with little or no allusion to Christian heritage
Membership Requirements	Near 100% with orthodoxy tests	Critical mass in all facets	Intentional representation	Haphazard sprinkling
Religion/theology department	Large, with theology privileged	Large, with theology as flagship	Small, mixed department, some theology, but mostly religious studies	Small, exclusively religious studies
Religion/theology required courses	All courses affected by shared religious perspective	Two or three, with dialogical effort in many other courses	One course in general education	Choice in distribution or an elective
Chapel	Required in large church at protected time daily	Voluntary at high quality services in large nave at protected time daily	Voluntary at unprotected times, with low attendance	For few, on special occasions
Ethos	Overt piety of sponsoring tradition	Dominant atmosphere of sponsoring tradition—rituals and habits	Open minority from sponsoring tradition finding private niche	Reclusive and unorganized minority from sponsoring tradition
			Dominantly secular atmosphere	
Support by church	Indispensable financial support and majority of students from sponsoring tradition	Important direct and crucial indirect financial support; at least 50% of students	Important focused indirect support; small minority of students	Token indirect support; student numbers no longer recorded
Governance	Owned and governed by church or its official representatives	Majority of board from tradition, some official representatives	Minority of board from tradition by unofficial agreement	Token membership from tradition
		College or university is autonomously owned and governed		

According to Benne’s typology every ELCA college would fit within the “critical mass” to “accidentally pluralist” categories on the continuum. His typology is a very

helpful starting point for conversation, voicing concern about losing religious identity in a rapidly changing world. Benne argues that the future of Lutheran higher education is dependent on an institutional commitment to its identity and mission, particularly in the areas of hiring and student recruitment.

Another important voice in the discussion about the recent history of Lutheran higher education in the United States is that of the late Tom Christenson, longtime Philosophy professor at Capital University. Christenson is more representative of the American Lutheran position, trying to find ways to reinterpret the tradition in the midst of a changing world. His book *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* has found more agreement within ELCA college and university circles than Benne's book.⁶⁸

Christenson distinguishes between two possible models for Lutheran colleges and universities. The *for us, by us* model preserves the original purpose of Lutheran higher education in the United States, to produce pastors and teachers to lead the church. Christenson notes the shift that nearly all Lutheran institutions underwent as their curriculum expanded and campuses diversified. As the gymnasium model of pre-theological education gave way, many lamented the loss of this past, and concluded these institutions had lost their Lutheran identity.⁶⁹

The second model Christenson suggests is the *vocation model*, which views the college or university as “a service (through the education of persons) of the deep needs of the world.”⁷⁰ This model became very popular because of the Lilly Foundation's grants

⁶⁸ Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*.

⁶⁹ Christenson, *Who Needs a Lutheran College?: Values Vision Vocation*, 22–24.

⁷⁰ Christenson, 24.

for the “theological exploration of vocation” in the early 2000s. Many credit these grants for reconnecting institutions to their religious identity and mission.⁷¹ It has been suggested that vocation may be the most important task of all educational institutions in the twenty-first century.⁷²

Christenson’s writing was intended for a broader audience but may have resonated more specifically with faculty. Ernest Simmons also made an important contribution to faculty understanding of Lutheran Higher Education with his book *Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction for Faculty*.⁷³ Simmons’ book appeared at a time when the transition from a predominantly Lutheran to a non-Lutheran faculty was accelerating.

Darrell Jodock has been another important moderating voice in the contemporary discussion of Lutheran higher education. He argues for Lutheran higher education as a “third path” between sectarian institutions that require theological orthodoxy and secular colleges where faith is not an explicit part of the curriculum. This typology is helpful for its accuracy and relatability. Jodock acknowledges that non-Lutherans may at times feel like outsiders on a Lutheran campus.⁷⁴ This is an important challenge for Lutheran higher education as we seek rootedness in a tradition but an openness to all. Benne’s model in particular seems to tolerate the presence of non-Lutherans on campus but does not explicitly embrace their contributions.

⁷¹ Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 213.

⁷² Clydesdale, *The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students about Vocation*.

⁷³ Simmons, *Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction for Faculty*.

⁷⁴ Darrel Jodock in Jason Mahn, *The Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2016), 98.

In the next chapter, we will look at the adaptive challenges all colleges and universities face in the United States, and particularly how Lutheran schools are dealing with these trials. To conclude this chapter on the history of Lutheran higher education I offer a quote from the eminent Lutheran historian Richard Solberg whose work I have leaned on heavily in this chapter. Reflecting on the state of Lutheran higher education he writes,

The most influential educational vehicle of that (Lutheran) tradition in North America has been the Lutheran college, an institution not native to Germany or Scandinavia but adapted from the American environment...The initial focus of Lutheran higher education in America was...enlarged in accordance with Luther's doctrines of vocation and the priesthood of all believers...⁷⁵

Despite the many competing intellectual, ethnic, and environmental challenges the Lutheran college/university persists to this day. There are currently thirty-nine Lutheran colleges and universities in the United States. Lutheran higher education will need to bring all its adaptive experience to bear on the challenges it faces as a new Reformation transforms our culture.

⁷⁵ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 349.

CHAPTER THREE: ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP AND CHALLENGES

American higher education finds itself in a moment of crisis as the twenty first century unfolds. There is a great deal of uncertainty because of disruptive pressures from new models of educational delivery, growing distrust of the pricing model, and financial concerns. Church colleges belong to not one, but two, sectors undergoing massive changes. As one Lutheran college president recently reminded the faculty and staff, “we are in a risky business.”¹

Adaptive Leadership Challenges

Leadership is a critical commodity in such times of crisis, and a big part of leadership is correctly diagnosing the challenges. Leadership theorists Ron Heifetz and Martin Linsky argue that in the current environment it is essential to distinguish between two types of leadership crises: technical problems and adaptive challenges.

A technical problem is when an organization faces a challenge to which it already has a tried and true solution. You bring in an expert who says, “simply apply xyz strategy to the problem” and *voila*, the problem is resolved. Technical problems are the easiest kinds of leadership challenges to face.

¹ President Darrell Colson, Wartburg College. Budget update meeting 11.23.16.

Increasingly, the problems that organizations are facing are more complex and multifaceted. Old solutions do not seem to be working any longer, and there is no magic bullet that will make it all better. Heifetz and Linsky call these “adaptive challenges.”

But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high. We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community.²

The following table illustrates the differences between technical problems and adaptive challenges.³

Table 2: Technical Problems vs Adaptive Challenges

<u>Technical Problem</u>	<u>Adaptive Challenge</u>
-Easy to identify	-Difficult to identify
-Can be solved by expertise/authority	-People close to challenge needed to solve it
-Requires small changes within organizational boundaries	-Requires changes in a number of areas which may cross organizational boundaries
-People are receptive to technical solution	-People resist acknowledgement of adaptive challenges
-Solutions can be implemented fast and by authority	-Solutions emerge from experimentation and discovery, take longer to implement

Adaptive Challenges for Higher Education

There is little doubt that American colleges and universities find themselves facing a slew of adaptive challenges, yet they continue to be misdiagnosed as technical problems because until relatively recently times were good. The future looked so bright for American colleges and universities at the turn of the century that we did not see the warning signs until it was too late.

² Heifetz and Linsky, “Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading” Loc. 213.

³ Sandeep Dahiya, “The Work of Leadership,” *Enlightenment: Trusting Thoughts That Matter* (blog), accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.enlightenment.ind.in/writers-corner/2016/01/work-of-leadership/>.

Higher education analyst Jeff Selingo calls the period from 1999-2009 *the lost decade* because American colleges and universities were lulled into a sense of complacency by relatively good market conditions.⁴ Students were plentiful, endowments were growing, and colleges were expanding to meet that demand. Things came to a screeching halt during the great recession and a host of other changes.

When the great recession hit in 2008 the market began to change. Endowments income decreased with investment values, causing even some of the most elite institutions like Harvard to do some belt tightening.⁵ But that did not affect the majority of institutions who depend on tuition revenue rather than endowment income for financial survival. But as time went on the cost of higher education continued to rise while household income remained flat or even declined.⁶ At many private tuition driven institutions, families were simply priced out of the market.

At first, colleges and universities tried to continue operating as usual. More pressure was placed on admission departments to bring in the class and everyone waited for things to go back to normal. This is a classic example of the primary cause of leadership failure, treating an adaptive challenge as a technical problem.

Indeed, the single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify—in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector—is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.⁷

⁴ Selingo, *College Unbound* Loc. 219.

⁵ Clayton M. Christensen and Henry J. Eyring, *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 189.

⁶ Christensen and Eyring, 13.

⁷ Heifetz and Linsky, “*Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*” Loc. 228.

It may have taken the higher education community some time to accept that they were facing an adaptive challenge, but there are few today who would disagree with that assessment, even if they remain uncertain how to address adaptive challenges. But what exactly contributed to this new state of affairs? David Breneman authored a prescient book in 1994 that outlined six pressures facing the higher education market in general and liberal arts colleges in particular.⁸

Shifting Demographics

The first challenge is shifting demographics. Most colleges and universities in the United States are *tuition driven*, meaning they depend on the tuition and fees of students in order to operate. Very few institutions have sizeable enough endowments to weather disruptions in the student population and the fees they bring in. The challenge for tuition driven institution is that there simply are not enough high school graduates to go around. The number of high school graduates in the United States peaked in 2008 and will not return to pre-2008 levels until 2022.⁹

Lutheran colleges and universities face additional pressures as the church begins to age and shrink. Fewer young adults make their college decision based on the denominational affiliation of their school. One of the contributing factors to this phenomenon is that most prospective students do not find faith all that important. According to Kendra Creasy Dean and the National Study on Youth and Religion,

⁸ David W. Breneman, *Liberal Arts Colleges: Thriving, Surviving, or Endangered?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), 15–17.

⁹ Selingo, *College Unbound*, 65.

teenagers consider faith to be something “nice” that can “help them through tough times.” But most of the time it operates in the background.

Three out of four American teenagers claim to be Christians, and most are affiliated with a religious organization—but only about half consider it very important, and fewer than half actually practice their faith as a regular part of their lives.¹⁰

Dean argues that the reason teenagers view their faith in these terms is that it is what they have been taught in church and at home. This pattern continues in college when many first-year students put their faith away in “identity lockboxes.”¹¹ Critics often blame colleges and universities for the decreasing faithfulness of college students, but actually the rate of attrition among non-college going young adults is even higher.¹² Nonetheless, many would argue that if faith is not going to bring in prospective students, and many of them are not going to participate in college, then why hold onto this whole Lutheran college identity?

Rising Costs and Tuition Discounting

The second pressure that Breneman identifies is the ever-increasing cost of attending college. It has become clear that colleges and universities are reaching the limits of what the market will bear in terms of rising tuition costs. Concerns about the cost of higher education are nothing new. In the early years of American higher education

¹⁰ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.

¹¹ Timothy T. Clydesdale, *The First Year out: Understanding American Teens after High School* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 211.

¹² Jacobsen and Jacobsen., *No Longer Invisible: Religion In University Education* Loc. 1635.

churches attempted to keep the costs of tuition down.¹³ Tuition began to rise rapidly during the 1960s as colleges and universities attempted to accommodate the large baby boomer generation by expanding their student bodies.¹⁴

Although most colleges are dependent on tuition revenue, expanding the size of the student body to bring in more revenue is costly. Institutions do not always plan for it properly, or projections of continued growth are disrupted by unforeseen factors.¹⁵

A third challenge is the practice of tuition discounting. In order to attract student's colleges and universities that are not among the elite institutions are forced to offer deep discounts through grants and merit aid. In many ways, this has become a sort of circular arms race in which schools lower their profit margins by competing with one another on price.

The irony in even the most reasonable uses of tuition discounts and merit awards is that they prove self-defeating. Once the first few colleges have adopted these methods, competing colleges feel compelled to do the same. The result is something of a price war in which few institutions end up gaining an advantage, since their competitors employ the same tactics.¹⁶

Tuition discounting is like being caught on a merry-go-round. Once colleges get on it is almost impossible to get off. Colleges and universities are also barred by antitrust from discussing a cap on tuition. Such action would be considered collusion.

¹³ Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 49.

¹⁴ Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*, 321.

¹⁵ Ries, "Correlations between Strategic Planning and Financial Performance: A Focus on Lutheran Colleges and Universities," 10.

¹⁶ Bok, *Higher Education in America*, 139.

Faculty and Fundraising

The fourth pressure for colleges and universities is recruiting and retaining quality faculty. This is a difficult task for any college or university, particularly in difficult financial times. An added challenge for Lutheran colleges is hiring and retaining faculty that understand and support the mission of Lutheran higher education. As the number of Lutherans continues to decline nationwide, finding those with the proper qualifications becomes trickier. The decline in number of Lutherans on college faculties has already been mentioned, but it seems the level of understanding of Lutheran theology and its educational mission is also lacking.¹⁷

Eric Childers points to the increasing professionalization of the faculty as another point of contention. As faculty become more tied to their particular disciplines Childers believes that their allegiance to the institution and its mission suffers.¹⁸

Fifth is the continued struggle of tuition driven colleges to find greater financial security through fundraising. As mentioned most American colleges and universities have very modest endowments. Harvard is the wealthiest university in the country with an endowment of approximately thirty-seven billion dollars.¹⁹ In contrast most Lutheran colleges have endowments of under 100 million dollars.²⁰

¹⁷ Hughes and Adrian, *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 119.

¹⁸ Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*, 24–28.

¹⁹ Farran Powell, "10 Universities With The Biggest Endowments." *US News & World Report*. September 28, 2017. accessed November 24, 2017. <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/the-short-list-college/articles/2017-09-28/10-universities-with-the-biggest-endowments>.

²⁰ "College and University Endowments 2015 Edition (2013 to 2014 Numbers)," National Association of College and University Business Officers, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.hughcalc.org/endow.cgi?state=Minnesota&state2=NONE>.

Increased Competition with Public Schools

The sixth and final pressure outlined by Breneman is increasing competition with public universities. In the 1950s an equal number of students attended public and private institutions, by the 1970s it was closer to eighty percent public versus twenty percent private.²¹ In 2011 only sixteen percent of US students attended private colleges.²²

The reasons for this shift are multifaceted, but of course, price is the biggest factor. Whether or not students at private colleges actually pay that much more than their public-school counterparts, the “sticker shock” of a private college is often enough to preclude students from even looking at these colleges.

An added pressure in states like Iowa comes from the governing boards of state institutions. Alarmed by rising percentages of out of state and international students at its universities the three public universities in Iowa were instructed by the board of regents to begin aggressively recruiting in state students.²³ This is occurring at a time when the pool of high school graduates in the state is shrinking and the number of US college graduates has fallen to critical levels.²⁴ Recent cuts in state funding for higher education

²¹ “College and University Endowments 2015 Edition (2013 to 2014 Numbers),” National Association of College and University Business Officers, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.hughcalc.org/endow.cgi?state=Minnesota&state2=NONE>.

²² Lynn O’Shaughnessy, “20 Surprising Higher Education Facts,” *US News & World Report*, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/the-college-solution/2011/09/06/20-surprising-higher-education-facts>.

²³ Ry Rivard, “As Iowa’s Largest Public University Scrambles for Students, Private Colleges Worry They Will Suffer,” *Inside Higher Ed*, accessed November 29, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/10/08/iowas-largest-public-university-scrambles-students-private-colleges-worry-they-will>.

²⁴ Bok, *Higher Education in America*, 220.

have imperiled this new emphasis on in state recruiting.²⁵ The decision was ultimately reversed for current students and the incoming First-Year class.²⁶ It is uncertain what effect the loss of these scholarship funds may have in future years. The uncertainty may convince some students to give private colleges and universities a second look.

Continuing Disruptions

A more recent analysis of the challenges facing higher education comes from Jeff Selingo, editor at large of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, arguably the most respected publication in the industry. Selingo identifies five disruptive forces facing higher education, many of which overlap with Breneman. As a more recent publication (2013) *College Unbound* also covers the massive technological disruptions that Breneman could not have anticipated.

Institutional Debt, Decreased Funding, and the Disappearance of Full Pay Students

The first disruption is a “sea of red ink” that colleges accrued during the lost decade.²⁷ During that time period when students were plentiful, many colleges saw an opportunity to secure their financial futures by doing more of what had always worked, increasing tuition revenue. In an effort to attract more students, many schools went

²⁵ Jeff Charis-Carlson, “University of Iowa Pulls Back Scholarships Affecting Nearly 2,500 Resident Students,” *Des Moines Register*, accessed February 25, 2017, <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/education/2017/02/22/iowa-pulls-back-scholarships-affecting-nearly-2500-resident-students/98263292/>.

²⁶ Deirdre Baker, “Students Appreciate Iowa’s Scholarship Reversal,” *The Quad-City Times*, accessed March 11, 2017, http://qctimes.com/news/local/education/students-appreciate-iowa-s-scholarship-reversal/article_fd55fd7f-bf5f-5d92-b888-95e3d571a3b0.html.

²⁷ Selingo, *College Unbound*, 58.

deeply into debt financing new residence halls, athletic facilities, classrooms, and the biggest red herring; attempting to move up to Division I athletics.

Since 2007 the number of colleges and universities that are considered to be under financial stress has increased by a third. Net tuition, the actual money colleges receive after financial aid and recruitment expenses, is falling or flat at seventy-three percent of the colleges in the country²⁸

A second disruption for colleges and universities is the diminishment of state and federal funding for higher education. Although this affects public schools more than private institutions it has ripple effects throughout the sector.

For the last twenty-five years...states have been slashing higher education appropriations during each downturn in the economy and never fully restoring the money when good times returned. This retreat hastened after the financial collapse in late 2008.²⁹

As public schools lose funding they look to add out-of-state and international students who pay more than the in-state students whose fees are subsidized by the state.³⁰ In states like Iowa this has been a topic of concern for lawmakers who, as previously mentioned, insisted on a renewed emphasis on in-state recruiting.

Third, the number of full paying students is decreasing. For years, many colleges, particularly the more elite, have been subsidizing the financial aid they offer to needier students by enrolling those who were able to pay full price. Less elite institutions do not have to worry as much about finding student who have the ability to pay full price *and*

²⁸ Selingo, 59.

²⁹ Selingo, 62.

³⁰ Selingo, 64. For example, the number of Chinese students studying in the United States tripled during a three-year period. Many of these students are either independently wealthy or receive subsidies from their government to attend college in the US.

high ACT/SAT scores, but most of the elite do. It is estimated that in a recent year the number of students who fit that category in the Northeastern United States, where the majority of the most elite schools are located, was just nine hundred and ninety-six.³¹ The competition for these students of course means that less elite colleges have fewer full paying students and more needy students.

Disruption and Disillusionment

The fourth factor is where the influence of technology begins to assert itself. Online education has made it easier for students to *unbundle* their education. Traditional colleges and universities have evolved into very complex businesses with multiple functions. Teaching, research, and preparing students for life are interrelated functions but very different business models. Online innovators are unbundling these services by offering students the opportunity to take classes without paying to support the research and life preparation functions of a traditional university.³² These students are also able to avoid paying the costs for student activities, residence halls, athletics, advising, etc. that on campus students pay.³³ This sets up a conundrum for colleges and universities. There are fewer students interested in the residential campus experience because of the cost, but those who are living on campus are there because of the services that make it costly.

In addition to the online providers that are providing courses for credit, there are a host of free classes that as of yet are not accepted for credit. Khan Academy is probably

³¹ Selingo, 65.

³² Selingo, 67.

³³ Christensen and Eyring, *The Innovative University*, 134.

the best known of these alternatives, but many universities are also experimenting with MOOC's (Massive Open Online Courses) that are open to everyone. Developing and teaching online courses is much less expensive and time intensive for these providers who do not need to worry about complex governing structures, accreditation, and the cost of maintaining brick and mortar facilities.³⁴ Although the massive hype about MOOC's has perhaps been overstated, if they are ever given the opportunity to provide real course credit, it could be fatal for traditional higher education.³⁵

The final disruptive force is the "growing value gap," meaning the perception that the value of a college education is not worth the money. Selingo (like Breneman) points to the rapid increase in tuition at American colleges and universities, "even with financial aid, the amount families pay for college has skyrocketed more than 400 percent since 1982."³⁶ Coupled with growing disillusionment with the quality of higher education this is a lethal challenge.

There is ample evidence that, in strictly cost benefit terms, a college education is worth the investment. A college graduate will make eighty-two percent more than a high school graduate over their lifetime.³⁷ But for families struggling to pay the bills right now that may be little compensation. New options like Mission U, which offers a guaranteed

³⁴ For further reading on the economic advantages of online education over traditional education see Christensen and Eyring, *The Innovative University*.

³⁵ Selingo, *College Unbound*, 68–69.

³⁶ Selingo, 71.

³⁷ "College Graduates Earn 84% More than High School Grads, Study Says," *LA Times Blogs - Money & Company* (blog), August 5, 2011, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/money_co/2011/08/college-graduates-pay.html.

debt free education in a year and job placement, will become more attractive to those in this demographic.³⁸

Additional Factors

An outdated business model is one reason that colleges are struggling, but they also have other pressures to contend with. Like every industry, colleges have been affected by rising healthcare costs. It is estimated that forty percent of college budgets go toward employee benefits including healthcare.³⁹ Forty percent of college students arrive on campus unprepared for college and needing remedial education which is an extra cost to the college and sometimes the student if it delays graduation or causes them to dropout.⁴⁰

There is also an increasing demand for better facilities and non-academic services from students and parents. This has led to a massive increase in college administrators who are often taking on responsibilities that were once handled by faculty. Faculty no longer have the time to devote to these pursuits because accrediting agencies and institutions expect them to publish, teach heavier course loads, and advise scores of students.

The easy availability of federal loans has also contributed to the problem. Because students can borrow from the federal government often at a subsidized rate, colleges and universities have not been constrained by the market.⁴¹ The fact that the federal

³⁸ "MissionU," accessed July 8, 2017, <https://www.missionu.com/>.

³⁹ Selingo, *College Unbound*, 27.

⁴⁰ Selingo, 93.

⁴¹ Selingo, 28–29.

government offers more loans than grants to students, and states are providing less support, marks a philosophical shift of the financial burden to students and families. This in turn has made education more of a *private good* and turned students into consumers.⁴²

There are also some unique challenges for Lutheran colleges and universities that are worth mentioning. The first is the declining support of denominational bodies. Most Lutheran colleges and universities began through the efforts of local congregations and were financially independent. Over time they were gradually adopted by different Lutheran church bodies, and finally all gathered together within the ELCA. In fact, Lutheran colleges did not begin serious fundraising efforts until the mid-twentieth century because it was reasoned that the church was their endowment. Over the years as membership has decreased, denominational financial support has been reduced to nothing. In addition, the staffing support for colleges and universities in the ELCA church wide office has decreased to two positions.

Faith and Learning

Lacking a clearly articulated educational philosophy is another challenge for Lutherans. ELCA colleges and universities were originally founded with a narrow focus on educating Lutheran pastors and teachers for immigrant communities. When their focus broadened to include more areas of study and a broader population, their existence was buttressed by the de facto Christian hegemony known as Christendom. There was little perceived need to articulate a clear sense of religious identity and mission.

Because there seemed to be little need for theological articulation of each college's identity and mission, there was little or none. Because there seemed

⁴² Ries, "Correlations between Strategic Planning and Financial Performance: A Focus on Lutheran Colleges and Universities," 9.

little need for each denomination's specific tradition of thought to be taught, it wasn't. Because the basic moral meanings of the larger culture seemed to undergird what each college itself was attempting to do, little effort was made to project a specifically Christian moral vision that was more than a bit countercultural.⁴³

Lutheran colleges and universities are still trying to define their relationship with the broader culture in the emerging context of post-Christian North America. As previously mentioned, there are a number of competing purposes and intellectual influences at work within Lutheran higher education. Whether the mission of a Lutheran college is to prepare pastors, laypeople or both has pretty much been decided in favor of inclusivity. The battles between pietism and confessionalism still persist although in different forms.

But this uncertainty has made it difficult for ELCA colleges to articulate a common educational philosophy. The fact that the dialectical relationship between faith and learning is not easy to fit into a tagline has made things problematic, as has the untested assumption that prospective students will be turned off by the college's faith affiliation. This lack of articulated identity and mission is an adaptive challenge for Lutheran colleges.

Another challenge for Lutheran colleges and universities is the declining influence of faith among the school's leadership. It was once common for a pastor to be the president of a Lutheran school; currently there are no pastors serving as ELCA presidents. Granted that is to some extent a reflection of the increasingly specialized nature of higher education leadership, but many ELCA colleges do not have any

⁴³ Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*, 35.

executive leaders (President's, Vice President's, Dean's) that are clergy or theologically trained. The number of faculty from the Lutheran tradition has also declined, as has the presence of clergy and church representatives on the governing boards of these institutions.⁴⁴

This brings us back to the issue of adaptive leadership at Lutheran colleges and universities. What is the role of leadership in this volatile context?

Adaptive Leadership

The importance of leadership for the future direction of Lutheran higher education cannot be overstated. Eric Childers notes in his study of three ELCA colleges and universities, "More than any other factor, the leadership of governing boards, presidents, and other senior administrators was essential in preserving or diminishing organizational Lutheran identity in all three schools in this study."⁴⁵

Although I agree with Childers' assertion that senior leadership is critical for the future of Lutheran colleges, I find the word "preservation" a bit problematic. In light of the adaptive challenges facing Lutheran colleges I do not think "preserving" a Lutheran identity is an option. Just as Luther had to provide adaptive leadership that brought changes to the ecclesiastical world, the leaders of today's Lutheran college must do the same. The critical thing that Childers is getting at is whether the theological identity of Lutheran colleges will adapt and be expressed in fresh ways, or simply be sacrificed through accommodation to other forces deemed more important?

⁴⁴ Benne, 9.

⁴⁵ Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*, 253.

One of the primary roles of an adaptive leader is to persuade people to deal with the problems they do not want to face but doing it “at a rate they can absorb.”⁴⁶ The religious identity and mission of Lutheran colleges is one of the many adaptive challenges that leaders face in these uncertain times. Most of the time the issue is avoided or ignored. We are not sure what to do with it because we are afraid of upsetting or excluding anyone. While that is a laudable concern, it is not realistic. Adaptive leadership requires conversations that are sometimes painful, and inevitably, cause some disappointment for all. The question leaders of Lutheran colleges and universities must ask is, “Of all that we value, what is really most precious and what is expendable?”⁴⁷

Identity and Mission

Adaptive challenges cannot be addressed unless leaders and communities are willing to face them. Lutheran higher education faces all the challenges of American higher education, plus some unique ones.

Perhaps the biggest issue is how to understand our identity and mission in a post-Christian world. Lutheran colleges could attempt to recreate a nostalgic past when students were more plentiful and the chapel was full. Or, we could decide to simply ignore the issue and allow our religious identity and mission to slowly ebb away. The problem is that we are not currently dealing with the challenge. We need adaptive leaders to help us think about what is most important to us. Margaret Wheatley writes,

People need to be connected to the fundamental identity of the organization or community. Who are we? Who do we aspire to become? How shall we be

⁴⁶ Heifetz and Linsky, “Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading” Loc. 208.

⁴⁷ Heifetz and Linsky Loc. 208.

together? And people need to be connected to new information. What else do we need to know? Where is this information to be found?⁴⁸

Institutional identity is not something that can be established with a technical solution like expanded orientation for faculty about the faith mission of the college. Although that may be part of the solution it has been demonstrated that such programs alone provide little help.⁴⁹ The questions of identity have to be confronted at the very center of the community, and at the highest levels of leadership, or they will not have little lasting impact.

But what is it that keeps us from discerning and claiming our institutional identities? One of those has already been named, a lack of adaptive leadership that forces us to face reality. But we have a lot of dedicated leaders on our college campuses who work very hard for their institutions and genuinely want them to be successful. So, what else is getting in the way?

Espoused versus Perceived Identity and Mission

Organizational theorist Chris Argyris argues that one reason we have a difficult time with such conversations is because of a disconnect between what we say we believe, espoused theories, and what we act on, theories-in-use. “Espoused theory describes the reasons we give for our actions; theory-in-use describes the more complicated theory that explains how we actually behave.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 146.

⁴⁹ Maria Palmer, “Faculty Perceptions of Organizational Leadership At Christian Colleges And Universities with Missions of Servant Leadership” (Dallas Baptist University, 2011), 130.

⁵⁰ Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 20.

As they studied organizations, Argyris and his co-author Schön noticed that when individuals have conversations with others they often hold certain things back that influence their behavior. We do this not so much to keep the peace, as to protect our way of thinking from further scrutiny. We feel we know what is right but are afraid if we come out and say it others might disagree and begin to force us to reconsider our beliefs. Since human beings crave predictability and resist change, we try to deflect any opportunity for others to challenge what we think. Being part of any sort of community brings out the incongruities between espoused and perceived values.⁵¹

Model I Thinking

Espoused theories are outgrowths of what Argyris and Schön call “Model I” thinking which assumes that, “an organization is a dangerous place where you have to look out for yourself or someone may do you in.”⁵² This attitude unconsciously dictates what we discuss and what we keep to ourselves. It also leads to a host of other unhealthy behaviors, all in an effort to protect ourselves from scrutiny and defend our positions.

Model I tells individuals to craft their positions, evaluations, and attributions in ways that inhibit inquiries into them and tests of them with others' logic. The consequences of these Model I strategies are likely to be defensiveness, misunderstanding, and self-fulfilling and self-sealing processes.⁵³

⁵¹ Frances Hesselbein et al., eds., *The Community of the Future*, 1st edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), xiii.

⁵² Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 165.

⁵³ Chris Argyris, “Action Science and Organizational Learning,” *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 10, no. 6 (1995): 20.

I have seen this type of thinking at work in the struggles about the identity and mission of Lutheran colleges. On several different campuses, I have observed distinct groups who distrust the motives of others and feel they have things figured out.

On the one hand, you have community members who are convinced that the college's religious identity is a liability in an increasingly pluralistic age. On the other hand, you have defenders of the college's religious identity who believe that others are actively plotting to strip the college or university of any vestiges of religious identity or mission.

Rarely do these two groups actually admit their suspicions about the other or have honest and constructive conversation. An uneasy truce remains in place because we do not talk to one another openly about our concerns and continue to avoid the issue.

Model II Thinking

Organizations are not bound to follow this path of avoidance and dysfunction. Argyris and Schön believe that people and organizations can move toward Model II thinking that actually engages the real issues.

The governing values of Model II are valid information, informed choice, and vigilant monitoring of the implementation of the choice in order to detect and correct error. As in the case of Model I, the three most prominent behaviours (sic) are advocate, evaluate, and attribute. However, unlike Model I behaviours, Model II behaviours are crafted into action strategies that openly illustrate how the actors reached their evaluations or attributions and how they crafted them to encourage inquiry and testing by others.⁵⁴

Model II thinking demands honesty and transparency from all participants. That means a willingness to be vulnerable by exposing your thought processes to the scrutiny

⁵⁴ Argyris, 20.

of others for feedback and correction. This may seem like an impossible task but Argyris and Schön have successfully used case studies to help leaders make the shift. Model II thinking is predicated on the belief that conflict is a sign of health not disease. If there is no conflict between competing ideas, then Model II thinking is not occurring.

In their case study approach participants are invited to divide a piece of paper in half with a line running down the middle. They are then instructed to narrate a conflict on one side of the paper with the actual events as they occurred. On the other side of the paper they write down their unspoken thoughts and assumptions at each step along the way. The participants are able to quickly identify how their unspoken thoughts (theories-in-use) affected their behavior. If they thought one of their co-workers was incompetent, anything they said was greeted with skepticism, even if it was a good idea.

Mental Models and Double Loop Learning

Peter Senge refers to theories-in-use as *mental models* because they constrain our ability to assess the ideas of others. This leads to self-fulfilling prophecies in which we end up getting the results we expected, not because that was the only possibility, but rather because that is what we expected to happen. In this sense, we create our own problems without realizing it. As Senge says, “We unwittingly create our own conflicts through our mental models.”⁵⁵

Although Model I and Model II thinking occur on an individual level, it affects organizations as well. Organizations are comprised of individuals who project their

⁵⁵ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday/Currency, 1990), 182.

dysfunctions and limitations. You cannot heal an organization without addressing self-destructive individual patterns and vice versa. As Argyris said in an interview,

Organizational defensive routines are created by a circular, self-reinforcing process in which individuals' Model I theories-in-use produce individual strategies of bypass and cover-up, which result in organizational bypass and cover-up, which reinforce the individuals' theories-in-use. The explanation of organizational defensive routines is therefore individual and organizational. This means that it should not be possible to change routines without changing individual routines and vice versa.⁵⁶

Part of the purpose of this study is to surface the underlying presuppositions that all parties bring to the conversation about the religious identity and mission of Lutheran colleges. That is why I have chosen to examine the relationship between espoused religious identity and mission (espoused values) and perceived religious identity and mission (theories-in-use or mental models) at ELCA colleges. Ultimately the hope is to get the conversation unstuck and out in the open. When organizations are able to make the transition to Model II thinking they have moved from what Argyris calls "single loop learning" to "double loop learning".

Single loop learning involves learning from the consequence of a previous behavior. In this model learning results from feedback generated by a process of observing the consequences of action and using this knowledge...to avoid similar mistakes in the future...Double loop learning involves systems that can monitor and correct behavior and determine what appropriate behavior is. ...Double loop learning requires that the system question its own underlying assumptions and values and risk fundamentally changing the terms of its own organizing.⁵⁷

Model II thinking and double loop learning may seem to be unrealistic considering human nature and our natural desire to protect our own interests and ways of

⁵⁶ Chris Argyris, "INTERVIEW," *Group & Organization Studies (Pre-1986)* 6, no. 4 (1981): 412.

⁵⁷ Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 371–72.

thinking. I believe, however, that there is cause for optimism in both Argyris' case study approach and adaptive leadership.

Defining Identity and Mission

There seems to be an important connection between identity and mission, but further definition of the terms may be needed. Mary Jo Hatch makes an important distinction when it comes to organizational identity. She argues that there is a difference between “organizational identity” and “corporate image.”

Organizational identity refers to members' experiences of and beliefs about the organization as a whole...Organizational identity is self-focused. It refers to how the organization's members regard themselves...**Corporate image**, however, refers to impressions of the organization formed by others. Image reflects the many impressions that an organization makes on its external audiences.⁵⁸

Hatch's distinction between organizational identity and corporate image corresponds to Argyris' and Schön's ideas of “theories in use/mental models” and “espoused values.” Organizational identity is an expression of what those in the organization actually think its identity is (theory in use). Corporate image corresponds with the “espoused values” of the organization, the image it presents to the world. The connection is not perfect because Hatch includes the impressions of others about the organization as a component of corporate image. But it does further illustrate the bifurcated nature of organizational identity that this study attempts to understand.

Table 3: Bifurcation in Organizational Identity and Mission

<u>Argyris/Schön</u>	<u>Hatch</u>	<u>Beckstrom</u>
Theories in use	Organizational identity	Perceived identity
Espoused values	Corporate image	Espoused identity

⁵⁸ Mary Jo Hatch, 257.

Bolman and Deal take organizational identity in a slightly different direction, one that is even more relevant to the conversation about the identity and mission of Lutheran colleges by using the term *soul* to replace *identity*. They believe that identity has an “animating” or “spiritual” dimension that goes beyond simply stating who we are by connecting the organization to a greater purpose. “For an organization, group, or family, soul can be viewed as a resolute sense of character, a deep confidence about who we are, what we care about and what we believe in.”⁵⁹

Bolman and Deal are primarily writing for a business audience where the concept of *soul* and connection to transcendent values has been a topic of interest for some time. It is a bit ironic that the business community is embracing such theological concepts while we at Lutheran colleges and universities seem to be unsure what to do about our own theological identities.

There are several ways to explain why Lutheran institutions seem to be unsure what to do about articulating their theological identities. Both are based on the reality of increasing diversity both on our campuses and in our culture.

The Secularization Theory

The secularization narrative was first introduced in the 1970s by the eminent sociologist Peter Berger. Observing the continuing diminishment of religious practice in western Europe and a seeming decline in the United States, Berger suggested that American culture would become more secularized as well.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 396.

⁶⁰ Jacobsen and Jacobsen., *No Longer Invisible: Religion In University Education*, 156.

Berger's prediction was greeted with much hand wringing among religious communities who wondered where they would fit in this strange new world. It was especially troubling to many in Lutheran higher education, but in two different ways.

There were those who reacted to the secularization prophecy by labeling the religious identity of the institution a liability. Those who followed this pattern put institutional survival and adaptation to the changing environment above fidelity to the tradition. There were others who reacted with alarm to the specter of secularization and tried to find ways to stave off its effects. They placed fidelity to the tradition above contextual adaptation and believe that if we can recruit enough Lutheran students and faculty the institution will remain faithful.

Perhaps the best-known proponent of this view is Bob Benne who was mentioned in the previous chapter. Benne's typological classification of religious colleges and universities (see table 2.1) is predicated on the notion that maintaining a "critical mass" of students from the sponsoring tradition is necessary for sustaining a religious identity. More recently Eric Childers has taken up some elements of Benne's argument. He identifies three challenges to the religious identity of ELCA colleges: financial viability, professionalization of the faculty, and secularization.⁶¹

We have spent a great deal of time looking at the financial pressures for Lutheran colleges and universities, and touched on the professionalization of the faculty, so I am going to focus on secularization.

⁶¹ Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*, 32.

Isomorphism

Central to Childers understanding of Lutheran college identity is the concept of “isomorphism,” first identified by DiMaggio and Powell in their classic article “The Iron Cage Revisited.”⁶² The article refers to a comment by Max Weber who believed that in an industrialized modern age, organizations would inevitably begin imprisoning individuals in an “iron cage” of bureaucratization. Driven by ever increasing competitive pressures that demanded greater efficiency, individuals would inevitably become cogs in the system and perhaps even ground up in the organization’s gears. DiMaggio and Powell argued that modern organizations are less powerful than Weber assumed, and that in fact their identities are usually driven by an unconscious drive to conform to their competitors.

Today, however, structural change in organizations seems less and less driven by competition or by the need for efficiency. Instead, we will contend, bureaucratization and other forms of organizational change occur as the result of processes that make organizations more similar without necessarily making them more efficient.⁶³

The term that DiMaggio and Powell coined to describe this phenomenon is “isomorphism.” When organizations are categorized with one another they actually begin to resemble one another. Childers argues that the ambiguous nature of the “product” colleges and universities produce makes them vulnerable to identity isomorphism.

Organizations like colleges and universities are susceptible to isomorphic change, due to the difficulty in measuring institutional quality (Morphew, 2002). To the point, the procedures and outcomes of colleges and universities, including teaching and learning, are difficult to measure. In the absence of suitable

⁶² Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 147–160.

⁶³ DiMaggio and Powell, 147.

measures, these organizations tend to be judged by prestige and best practices, and subsequently, colleges and universities tend to look and behave like the dominant organization.⁶⁴

Isomorphism is a powerful force in a turbulent higher education market. Everyone wants to be like the financially secure elite colleges and universities, and many Lutheran colleges have attempted to emulate them.⁶⁵ The primary example that Childers offers is the first Lutheran college, Gettysburg, which has essentially disconnected from its Lutheran identity in the pursuit of elite status. An alternative example provided by Bob Benne is St. Olaf College which has also pursued elite status but has maintained its commitment to being a Lutheran college.

The implications of isomorphism for Lutheran college identity lie in the fact that nearly every elite college and university is secular or loosely affiliated with their sponsoring denomination. Childers fears that isomorphism may lead to increasing secularization along ELCA colleges as they struggle to survive.

The secularization narrative underlies Benne and Childers arguments about the dangers facing Lutheran higher education. The same rationale drives those who argue that isomorphic assimilation is the best means of survival for Lutheran colleges and universities. Benne and Childers view it as a threat; proponents see secularization as an opportunity for adaptation.

⁶⁴ Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*, 23.

⁶⁵ Christensen and Eyring, *The Innovative University*, 29.

Reconsidering the Secularization Theory

But what if the underlying notion of secularization has become ingrained in our consciousness to the degree that it serves as a powerful *mental model*, precluding us from seeing other possibilities? Years after he proposed the secularization narrative Peter Berger admitted that the abandonment of religion in the west had not played out as he expected.

As early as 1970, Peter Berger retracted some of his claims about secularization, arguing in *A Rumor of Angels* that symbols of transcendence continued to abound in modern society, even though some forms of religion were on the decline.⁶⁶

Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen and Douglas Jacobsen agree with Benne, Marsden and others who argue that religion did become marginalized within college and university curriculums. But they provide an alternate historical perspective to explain how this occurred.

During the colonial period and most of the nineteenth century, religion, especially as expressed in concern about character and moral development, was the glue that held the curriculum together. Over time, the relatively narrow way in which religion was defined (primarily as Protestantism) made it impossible for religion to continue to play such a role in an increasingly pluralistic America, and religion was pulled out of the curriculum and privatized.⁶⁷

Participation in traditional forms of religious practice has definitely decreased. But contrary to the initial observations of Dean Kelley⁶⁸ and others, it is not just the more progressive mainline denominations that are declining, it is everyone. There is evidence

⁶⁶ Jacobsen and Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible: Religion In University Education*, 26.

⁶⁷ Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 26.

⁶⁸ Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion with a New Preface* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996).

that within American Christianity it is not necessarily religion (or at least spirituality) that is being rejected, but rather the traditional patterns of expression.⁶⁹

And at the same time that American Protestantism seems to be waning, there are a host of other religions that are growing thanks to immigration patterns. Christianity may no longer have a hegemonic role in the culture, but that does not mean that religion and spirituality are disappearing as the secularization narrative indicates. In fact, what we are seeing is a new more diverse religious culture emerging in the United States.

Many are describing this emerging religious environment as a “pluriformity.”⁷⁰ Religion is more diverse than it has ever been but it certainly has not disappeared. Furthermore, the ways in which people relate to their faith has become less institutionally reliant and fluid. Perhaps most difficult of all when it comes to assessing the secularization narrative is that the distinction between secular and sacred has become very blurry.

The boundary line between what is and what is not religion has become thoroughly blurred. If secularity is like freshwater and religion is like saltwater, life in America is now thoroughly brackish.⁷¹

Religion Returns to Campus

The implications of these developments for colleges and universities are multifaceted. But one thing seems for sure, “religion is back” on colleges campuses, but

⁶⁹ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2012), 16.

⁷⁰ Jacobsen and Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible: Religion In University Education*, 7.

⁷¹ Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 7.

perhaps in different ways.⁷² In fact, the most elite universities like MIT and Dartmouth have recently added religious support services for students. Even Harvard, which jettisoned its religious identity long ago, has begun to reconsider that position.⁷³

The same is occurring on many state campuses, something that would have been unthinkable even ten years ago. So perhaps what we are learning is that, contrary to the secularization narrative, religion is not disappearing, but both the dominance of one tradition and the total marginalization of faith are being rejected.

The Jacobsens' work is focused on all types of colleges and universities. The work of interpreting what to do with these new realities on Lutheran college and university campuses remains the responsibility of its leaders. My review of the literature suggests that conversations about religious identity and mission have been dominated by two seemingly unsavory alternatives. Abandon religious identity and mission in order to adapt to new realities; or try preserve the past through technical solutions like maintaining a critical mass of Lutherans on campus. The option of simply abandoning our religious identity and mission would seem foolish in light of the increasing role of religion on college campuses, but can we maintain a distinctive Lutheran identity in a pluriform world?

⁷² Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 153.

⁷³ Douglas G. Jacobsen. and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, "Religion's Return to Higher Education: A Primer," AGB, January 31, 2013, 197, <https://www.agb.org/trusteeship/2013/1/religions-return-higher-education-primer>. accessed 5.18.17.

The Subjectivity of Identity

One of the primary struggles in discerning our religious identity is the assumption that identity is something that must be discovered and then preserved. There is increasing support for the idea that identity is a far more fluid concept, particularly in the present age, than we have realized. To borrow a scientific metaphor, the impulse to see organizational identity as something objective and fixed is based on a Newtonian understanding of the nature of reality, but we are living in a post-Newtonian world.

Margaret Wheatley writes,

There is no objective reality; the environment we experience does not exist “out there.” It is co-created through our acts of observation, what we choose to notice and worry about. If we truly embraced this sensibility in our organizational life, we would no longer waste time arguing about the “objective” features of the environment. Conflicts about what is true and false would disappear in the exploration of multiple perceptions.⁷⁴

Wheatley’s work is based on many new scientific developments that question the traditional Newtonian assumption that truth is objective, but that does not mean she is a complete relativist. We do not create identity completely *ex-nihilo*, but rather through a process of observation of what has been, is, and is developing. Wheatley argues that “identity is self-referential...organizations choose a path into the future that is consistent with who they’ve been...but also allows for change.”⁷⁵

This understanding of identity as both fluid and congruent with the past seems especially helpful in our current context. Identity can no longer be conceived as static, yet it also must have some continuity with the past.

⁷⁴ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 37.

⁷⁵ Wheatley, 85–86.

One of the challenges inherent in any effort to define communal identity is the evolution of the concept itself in an era of virtual community and individual choice. Community is no longer a physical place or location; it is a means of defining one's identity. Communities have always defined their identities, but when coupled with radical individualism and the proliferation of individual choice it becomes something quite different. "It used to be that people were born as part of a community and had to find their place as individuals. Now people are born as individuals and have to find their community."⁷⁶ There are many good things about the changing nature of community but it also places quite a strain on individuals who lack a foundational sense of identity and are constantly under pressure to choose the "right" communities. Feeling like you "do not belong" anywhere is becoming an increasingly common experience.

Fragmented Identities and Experiential Satisfaction

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has written extensively on the changing nature of community. Bauman suggests that we live in a time of great cultural upheaval and disruption that he terms *liquid modernity*. He agrees with Wheatley's assessment that identity in a liquid modern world is not an objective phenomenon.

Yes, indeed, 'identity' is revealed to us only as something to be invented rather than discovered; as a target of an effort, 'an objective'; as something one needs to build from scratch or to choose from alternative offers and then to struggle for and then to protect through yet more struggle – though for the struggle to be victorious, the truth of the precarious and forever incomplete status of identity needs to be...suppressed and laboriously covered up.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Bill Bishop as quoted in Megan Garber, "What Does 'Community' Mean?," *The Atlantic*, July 3, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/07/what-does-community-mean/532518/>.

⁷⁷ Bauman and Vecchi, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, 15–16.

Bauman suggests that identity in a liquid modern age is fragmented by increasing mobility, and that in many cases people assume more than one identity. We do this because the liquid modern age is all about choice. We have more choices than we have ever had before, but with those choices comes the tendency to become fearful about making the wrong choice, assuming the wrong identity. And so, we hold our identities loosely.⁷⁸

I see the truth of Bauman's reflections in some of the young adults I work with. Increasingly they have multi religious identities, whether they have been raised in more than one tradition, or simply do not want to be tied down to one identity. Today's college students fear the idea of being labeled, and this is reflected even in their romantic attachments. Many young people will have casual sexual encounters but spend long periods of time "talking" with a potential partner before actually committing and "making it Facebook official."

Miroslav Volf has called the contemporary quest for meaning a search for "experiential satisfaction," based on the notion that "the point of human life is to string together a series of satisfying experiences for the individual self. In this framework, even God becomes simply a means for self-gratification."⁷⁹

Others react to the turbulence of liquid modernity by seeking certainty through various forms of fundamentalism or restrictive ideologies. This too, according to Bauman, is a reaction to the often-overwhelming process of constructing an identity. The

⁷⁸ Bauman and Vecchi, 69.

⁷⁹ Zscheile, "Disruptive Innovations and the Deinstitutionalization of Religion," 10.

subject eliminates all potential options but one thereby reducing anxiety at least momentarily.

I have already stressed a number of times that, with all its coveted advantages, the life condition of a chooser-by-necessity is also an utterly unnerving experience. A chooser's life is an insecure life. The value conspicuously missing is that of confidence and trust and so also of self-assurance.⁸⁰

In order to achieve the kind of security that fundamentalism offers one must also be willing to give up the right to choose which has become so central in a liquid modern world.

Identity in Tension

The subjective nature of identity formation, and the reality that the sheer magnitude of choices available to individuals leads to either half-hearted attachments or retreat into fundamentalism, poses real challenges for all organizations. Is it possible to create a sense of collective identity, whether around Lutheranism or something else, without restricting people's options in the way that fundamentalism does? There certainly are a group of colleges in the United States that choose a narrow identity as a bulwark against the challenges of liquid modernity, but as the recent controversy at Wheaton College indicates, such identity sometimes comes at the cost of new information and inclusivity.⁸¹

MacDonald suggests that for colleges and universities trying to "define a constant identity or even a discrete number of multiple identities may be an inappropriate effort."⁸²

⁸⁰ Bauman and Vecchi, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, 86.

⁸¹ Ray, "What the Wheaton Controversy Means for Colleges' Religious Identity."

⁸² Ginger Phillips MacDonald, "Theorizing University Identity Development: Multiple Perspectives and Common Goals," *Higher Education* 65, no. 2 (February 2013): 164.

Although it may be more appropriate to refer to large universities as *fractured subjects* there is certainly a sense on even small college campuses that there are many micro-communities. Ultimately MacDonald suggests that a sort of dialogical tension may be the best option for institutional identity in the higher education sector.

In the quest for identity, Brewer (2003) suggested that institutions experience a tension in efforts to find “optimal distinctiveness” – a tension between assimilation and uniqueness...*Equilibrium* is the process by which one integrates the foreign (i.e. accommodation) and the familiar (i.e. assimilation) resulting in new schemata—in many ways a new identity.⁸³

From a Lutheran college perspective, it is intriguing that one of our central theological principles, dialogical tension, is suggested by higher education theorists as an avenue towards identity formation.⁸⁴ In fact, it just may be that Lutheran colleges and universities have the theological and educational tools to thrive in a liquid modern world.

But in order for this dialogical tension to truly impact the institution’s identity it must be at the heart of the community. Dialogical tension must be the thing that defines the identity of our colleges and universities, not in spite of our religious mission, but because of it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reviewed the theoretical lenses of adaptive challenges and leadership, espoused and perceived values, and identity and mission. In the next chapter, we will examine theological lenses that offer an opportunity for Lutheran colleges and universities to address adaptive challenges, through deeper understanding of their identity

⁸³ MacDonald, 159.

⁸⁴ Wendy McCredie, “Academic Vocation: What the Lutheran University Has to Offer,” *Intersections* 2004, no. No. 19, Article 4 (2004).

and mission, ultimately allowing them to address the fractured nature of the liquid modern world.

CHAPTER FOUR: ADAPTIVE THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

In the previous chapter, we considered the distinction between *technical problems* and *adaptive challenges*. When leaders of religious organizations face adaptive challenges they often deal with them on an organizational level but neglect the underlying theological issues. Doing so eliminates a helpful resource from the discussion and falls into the trap of treating adaptive challenges as technical problems. Even if a suitable organizational solution is identified it will be disconnected from the soul of the organization and merely address cosmetic issues.

Indeed, the single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify—in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector—is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.¹

Church colleges that wish to maintain their religious identity and mission must not neglect the theological aspects of organizational leadership. ELCA colleges and universities are not congregations, but according to the ELCA constitution they are the church and “an essential part of God’s mission in the world.”²

¹ Heifetz and Linsky, “Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading” Loc. 228-230.

² “Constitution, Bylaws, And Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, April 30, 1987), 58 (Accessed: 8.22.01),

Failure to consider the theological aspects of church leadership is not just an issue for ELCA colleges and universities, most congregations neglect it as well. Secular models for organizational leadership are helpful but incomplete without theological reflection. The church must always begin with its identity or essence before it proceeds to organizational issues.

As Craig Van Gelder put it, “The church is...” (identity). “The church does what it is...” (mission). “The church organizes what it does.”³ Jumping straight to organizational issues does not work in the church. It will be difficult for ELCA schools to maintain or strengthen their religious identity and mission if theological considerations are marginalized from organizational leadership. There needs to be a different starting point for organizational leadership at ELCA institutions than at secular institutions.

The lack of theological reflection in organizational leadership at ELCA colleges and universities is an unintended consequence of changes in executive leadership (Presidents, Vice Presidents, Deans, etc.). At one time, many executive leaders at Lutheran colleges and universities were clergy or theologically trained lay people. In response to rising levels of complexity in the higher education market, leadership has become more specialized.

There are many good things about this shift to hiring leaders with expertise in the higher education sector, but there are also downsides. Today very few executive leaders have theological training. By no means are they incapable of theological reflection, but

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Constitutions_Bylaws_and_Continuing_Resolutions_of_the_ELCA.pdf?_ga=1.4585331.1914476288.1478574636.

³ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*, 37.

they may feel as if they don't have the necessary skills to introduce theological reflection into their deliberations or lead the community in sustained theological dialogue.

Whoever is facilitating theological conversation among organizational leaders must deal with a number of adaptive theological issues. This chapter begins with an examination of some of the primary challenges that must be addressed in this process.

Keeping God in the Conversation

It is critically important that faith have a central voice at the table when it comes to this discernment process. This will require the institution to engage in some hermeneutical reflection about how it chooses to interpret reality.

The first adaptive theological challenge for Lutheran colleges is whether they will consider God an active participant in the institution's discernment. Hermeneutical conversations are not new in academic communities but have been limited to rationalistic methodologies. Craig Van Gelder identifies several different hermeneutical options for interpreting reality.

The first method draws primarily on a scientific worldview where it is accepted that objective facts inform and determine our decisions. The second incorporates a constructionist approach which understands reality to be the shared interpretation persons bring to it. The third utilizes an advocacy approach which is designed to change how people interpret their shared situation and then act on it. The fourth relies on a pragmatic approach in an effort to get to an effective solution in a timely manner.⁴

Different disciplines and faculty may prefer one method over another, but each of these hermeneutical methods are widely accepted in the academic world. It is important to note that there is nothing wrong with any of these hermeneutical perspectives, in fact,

⁴ Craig Van Gelder, "Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 3, no. 1-2 (September 2004): 44.

they are each critical to discerning the future of Lutheran higher education. What may be more difficult, yet absolutely crucial, is including a theological hermeneutic in the discussion.

(t)he fifth brings God into the conversation as an acting subject with an expectation that persons can discern the leading of God's Spirit in relation to specific situations.⁵

It is difficult to "keep God in the conversation"⁶ in any setting because we live in a secular age in which faith has been relegated to the private world of individual choice.⁷ That is not to say that religious faith or spirituality have disappeared. While there has been a decline in overall religious participation among young people it is unlikely that the United States will become a secular culture. If the current rate of attrition among young adults persists into older adulthood (and we do not know whether it will) it would take "several centuries" before the US becomes as secularized as Western Europe; a development that is considered unlikely.⁸

Even if North America does not follow the same secularization pattern as Western Europe, there is no question that the way we view faith has changed. This changing worldview began shortly after the Reformation. Through a process of *excarnation*, religious ideas and God's activity were gradually pushed to the margins of life. With this

⁵ Van Gelder, 44.

⁶ Craig Van Gelder, "The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 3, no. 1-2 (September 2004): 137.

⁷ Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Arthur Emery Farnsley, *Congregation & Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 356. Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 30.

⁸ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 76.

move from an *enchanted* universe to a closed system of universal laws God became unnecessary for public life.⁹ This development reached its zenith during the period of the Enlightenment.¹⁰

The marginalization of faith during the enlightenment period is evidenced by theological developments based on an enlightenment cosmology that left little room for God or transcendence. “The accepted view (during the enlightenment) was that the universe was a closed system, and that everything in the world was subject to the natural laws of cause and effect.”¹¹ These views have been expressed by both theological progressives and conservatives in at least three different ways.

The first is the idea that religious faith is exclusively a means of developing “moral fiber”¹² or political change.¹³ Whether that is traditional “family values” or the Social Gospel, both were focused on the finite world as the primary arena for religious activity.

The second is the reduction of the Gospel to a means of personal salvation and escape from the world.¹⁴ This has mainly been expressed from conservative Christians—

⁹ Dwight J. Zscheile, ed., *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012), 4.

¹⁰ John D Morrison, “Teaching Them to Obey All Things in a Pluralist Society: The ‘open Secret’ of the Gospel in the Thought and ‘Emergent’ Influence of Lesslie Newbigin,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (July 2012): 260–61.

¹¹ Van Gelder, “Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics,” 47.

¹² David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 278.

¹³ Bosch, 453.

¹⁴ Bosch, 71.

in its most extreme form as premillennialism—and sees escape from the “closed universe” of the enlightenment to be the sole or primary objective of Christianity.¹⁵

Theologians of all perspectives have begun to question this kind of theological reductionism as anti-biblical and missionally dubious.¹⁶

The third is theological Deism, the concept that God is like a great clockmaker who winds up the world and then steps back and allows it to operate on its own. Deism has remained a persistent theological force as evidenced by the previously mentioned principles of moralistic therapeutic Deism,¹⁷ but there are signs that Deism is breaking down.

Most people today subscribe to a theological *bricolage* in which God is an active agent in the world when *therapeutic intervention* is needed, but otherwise may be absent.¹⁸ This may not seem much different than pure enlightenment Deism but it is. The mere fact that people are acknowledging that God is at least sometimes active in the world is a marked departure from the days of Descartes, Hume, and Locke. This idea of God as an active subject in the world is essential to authentic Christian witness.¹⁹

¹⁵ Bosch, 203.

¹⁶ See Dean E. Flemming, *Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing, and Telling* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2013). N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

¹⁷ See Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009). The National Study on Youth and Religion revealed that the theology of most young Americans is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

¹⁸ Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 15.

¹⁹ Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 49, 88.

The enlightenment worldview has also been challenged epistemologically by the rise of postmodernism. As we began to realize the highly contextual nature of observation it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that anyone can be a purely objective observer. Is it really possible for anyone to interpret reality without being affected by their gender, sexual orientation, or socio-economic identity? Why should religious beliefs be treated any differently than other hermeneutical lenses? Postmodernism's premise that all knowledge is subjectively conditioned has opened up a new opportunity for theology:

In contrast to the Enlightenment's scientific worldview, which relied on an epistemology that assumed the natural explanation of all phenomena, a hermeneutical perspective no longer requires that the God hypothesis be cancelled out a priori...Interestingly in a hermeneutically-shaped, postmodern context, faith claims regarding the leading of God's Spirit in a Christian community have taken on a renewed viability.²⁰

Lutheran colleges and universities are sometimes accused of being disconnected from their theological roots. I would argue that this may be true, but not necessarily for the reasons people think. It is not that the Lutheran theological tradition is ignored on campus, but rather that it is interpreted through the lens of enlightenment rationality.

Theology and the college's religious heritage are treated as one among many objective sources of influence in institutional self-understanding. The idea that God may somehow be an active subject in the process of discerning religious identity and mission in a post-Christian age is simply not on the radar. Recalibrating our understanding of God's agency is an adaptive theological challenge.

²⁰ Van Gelder, "Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics," 49.

Pluralism

A second adaptive theological challenge is that we are now living in a *pluriform*²¹ post-Christian context.²² But instead of engaging pluralism in a theologically constructive manner we have largely ignored or glossed over religious diversity because we fear conflict. The unspoken assumption is that there are only two options for Lutheran schools in a pluriform age, hunker down and protect our identity at all costs, or downplay it at the risk of alienating prospective students and community members.

The belief that there are only two options when dealing with challenging circumstances is known in conflict resolution as a *sucker's choice*.²³ There are other options available to Lutheran schools that do not involve requiring others to conform to the institution's religious identity, but also do not treat it as a liability that should never be mentioned.

In his book *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*, Anthony Robinson argues that “coming to grips with cultural and religious pluralism”²⁴ is one of the most important things that a congregation can do, and I believe the same is true for colleges and universities. Such engagement must avoid the most extreme theological options.

One response treats all faiths and spiritualities as being of equal merit, and the choice between them is of no greater significance than the choice between Thai, Italian, or Ethiopian restaurants. The response at the other extreme is the

²¹ Jacobsen and Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible: Religion In University Education*, 7.

²² When I refer to a “post-Christian” context I’m not accepting the secularization hypothesis but rather acknowledging that Christianity no longer holds a dominant place in today’s culture.

²³ Kerry Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*, 2nd edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2011).

²⁴ Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*, 158.

declaration that there is only one right and true religion, and adherents of all other faiths are damned. I find neither option compelling or adequate in our new time: the first lapses into relativism, the second into totalitarianism.²⁵

Fortunately, there seems to be little danger that ELCA colleges and universities will succumb to totalitarianism. There is rich and robust interfaith theological conversation going on at our campuses. Our institutional challenge is to express an “operative and articulated theological perspective when it comes to pluralism and other religions.”²⁶ Such a perspective must be “centered in the great core convictions of the Christian faith, yet open to the insights, experiences, and corrections of others with whom we share life in community and the public sector.”²⁷

If theological tension is central to our identity as Lutheran-Christian colleges and universities then difference and otherness must be acknowledged and celebrated. Ignoring the potential conflicts for fear of discomfort is a recipe for theological disaster. As David Bosch notes, “(h)olding onto mission and unity and to both truth and unity *presupposes tension*. It does not presume uniformity. The aim is not a leveling out of differences, a shallow reductionism, a kind of ecumenical broth.”²⁸

We are not respecting our brothers and sisters of other faiths by treating them with a generic sameness. Without an articulated theology of pluralism, we also run the risk of being identified with more totalitarian theological perspectives in the culture and on our campuses. We need to be clear about who we are as institutions in order to truly be

²⁵ Robinson, 159.

²⁶ Robinson, 159.

²⁷ Robinson, 159.

²⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 475.

hospitable to those from other religious traditions. Lutheran colleges will likely never require theological uniformity, but does that mean we should avoid making any explicit institutional theological convictions?

Clarifying Religious Identity and Mission

This naturally leads to the third adaptive theological challenge for Lutheran colleges and universities, clarifying our religious identity and mission. I have argued throughout this document that identity and mission are intertwined. We cannot understand our mission without first understanding our identity, and missional clarity is vital for any organization.

Clarity is an organization's friend. If there is any confusion as to where energy or funds are to be directed, then the likelihood of an organization accomplishing any of its goals decreases dramatically.²⁹

The best method for clarifying identity and mission is ongoing theological conversation and discernment. If this is approached from an organizational perspective that embraces theological tension, then conflict and disagreement are signs of a healthy dialogue.

(w)hen a tradition is in good order it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose. So, when an organization—a university, say, or a farm, or a hospital—is the bearer of a tradition of practice...its common life will be partly, but in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be or what good farming is or what good medicine is.³⁰

²⁹ Whitsitt, *Open Source Church: Making Room for the Wisdom of All*, 42.

³⁰ Robert Muthiah, "Christian Practices, Congregational Leadership, and the Priesthood of All Believers," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 2, no. 2 (September 2003): 178.

The “identity crisis” of ELCA colleges is directly related to the same predicament at the ecclesiastical level. The Christian church is struggling to come to grips with a changing cultural context in which it no longer occupies a place of prominence within the culture.³¹ Christianity was the dominant cultural force during the period of Christendom and the surrounding culture reinforced its values. There was little need to deal with ecclesiological issues like the identity of the church because we assumed that there was a common understanding. In a post-Christian age, we must learn to “hold our assumptions lightly”³² because we cannot be sure that a common understanding of fundamental theological issues like the nature of the church actually exists (if it ever did).

There is a deeper and more basic issue that must be explored, one that has to do with the church’s theological identity, that is, *what it means to be the church*. It is my thesis that the church today is facing an *identity crisis*. It is not simply that the church is culturally irrelevant or inauthentic; these are symptoms of the underlying issue, which is that *we don’t know who we are as the church... Who is the church?* This is a theological question that calls for a theological answer.³³

This identity crisis is exacerbated by the fact that ecclesiology (the study of the nature of the church) has tended to be undervalued by Protestant denominations.³⁴ American churches have also tended to be more pragmatic when it comes to ecclesiological matters, holding to an ecclesiological theory-in-use that views the church as a “voluntary association.”³⁵

³¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 373.

³² Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, 5.

³³ Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 4.

³⁴ Peterson, 13.

³⁵ Peterson, 35.

Voluntary associations do not have an ontological, spiritual or theological identity—they are merely organizations of individuals who choose to come together around a common purpose—in this case religious faith.³⁶ Consequently the American church has tended to view ecclesiology in functional and organizational terms—what the church *does*—rather than probe deeper theological issues like identity—what the church *is*.³⁷

This is evidenced in the fact that the primary statements about colleges and universities from the ELCA and its colleges focus almost entirely on organizational and functional concerns. The ELCA constitution focuses almost exclusively on the ways in which the colleges and universities relate to the church-wide organizational structure.³⁸ There is only one paragraph that even comes close to an ecclesiological statement.

The relationship of this church to its colleges and universities shall be guided by policies fostering educational institutions dedicated to the Lutheran tradition wherein such institutions are an essential part of God’s mission in the world.³⁹

The rest of this paragraph and the document focus on what the colleges and universities do rather than who they are. Perhaps this is understandable as governing

³⁶ Peterson, 27.

³⁷ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*, 23.

³⁸ When the ELCA was formed colleges and universities were given three options for how they would relate to the church. Option #1: colleges and universities form a corporation comprised of their board of trustees/regents and voting members of the Church-wide assembly. For colleges that choose this option the Church-wide assembly ratifies new governing board members and must approve any changes to the relationship between church and college. In 2016 this was amended so that the ELCA Church Council could substitute for the Church-wide assembly. Option #2: colleges and universities form a corporation who are congregations and/or synods. The corporation still retains the same responsibilities as option #1. Option #3: The College or University has a “self-perpetuating” relationship with the ELCA by maintaining a certain number of seats on its board for clergy and/or bishops. Source: Mark Wilhelm and Brian A.F. Beckstrom, “RE: Governance Question,” December 26, 2016.

³⁹ “Constitution, Bylaws, And Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” 58 (8.22.01).

documents are not necessarily intended to be theological documents, but this functional approach to ecclesiology is consistent in other ELCA documents.⁴⁰ None of the other documents I could find included substantive theological conversation about the most basic of matters—how the colleges and universities of the ELCA are ecclesiologically related to the broader Church.⁴¹ While these are all admirable and important statements there is little evidence that God is an active subject at work within the ecclesiology of the ELCA.

To clarify our religious identity and mission, it is imperative that we begin with basic ecclesiological questions such as: what is the nature of the church and how does it affect the identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities in a post-Christian world? It is to this question that we now turn our attention.

Rediscovering the Trinity

In order to understand the nature of the Church we must begin with the nature of God. That means reclaiming the triune nature of God, an often misunderstood but central doctrine of the Church.

⁴⁰ An exception is this paper from former presiding Bishop H. George Anderson. But even in this case the conversation largely focuses on the ecclesiology of the Church, with little mention of the colleges, despite the fact that the author is the former President of Luther College. H. George Anderson, “Ecclesiology, Mission, and Structure,” 2004, <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ecclesiology.pdf>.

⁴¹ In the LIFT Report the term ecclesiology is only mentioned twice, and both of those instance are in the footnotes. “LIFT: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, April 2011), https://liftelca.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/lift_report_041111_complete.pdf. It is not mentioned at all in ELCA’s primary social statement on education: “ELCA Social Statement: Our Calling in Education” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, August 2007), <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/EducationSS.pdf>.

Lutherans have been guilty of interpreting ecclesiology and missiology almost exclusively through a Christological lens. After all the central tenet of Lutheranism is the doctrine of justification by grace. Accordingly, much attention has been focused on the saving work of Jesus at the expense of the first and third articles.⁴²

Lutherans are not alone in this modalistic reductionism. Catholic Theologian Karl Rahner observed that, “Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere “monotheists.” We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”⁴³ There are even eminent contributors within the missional church conversations that could be accused of a Christological reduction of the Trinity.⁴⁴

The Trinity is not the easiest theological concept to understand in part because it does not appear in Scripture. All of the pieces of the Trinity are present in Scripture but it was not until Tertullian (150-240) that the term was first used.⁴⁵ Further muddying the waters is the fact that there are complimentary but different understandings of the Trinity within the church itself. Western Christianity has tended to emphasize the *Oneness* of the Trinity. The Eastern understanding emphasizes the *Threeness* of God.

The triune nature of God is not merely an abstract doctrine, it is embodied in all of creation. Before God creates humankind in Genesis two God first says, “Let us create

⁴² The first article of the Apostle’s Creed deals with God the creator, the second article focuses on Jesus. Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 45–54.

⁴³ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1997), 10–11.

⁴⁴ Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 86–87.

⁴⁵ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 48.

humankind in our own image.”⁴⁶ We tend to think of being created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) as being created in the image of God the Father. But we are not merely created in the image of God the Father, we are created in the image of the Triune God (*Imago Trinitatis*). This has significant implications for the way we understand ourselves and our relationship to the Triune God. It is not just human beings that bear the marks of a Trinitarian identity, all of creation seems to reflect this pattern.

If there is only one God and there is only one pattern to this God, then the wonderful thing is that we can expect to find that pattern everywhere. I believe one reason so many theologians are interested in Trinity right now is that we’re finding quantum physics, biology, and cosmology are finally at a level of development that our understanding of everything from atoms to galaxies to organisms is affirming, confirming, and allowing us to use the old Trinitarian language, and now with a whole new level of appreciation.⁴⁷

The Trinitarian pattern has deep ontological and anthropological implications. It changes the way we understand the nature of all creation, including human beings. There is something in our very nature that connects us to God, creation, and one another. A human being is “one to whom God has transferred and communicated God’s divine image in relationship, and who can, in turn, communicate and reflect that image to other created human beings.”⁴⁸

We might think of the Triune God as the model on which creation is patterned. Creation is not divine in and of itself, but it reflects the divine image of the Triune God. That means that everything God creates contains this same ontological pattern. A helpful

⁴⁶ Harrelson, *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible* Genesis 1:26.

⁴⁷ Rohr, *Divine Dance*, 69.

⁴⁸ Rohr, 75.

way to understand the Trinitarian pattern of existence comes through the scientific concept of fractals.

Fractals are everywhere around us, in the patterns by which nature organizes clouds, rivers, mountains...all of these (and millions more) are fractal, replicating a dominant pattern at several smaller levels of scale.⁴⁹

This same ontological pattern applies to the church because it is a part of creation, created by God through the Holy Spirit. The church is not merely some sort of cosmological accident, but rather the intention of God. Leslie Newbigin points to the continued appeal of Jesus at the Last Supper to “do this in remembrance of me” which suggests that Jesus assumed some form of community to carry on his ministry.⁵⁰ As Newbigin puts it, “the new reality that he (Jesus) introduced was to be continued through history in the form of a community, not in the form of a book.”⁵¹

The Church is created by the Holy Spirit and patterned on the Trinitarian nature of God. That means that ecclesiology cannot be understood except in relationship to the Triune God. This also means that ELCA colleges, as expressions of the Church, cannot understand their own identity if we do not begin with the Trinitarian nature of God and all creation.

So far, we have done a cursory overview of the nature of the Triune God. As we delve deeper it will become clear that the Trinitarian nature of God is the ideal pattern for

⁴⁹ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2006), 123-124.

⁵⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 47.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 52.

the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges in a post-Christian age. But first we must explore the nature of the Triune God more deeply.

The Nature of the Triune God

Theologians have traditionally made a distinction between the inner relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit (the Immanent Trinity) and the way in which the Triune God relates to the world (the Economic Trinity). These different ways of understanding the Trinity relate back to the distinctions between the Western and Eastern views of the Trinity.

The Western View

The Western understanding of the Triune God tends to focus on the unity of the Trinity and the triune God's work in the world (the economic Trinity). Relationships within the Trinity have been a less prominent feature in the Western view than the Eastern.

Up until the sixteenth century mission was “used exclusively with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity.”⁵² With the advent of the enlightenment and its “closed universe,” supernatural concepts like the Trinity and the concept of an active God became less of a factor. Karl Barth was a seminal figure in rediscovering the importance of the Trinity in the Western church and its connection to mission.

Barth recognized the Trinitarian implications for both missiology and ecclesiology—contradicting enlightenment assumptions—by insisting that God is indeed an active subject in the world. It was due in part to Barth's influence that the sending

⁵² Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 1.

nature of God received a name, the *missio Dei*, linking the missional nature of God to the nature of the church.⁵³

The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.⁵⁴

This Trinitarian understanding of God was taken up by a number of other theologians who began to develop the concept of the *missio Dei*. Leslie Newbigin is one of the most important figures in the post-Barth era. Newbigin was an English missionary in India for many years and was dismayed at the decline of Christianity that he encountered upon returning to his home country. Because of his background Newbigin began to assess western culture from a missiological perspective, eventually leading to his 1978 volume *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*.⁵⁵

Inspired by Newbigin’s work, a group of theologians in the United States began examining the North American context from a missiological perspective. This led to the publication of *The Missional Church*⁵⁶ and the coining of a new term.

The term “Missional Church” is a bit of a misnomer because it begins with the mission of God (*missio Dei*) rather than the mission of the church. The authors of *The Missional Church* argued that the Gospel of the North American Church is primarily

⁵³ Bosch, 399.

⁵⁴ Bosch, 547.

⁵⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995).

⁵⁶ Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

focused on individual salvation but ignores Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom or Reign of God—which includes healing and justice for all creation.⁵⁷

Another important criticism of the authors is that the North American Church has an anti-biblical “church centric” mission⁵⁸ that is almost entirely preoccupied with what the church does for God.⁵⁹ Building on the work of Barth and others, the authors of *The Missional Church* argued for a *mission-centered church* rather than a *church-centered mission*.⁶⁰ Or, as famously stated, “It’s not so much that the church of God has a mission, but rather, that the mission of God has a church.”⁶¹

The western understanding of the Trinity is not without its flaws. Because of its reliance on the *Oneness* of God it can become Christocentric,⁶² individualistic,⁶³ and collapse into “mere monotheism.”⁶⁴ Essentially the *Oneness* swallows up the *Threeness* in a sort of modalistic hierarchy in which the persons of the Trinity become subordinate to one another. The original missional church conversation fell prey to these flaws. Some

⁵⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 32–35.

⁵⁸ Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives* (New York, NY: P. Lang, 2007), 71.

⁵⁹ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*, 23. Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, 55.

⁶⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 379.

⁶¹ Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, 55.

⁶² Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 56.

⁶³ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 199.

⁶⁴ Moltmann, 17.

in the missional church conversation have discovered an important counterbalancing effect in the Eastern church's perspective on the Trinity.⁶⁵

The Eastern View: Perichoresis

The Eastern view of the Trinity begins with the *Threeness* of God and the inner relationships of the immanent Trinity. Rublev's famous icon *The Hospitality of Abraham* depicts the appearance of three strangers who announce the impending miracle of Isaac's birth.⁶⁶ Christians have long interpreted these three persons as representations of the Trinity and it has become a touchstone for the eastern view of the Triune God.⁶⁷



Figure 1: Rublev, *The Hospitality of Abraham*

The icon depicts the three visitors seated around a table, heads inclined toward one another, in a posture of mutuality. “The Holy One in the form of Three—eating and

⁶⁵ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*.

⁶⁶ Andrei Rublev (circa 1360-1428) was a famous Russian iconographer.

⁶⁷ Harrelson, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, Genesis 18:1-8.

drinking in infinite hospitality and enjoyment between themselves.”⁶⁸ Many metaphors have been used to describe the relationship within the Trinity; a “divine dance,”⁶⁹ circulation around the neighborhood,⁷⁰ “whirl,” “rotation,” and even the passing around of a jug of a wine.⁷¹ Regardless of the metaphors employed they all point to a deep mutuality and divine flow⁷² known by the term “perichoresis.”

Jürgen Moltmann was among the first theologians⁷³ to return the church’s attention to the eastern understanding of the Trinity by describing the perichoretic nature of God in his book *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.

The three divine Persons have everything in common, except for their personal characteristics. So, the Trinity corresponds to a community in which people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession.⁷⁴

Moltmann argues that perichoresis “links together in a brilliant way the Threeness and the unity (of God), without reducing the Threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the Threeness.”⁷⁵ Perichoresis becomes especially important in light of my earlier argument that the Trinity has ontological, missiological, and ecclesiological implications.

⁶⁸ Rohr, *Divine Dance*, 30.

⁶⁹ Rohr, *Divine Dance*.

⁷⁰ Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, 51.

⁷¹ Moltmann, “Perichoresis.”

⁷² Rohr, *Divine Dance*, 68.

⁷³ Another important early contributor was the Eastern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, unknown edition (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimirs Seminary Pr, 1997).

⁷⁴ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 198.

⁷⁵ Moltmann, 175.

If the very nature of God is communal, interdependent, and unified—that means that human community and the church are called to these same patterns of relationship.

The perichoretic nature of the Triune God resolves two very important theological issues. The first is the relationship between the one and the many, or the tension between unity and diversity; but the perichoretic nature of God suggests that diversity does not exist in opposition to unity. In fact, the very nature of the Triune God encompasses both diversity (Threeness) and unity (Oneness), which means unity and diversity are ontological necessities.⁷⁶ If creation is patterned on a Trinitarian code it, “Reveals a pattern of perfect freedom in relationship whereby each person allows the other to be themselves, and yet remains in perfect given-ness toward the other, not withholding from other-ness.”⁷⁷

If it is an ontological reality, then it is also an ecclesiological necessity to envelop both unity and diversity because “communal Christian existence must be conceived in correspondence to Trinitarian communion,”⁷⁸ Both human and ecclesiological identity rest on the notion of unified diversity.

It may sound naïve to suggest that humanity or the church might ever approach such lofty ideals, and surely such communion will not be achieved on this side of the eschaton. But living into this emerging reality actually brings us into closer relationship to God. “The more open-mindedly people live with one another, for one another, and in

⁷⁶ Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 203.

⁷⁷ Rohr, *Divine Dance*, 63.

⁷⁸ Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 39.

one another in the fellowship of the Spirit, the more they will become one with the Son and the Father, and one in the Son and the Father (John 17:21).⁷⁹

This leads into the second important theological implication of a perichoretic understanding of God—the relational effects. The model of perichoretic relationship between the persons of the Trinity is subject to subject rather than subject-object, “(j)ust as the persons of the Trinity know and love one another...God and the human person must know (and can know) one another center to center, subject to subject—and never subject to object.”⁸⁰ Human relationships often fall into patterns of instrumental benefit in which, “we connect with people because we think they will meet our needs for intimacy or otherwise help us advance our interests.”⁸¹ Such relationships that treat people like objects and can never be truly fulfilling because they contradict the Trinitarian pattern of mutuality and interdependence. There is a reason we feel empty when our relationships do not fit the perichoretic Trinitarian nature of reality.

Again, it may seem to naïve to suggest that the kind of relationships within the Trinity are even possible when it comes to human relationships. But as we enter into the *divine flow* of the Triune life we can rediscover some sense of what such relationships entail. And because God is a relational God we are indeed invited into this *divine dance*.

This invitation to participate in a perichoretic relationship with the Triune God is an opportunity for an ontological rediscovery of our true selves. Hanging out with the

⁷⁹ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 158.

⁸⁰ Rohr, *Divine Dance*, 78.

⁸¹ Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, 16.

Trinity seems to have a sort of restorative power that opens up our relationships with the rest of creation. We might think of the Trinitarian relationship like a rubber band.

When I pull a rubber band outward, a centrifugal force is created; I expand my fingers and the rubber band stretches with them. And soon, an opposite motion occurs—the very thing that pulls the rubber band outward (in this case my thumb and index finger) finds itself included within it. A centripetal force then acts to pull what is included back to the center. It’s one complete motion—moving out and allowing oneself to be pulled back in.⁸²

This motion of breathing in and out is central to understanding the perichoretic nature of the Triune God. God is at work drawing all people into relationship with Godself and then sending them back into the world to live as people in the process of being relationally restored to wholeness. There seems to be a certain inherent missional *push and pull*⁸³ within the nature of the Triune God. Like the tides going out and coming back in, we are drawn into the life of the Triune God and sent forth into mission. And the good news is that we do not necessarily have to do anything or have any sort of experience in order to participate. We are created for this because we are *imago Trinitatis* and can simply allow “the flow of the Spirit” to draw us in and send us out.⁸⁴

The Eastern and Western views of the Trinity complement one another. While the Western view can become overly hierarchical, its focus on the outward sending nature of God (*missio Dei*), counterbalances the Eastern focus on inward relationships which could conceivably lead to a church-centric missiology. When the perichoretic nature of God is combined with the sending nature of God, mission takes on a different sense. The

⁸² Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 48.

⁸³ Scott Cormode, “Cultivating Missional Leaders: Mental Models and the Ecology of Vocation,” in *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 100.

⁸⁴ Rohr, *Divine Dance*, 58.

resulting synthesis is a missiological ecclesiology that unites the sending and relational aspects of God's nature.

Towards a Missiological Ecclesiology

This chapter began with an overview of the adaptive theological challenges facing Lutheran higher education in a post-Christian world: keeping God in the conversation, pluralism, and clarifying religious identity and mission from a theological perspective.

In this discussion missiology and ecclesiology have continually surfaced as important lenses for understanding the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges. In this final section, I will argue that a missiological ecclesiology—grounded in the perichoretic identity of the Triune God—provides an ideal framework for addressing the aforementioned adaptive theological challenges.

This argument rests on the conviction that ELCA colleges and universities are not congregations in the traditional sense—although some campus ministries are organized as student congregations—but they are most certainly the church. More than likely some will argue with this assumption. The theological nature of our identity and mission have been marginalized by a “*de facto* Christendom,”⁸⁵ the enlightenment worldview, and struggles for institutional survival. Some might argue that the end of Christendom suggests that ELCA colleges and universities should move away from theological reflection on our mission and identity. I believe that the end of Christendom is actually an opportunity to reclaim an authentic and contextually relevant religious identity and

⁸⁵ Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 133.

mission that distinguishes us from the many generic liberal arts colleges vying for a place in the world of American higher education.

A missiological ecclesiology is grounded in the conviction that God's identity and mission cannot be separated. The Triune God is a perichoretic community of mutuality and love that is constantly sending Godself into the world; through the act of creation, the incarnation of Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, God is drawing all of humanity (and creation) into God's triune *divine dance*, then sending us out to bear God's healing love. As part of God's creation, human beings and the church are patterned on the Triune God's perichoretic missional nature.

The church's identity and mission (*missiones ecclesia*) cannot be separated, because the Triune God's identity and mission cannot be separated. Theological reflection on the identity of the church (ecclesiology) and mission (missiology) must therefore be considered together.⁸⁶

We need to relate a view of mission that is based on the redemptive reign of the Triune God in all creation with an understanding of the church that views it both as a living community of God's people and as a historical institution. We need to develop a missiological ecclesiology. To do this we must address the interrelationship of the nature, ministry, and organization of the church.⁸⁷

Understanding ELCA colleges and universities as ministries of the church is an important step in applying a missiological ecclesiology. It is important to note that "the church" refers not merely to the ELCA but to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Christian church.⁸⁸ Lutheranism is a theological movement within the church Catholic,

⁸⁶ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*, 31.

⁸⁷ Van Gelder, 36.

⁸⁸ Peterson, *Who Is the Church?: An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 131–32.

while the ELCA is a denomination. One does not need to be a Lutheran in order to be part of the ministry of the church in higher education.

Understandably there may be objections at this point to the characterization of colleges and universities as ministries of the church. If that is true, does that mean that all those involved in the work of the college must also be Christians? I do not think it does.

My biblical lenses support this conclusion. The first lens is that God values and affirms all of creation. Human beings are created in God's own image⁸⁹ and when God surveys the creation God reflects that "it is good,"⁹⁰ in fact it "is very good."⁹¹

Jesus seems to suggest a greater inclusiveness as well when he states that he has "other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."⁹² This of course echoes Isaiah's declaration that, "In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it."⁹³ Not to mention Paul's claim in Philippians that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."⁹⁴ These passages might sound imperialistic if taken out of context, but these promises come from a

⁸⁹ Genesis 1:27.

⁹⁰ Genesis 1:12

⁹¹ Genesis 1:31

⁹² John 10:16

⁹³ Isaiah 2:2

⁹⁴ Philippians 2:10-11

perichoretic triune God who relates to other non-coercively. If any of this comes to pass it will be through love, not force.

So, it would seem that all people have an awareness of God through the simple fact that they are human (Acts 17:22-31). When Paul approaches the Athenians at the Aeropagus he begins with the assumption that they already have knowledge of God as evidenced by their worship of an unknown God. In my opinion this is often dismissed as a mere oratorical device, but could Paul be arguing that all people have some knowledge of God simply by virtue of being created in God's image?

There are numerous biblical examples of non-believers participating in what Christians would call the mission of God, so, a second biblical lens is the participation of outsiders in God's mission. Their motivations for doing so may be different than Christians, but that does not make them any less important or valuable. In fact, God often seems to renew and teach the church through those who might not consider themselves to be God's people, or who are not considered to belong in the eyes of God's people.

Pharaoh gave Jacob a position of prominence that saved God's people from famine (Genesis 47). When the new Pharaoh turned against God's people and they fled Egypt it was Moses' father-in-law Jethro, a Midianite priest, who confronted Moses about his need to share leadership (Exodus 18). When God's people were defeated and exiled, it was Cyrus, King of Persia, who rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1). The Magi traveled to see the Christ child and offered him gifts at his birth (Matthew 2:1-12). The Samaritan Woman at the Well challenged Jesus to extend his love to those looked down upon by his people (John 4). Jesus made a "Good Samaritan" a hero (Luke 10:25-37), while Paul was saved by a Roman centurion (Acts 27). And the list goes on and on.

The identity and mission of the Triune God is not one of conquest and coercion but perichoretic love and invitation to share in the life of the Trinity. Christians are called to humble engagement with those of other religious traditions because they are beloved by God and God is at work in and through them.

The gospel is always embedded in particular cultures—that is the logic of the incarnation. Our own rehearsing of it invites us into the posture of being learners (disciples) who seek the Spirit’s leading as we are called into God’s great adventure of faith. That calling is also a *sending* into relationship with our neighbors, for God creates covenant community not primarily for its own enjoyment or privilege, but to be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12).⁹⁵

The full inclusion of those from all (and no) faith traditions and practices in our college and university communities is not merely a ploy to convert them to Christianity. That would go against the perichoretic nature of God by treating people as objects. God relates to the world subject to subject, and so any organization that claims to be part of the church must do the same. It is especially important that the church disavow the colonial stigma that hangs over Christianity by embodying true perichoretic missional engagement that respects and honors all people created in the image of God.⁹⁶

Understanding the world as created by God in genuine otherness, with a dazzling array of difference in human cultures, ethnicities, perspectives, and ways of life that need not be cause for division, is critical for a postcolonial missiology.⁹⁷

Moving beyond the past to understand the church’s mission in a post-Christian world requires reflection on cultural engagement and difference. Building on the work of

⁹⁵ Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, 57.

⁹⁶ I agree with Lamin Sanneh’s conclusion that mission and colonialism are too easily equated with one another. There are both good and bad examples of missional engagement in the church’s past. Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 150.

⁹⁷ Zscheile, *Cultivating Sent Communities*, 15.

Fernando Ortiz, Daniel Anderson makes an important distinction about cross cultural encounters.

(Ortiz) referred to a process of transition from one culture to another that is not one culture taking on the culture of another (as is implied in acculturation) but that the interaction of cultures involves deculturation and the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, neoculturation.⁹⁸

This is not to say that ELCA colleges and universities should not embrace an institutional religious identity and mission that is faithful to its calling as a ministry of the church. But theological and cultural conformity are not necessary, and in fact would be detrimental, to the calling God has given us.

Our obsession with drawing boundaries around certain doctrinal concepts as preconditions for inclusion in the community is a vestige of the objectivist framework of the enlightenment and unhelpful in our more fluid age. It is not that beliefs do not matter, but rather that they are not helpful parameters for communities formed by the missional nature of God who seeks relationship with all creation.

A more helpful way of thinking about the identity of ELCA colleges and universities is through the concept of open, bound, and centered sets as models for organizational identity and mission.⁹⁹ An open set has no boundaries in terms of who belongs and who does not. Everyone is free to believe whatever they want to believe and the institution has no articulated identity. Open sets tend towards relativism and it is

⁹⁸ Daniel R. Anderson, "Church Emerging: A Missional View" in Mary Sue Dehmlow Dreier, *Created and Led by the Spirit: Planting Missional Congregations*, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 8.

⁹⁹ Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*, 7–8.

difficult for the institution to accomplish anything because it has no defined identity. The advantage is that it is inclusive in nature.

At the other end of the spectrum is the bound set which has clear boundaries for community membership. If your identity and beliefs are consistent with the institutions, then you are within the boundaries of the community—if not, you are excluded. Obviously bound sets are less inclusive but there is also a clearly articulated identity and mission that allows the organization to fulfill its purpose.

A third alternative is the centered set in which the organization has a clearly defined identity and mission (a center) but there are no boundaries. Everyone is welcome to be part of the community, yet, the organization is clear about its identity and purpose. Institutions that are centered sets have an articulated identity, allowing them to fulfill their mission without being exclusive.

The centered set is the most consistent with the nature of the triune God because it has a clear identity and mission but remains open, inclusive, and non-coercive. Institutions do not spend their time “policing the boundaries” and ensuring conformity, instead they focus their attention on consistently articulating the institution’s identity and mission. Using the fractal analogy again, Margaret Wheatley argues that organizations can have certain “vital agreements” that create common purpose but allow for diverse expressions.

(i)n true fractal fashion, these vital agreements do not restrict individuals from embodying them in diverse and unique ways. Self-similarity is achieved not through compliance to an exhausting set of standards and rules, but from a few simple principles that everyone is accountable for, operating in a condition of individual freedom.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 129.

Vital agreements could take many different forms at institutions. At ELCA colleges and universities they may include a commitment to the theological exploration of vocation and faith, the presence of a robust campus ministry, an emphasis on service and leadership, etc. The important thing is that these vital agreements are clearly grounded in the religious identity and mission of the institution, something that is often missing because of a lack of theological reflection and articulation.¹⁰¹

A missiological ecclesiology is not a technical solution to the adaptive challenges facing our institutions. Recruiting more Lutheran students, marketing campaigns that emphasize the religious identity of the college, providing more religious programming, or any other conceivable strategy are technical solutions to an adaptive challenge. They may be part of the solution but they are cosmetic changes that will not have any lasting significance if we do not understand who we are and what God is doing in and through us.

Contextual Theology

A final lens that may be helpful in understanding the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities is contextual theology as outlined by Steven Bevans in his book *Models of Contextual Theology*. Contextual theology reflects an awareness of the culturally conditioned nature of all theological reflection. There is no ahistorical or culturally neutral perspective from which human beings might understand the world. Contextual theology honors the importance of culture by examining how they relate to one another.

¹⁰¹ I provide some examples of possible vital agreements for Lutheran colleges and universities in the final chapter.

Bevans identifies a number of different contextual theological models that can be found in Scripture and Christian tradition. The question is which model is most appropriate theologically and missionally in the present context?

The first model Bevans identifies is the *translation model*, one of two that are not utilized on the identity and mission websites that I analyzed. It is also the model most often used when doing contextual theology.

If there is a key proposition of the translation model, it is that the essential message of Christianity is supracultural or supracontextual. Practitioners of this model speak of a “gospel core.”¹⁰² Another basic metaphor that reveals this presupposition is that of the kernel and the husk: there is the kernel of the gospel, which is surrounded in a disposable, nonessential cultural husk.¹⁰³

The *translation model* assumes that the Christian message is something entirely new in any cultural context and that people from different cultures are asking the same theological questions to which this *gospel core* communicates. This is a model most closely associated with evangelical Christianity which approaches the mission of God in higher education as the advancement of a Christian worldview in each academic discipline.¹⁰⁴

The *humanistic model* seems to be relied on heavily by ELCA colleges and universities. Tom Christenson devotes an entire chapter in his book *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* to the development of a Lutheran anthropology for higher education.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Krikor Haleblian, “The Problem of Contextualization,” *Missiology* 11, no. 1 (January 1983): 101–2.

¹⁰³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*, 57–84.

It is within every person, and every society and social location and every culture, that God manifests the divine presence, and so theology is not just a matter of relating an external message...to a particular situation; rather, theology chiefly involves attending and listening to that situation so that God's hidden presence can be manifested in the ordinary structures of the situation, often in surprising ways.¹⁰⁶

Lutheran colleges often ground their commitment to the academic enterprise, the liberal arts, intellectual inquiry, and the need for a diverse community in a humanistic understanding of God's presence in creation. Luther himself often employed this type of language when talking about the value of education.

The *praxis model* is often associated with liberation theology and its emphasis on the fundamental command to work for justice and serve others in the Christian witness. In order for Christianity to have any legitimacy it must acknowledge that God requires God's people to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."¹⁰⁷

(t)he *praxis model* of contextual theology focuses on the identity of Christians within a particular context particularly as that context is understood in terms of social change.¹⁰⁸

ELCA colleges are well known for supporting the pursuit of justice and the value of service as expressions of their religious identity and mission. Social justice and social change are deeply embedded in our curriculums.

The *synthetic model* combines elements of several different contextual theologies. It appreciates the contributions of all individuals and without privileging one over another.

¹⁰⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 55.

¹⁰⁷ Harrelson, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, Micah 6:8.

¹⁰⁸ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 55.

The practitioner of the synthetic model would say that it is only when women and men are in dialogue that we have true human growth. Each participant in a context has something to give the other, and each context has something from which it needs to be exercised.¹⁰⁹

This is another model that ELCA colleges and universities value highly. We talk often of the dialogue between faith and learning, as well as the importance of considering different viewpoints and perspectives. A growing area of emphasis for many ELCA colleges is interfaith and intrafaith understanding and inclusivity. It is often stated that the reason ELCA colleges do not require a statement of belief is that the inclusion of diverse opinions and people is one of the primary values of Lutheran higher education.

The *transcendental model* also appears frequently in the espoused religious identity and mission of ELCA institutions. Self-discovery is an important part of the Lutheran educational experience.

Subjective authenticity is the foundation for theological understanding. You have to know yourself before you can understand how your perceptions of the world are shaped by your community, culture, etc.¹¹⁰

One of the most common categories on all of the ELCA college websites is the discussion of vocation. Vocation is referred to in a variety of ways; calling, faith and vocation, and passion. This is not surprising as many of the ELCA colleges received grants for the theological exploration of vocation from the Lilly foundation.¹¹¹ There is definitely a subjective flavor to the discussion of vocation on the ELCA sites. Similarly, there is a great deal of emphasis on individual student development; particularly in

¹⁰⁹ Bevens, 91.

¹¹⁰ Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

¹¹¹ Clydesdale, *The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students about Vocation*.

relationship to spiritual growth and self-discovery. Knowing yourself is often mentioned as a prerequisite for understanding faith and your place in the world.

The sixth and final model is *the countercultural model*, which did not appear on any of the ELCA sites. It is more closely associated with a Reformed model of higher education.

It recognizes that human beings and all theological expressions only exist in historically and culturally conditioned situations. On the other hand, however, it warns that context always needs to be treated with a great deal of suspicion.¹¹²

One might argue that there is a countercultural element to the ELCA college's encouragement to work for social justice and change, but because these concepts are not rooted in theological notions of human brokenness or sin it seemed to make more sense to keep them in other categories.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an overview of the adaptive theological challenges facing Lutheran higher education: keeping God in the conversation, pluralism, and clarifying religious identity and mission.

We then explored the ways in which an ecclesiology, rooted in both western and eastern understandings of the nature of the Triune God, leads to a missional ecclesiology that is grounded in both the *missio Dei* and *perichoresis*.

The benefits of a Trinitarian missiological ecclesiology for the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges are that it allows for a distinctive Christian identity and mission which embraces religious pluralism through subject to subject relationships in

¹¹² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 117.

which God's transformative work is accomplished. The identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities are best understood as a centered set in which there is a clear sense of identity and mission that is inclusive of religious diversity.

Finally, we considered the importance of contextual theology in interpreting our relationships with one another. In the next chapter, we turn our attention to the methodological elements of this study which will then be interpreted in light of the theoretical and theological lenses outlined in the previous two chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY

Previous research on ELCA colleges and universities has focused on their faithfulness to the institution's historical religious identity and mission. Missional fidelity is an important but subjective issue that raises a host of questions including;

- Who and what determines whether or not a school is being faithful to its mission?
The researcher? Executive leaders? The Board of Regents/Directors? Alumni?
The current campus community? The mission statement?
- When institutions reinterpret their religious identity and mission does that necessitate infidelity?
- Is it possible for an institution to be faithful to its identity but ineffective at articulating its mission, or vice versa?

As a result of these questions, I determined to focus on how ELCA colleges and universities express their religious identity and mission and how they are perceived by members of the current campus community.

Review of Research Question

My research question is, "What is the relationship between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission at select ELCA colleges and universities?" The work of Argyris and Schön influenced the formation of this question. They argue that

there is a disconnect between what people and organizations say is important to them (*espoused values*) and the principles that actually govern their behavior (*theories in use*).¹

There is an element of self-deception at work in the relationship between espoused institutional values and perceptions within the organization. Organizations and individuals do not initially aim to be deceptive. Usually the organization perceives itself as acting consistently with its espoused values; but many organizations do not have “feedback loops” that allow members to communicate what is really going on.² Members of organizations are sometimes also reluctant to state what they are really thinking when asked about the organization’s fidelity to its espoused identity and mission. Organizations also may not articulate effectively their values and guiding principles within the organization, or they may be interpreted differently by people. The main purpose of the research question is to ascertain the level of congruence between how institutions articulate their religious identity and mission and how it actually functions and is perceived within the campus community.

Research Methodology

The methodology for this research project is a convergent mixed methods exploratory case study.³ Because my research involved working with multiple institutions and their institutional review boards, it was necessary to use a convergent rather than concurrent approach in my methodology. It took a great deal of time to receive approval

¹ Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön, *Organizational Learning II: Theory, Method and Practice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996), 69.

² Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

³ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th edition, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2013), 219–28.

from each board so I began other phases of the research while still waiting on approval from other schools. Attempting to complete all three phases of my research without some overlap would have been impossible within my research time frame.

Using a mixed methods approach allowed me to qualitatively evaluate the institution's espoused religious identity and mission, and then compare it with both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the perceptions of institutional identity and mission among community members. A strictly qualitative or quantitative methodology would not have been sufficient for a question of this complexity.

A mixed methods research design is useful when the quantitative or qualitative approach, each by itself, is inadequate to best understand a research problem and the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research (and its data) can provide the best understanding.⁴

Another factor that influenced my choice of methodology is the diversity of ELCA institutions. These colleges and universities are technically "owned" by the denomination through affiliated educational corporations. But the ELCA church-wide office exerts much less influence over the day-to-day operations of its colleges and universities than would be the case in other denominations like the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Essentially the ELCA governs the colleges by having a stake in the corporation of each school and, in most cases, seats on its governing board. Historically the denomination has also served as a convener for the colleges and universities for conversations about Lutheran higher education. The autonomy of each institution leads to

⁴ Creswell, 20.

diverse expression of religious identity and mission. This diversity necessitates an exploratory research approach to this topic.

Taking a case study approach also fits with the diverse expressions of religious identity and mission at ELCA schools.⁵ By studying a number of institutions, it is easier to ascertain what they share in common and how they are different. Most schools share similar language and values, but how those are expressed can vary based on the ethnicity of its founders, the campus piety, and geographical location. Institutions located in the Midwest are perceived to be more closely affiliated to the church because of a larger supply of Lutheran students that have sheltered them from the need to reach as far beyond the Lutheran market.

On the east and west coasts, there are simply fewer Lutheran students, which means that schools located in these regions have had to recruit from a more diverse student population. There is a perception that being too closely identified with a particular group or church might be seen as a liability by such institutions, causing them to downplay their distinctiveness in an attempt to attract students.⁶

Biblical and Theological Rationale for Methodology

I chose a *convergent mixed methods exploratory case study* for this project because of the diversity of expressions of religious identity and mission at ELCA colleges. This diversity could be viewed as an indication that there is little holding

⁵ Creswell, 14.

⁶ See the discussion in chapter three of organizational isomorphism. Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*. DiMaggio and Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited."

together these institutions besides their affiliation with the ELCA. The impulse to create some sort of standardized identity is understandable because the influence of modernism is so pervasive.

While I would agree that ELCA colleges and universities do need some sort of common sense of religious identity and mission, the degree of this standardization should be carefully considered. Each ELCA college and university has its own unique context, challenges, and opportunities. From a missional perspective, it would make little sense for them to be carbon copies of one another. Such an approach would lead to sectarian expressions with little concern for the institution's unique history and context. To put it more plainly, God is up to different things at each of these institutions.

The Triune God: Unity and Diversity

I have argued in previous chapters that the Triune God is the proper starting point for understanding the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities. The Triune God exemplifies that both unity and diversity can and should coexist with one another.

The Triune God is one; Father, Son, and Spirit in complete alignment and one in being. Yet the perichoretic relationships within the economic Trinity indicate that diversity exists within this unity. Because unity *and* diversity are elements of the Triune God, and the nature of the Triune God is the pattern for the church, that means the church can express itself in different ways while still being one. This is extremely important for my methodology as I seek to study diverse expressions of the church through ELCA colleges and universities. Being expressions of the same identity does not presuppose uniformity, nor does the diversity of expressions necessarily negate our unity.

An *exploratory mixed methods case study* is the best choice for capturing both the unity and diversity of these institutions. The exploratory nature of the study does not presuppose too many parameters that the institutions must exhibit in order to be legitimate. Mixed methods offer a more nuanced cross section of each institution but also identifies what they share in common. The case study approach allows for comparing and contrasting each school which opens up discussion for the proper balance between unity and diversity in ELCA schools overall.

Mixed Methods Research: Biblical Support

Mixed methods research is designed to allow the researcher to look at data from different perspectives. This is not unlike the biblical narrative which presents information from multiple authors' perspectives. Not only does Scripture provide viewpoints from different authors, it often provides the *same* information from different perspectives.

In the Old Testament, the creation story is told in two different ways. The first version in Genesis 1 provides a macro perspective. The author describes the creation of the heavens and the earth purely from God's point of view and with a focus on how each element of creation is formed. In Genesis two we see creation not only from God's point of view, but also from humankind's. The story of Adam and Eve is an even more in-depth reflection on the creation of humankind, their subsequent rebellion, and God's relationship with the people God created.

Another example of the multiperspectival nature of Scripture is the story of Israel's flight from Egypt and journey toward the Promised Land. Both Exodus and Numbers provide complimentary accounts of this journey, most likely from different authors. According to the JEDP hypothesis there were at least four writers of the

Pentateuch; J-The Yahwist, E-The Elohist, D-The Deuteronomist, and P-The Priestly. In Exodus, much of the story of Israel's journey is told from the perspective of the Elohist, while in Numbers the Priestly voice provides a slightly different interpretation of these same events.

The perspectives of different authors are more obvious in the New Testament because they appear in different volumes. Matthew, Mark, and Luke—the “synoptic” gospels—seem to share common source material. They include many of the same stories but tell them in different ways while adding or omitting others. John, on the other hand, contains relatively few of the same stories as the synoptic gospels. John's Gospel even begins before time with a mystical account of how “the Word became flesh” in John 1.

These different perspectives on the same material enhances the reader's appreciation for what God was up to in the biblical narrative and is doing in our own times. Similarly, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data provides a fuller picture of what God is up to at the colleges and universities that I studied. Quantitative research provides a broad cross section of the community's opinions and sense of what God is doing. Qualitative data allow for a more in-depth look at opinions within the community and what God is up to.

Case Studies: The Letters to the Churches in Revelation

Another Johannine source, the book of Revelation, offers ample evidence of the merits of the case study approach. In the second and third chapters of Revelation the author relates messages from Christ to seven different churches in Asia Minor. Each of these churches exists in its own unique context and has particular resources and

challenges that the author identifies. Despite these differences each church shares a common mission and identity.

The address to each Church follows the same formula. “To the angel of the church in _____ write,” followed by a different description of Christ. Next, Christ tells the church that “he knows their works,” identifying ways in which they are faithful, followed by a rebuke. Then, counsel and encouragement are offered to each church as they live out their calling. A warning is then given and a prophecy about things that are to come or an account of something the church possesses. Each address ends with a promise of reward for those who remain faithful, in some cases other promises, and finally a sign off.

The letters to the churches in Revelation are similar to case study methodology because each church is evaluated in a similar format and according to the same standards, but the information is tailored to each context. Strengths and weaknesses are acknowledged, and similarities and differences between the churches are easier to identify. It is not as if one church is the ideal church and the others are deficient. There certainly seem to be some that are viewed more favorably than others, but Revelation does not expect each church to conform to the exact same blueprint.

Research Design

The unit of analysis for my research was ELCA colleges and universities. Initially I contacted all the ELCA college and university chaplains and campus pastors through an email list-serve we use to communicate with one another. Ten schools expressed interest in participating, but for a variety of reasons not all were unable to follow through on their initial commitment, or their participation did not fit within my research timeline. I

purposively chose my own institution as one of the schools I studied and chose schools from different geographical areas.

Previous studies have focused on elite institutions or compared schools with different levels of academic selectivity to one another.⁷ In contrast this study focused on schools with similar demographic profiles. All the institutions I studied were tuition driven but financially stable schools with strong, but not elite, academic profiles. By comparing similar institutions in different areas of the country I was better able to isolate the geographical variable.

There were three phases to my research design. The first phase of my research was to complete a qualitative analysis of the web sites of each institution in order to establish their espoused religious identity and mission. The second phase involved a quantitative analysis of community member's perceptions of their institution's religious identity and mission. The goal was to get a broad snapshot of different ELCA colleges to see what patterns emerged and inform the questions for the third and final qualitative phase of my project, which involved conducting on campus focus groups and interviews. The third phase also focused on community perceptions.

⁷ For a study of elite institutions see Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*. A comparative case study that involves comparing institutions of different academic selectivity is Childers, *College Identity Sagas: Investigating Organizational Identity Preservation and Diminishment at Lutheran Colleges and Universities*.

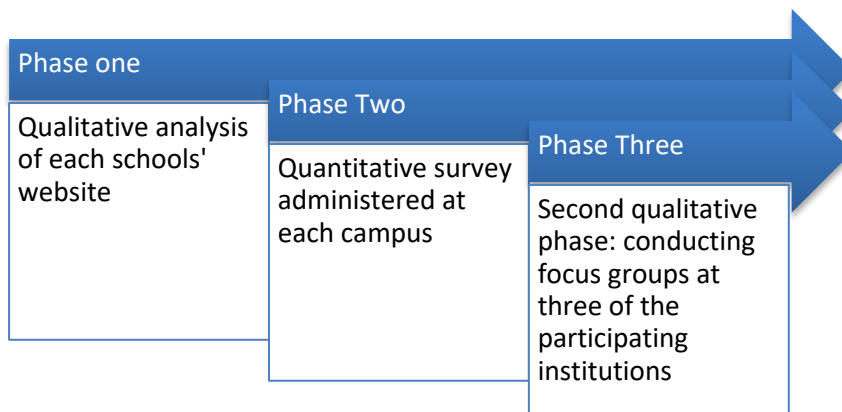


Figure 2: Research Design

Population

The first qualitative phase of my study focused on the religious mission and identity web site pages at the five schools where I planned to administer the quantitative survey. Three of the schools I studied were located in the Midwest, one was located on the east coast, and one on the west coast. Three were formerly American Lutheran Church (ALC) institutions, two were Lutheran Church in America (LCA) schools. These institutions were founded by several different ethnic groups including German, Norwegian, Swedish, and one multi-ethnic Northern European group.

All of the quantitative samples were random except for Riverside University which was a census study administered by the campus pastor.⁸ Most schools preferred the random sample which they selected based on the parameters I provided to them. I used the Survey Monkey sample size calculator to determine the number of questionnaires that needed to be sent out in order to achieve a ninety-five percent confidence rate with a five

⁸ All of the college and university names used in the research section are pseudonyms.

percent margin of error.⁹ Due to concerns about survey fatigue and privacy, I did not always receive an equal size sample.

In total, I received fourteen hundred and ninety-four survey responses for the five participating institutions. One of the institutions provided graduate students in the sample due to miscommunication. This yielded a total of fifty-eight graduate student responses. I decided to exclude the graduate student results because I did not have a similar population at any of the other institutions with which to compare. Table 4 indicates the population from each institution and the actual response numbers and rates.

Table 4: Sample Size and Response Rates by Institution

College/University	N	n	Response Rate
Foothills College	956	162	16.9%
Plains University	1757	448	25.4%
Riverside University	2124	219	9.6%
Valley College	966	348	36.4%
Western Luth University	1910	258	13.5%

All surveys were administered via Survey Monkey and each school had a unique collector and customized web link so that all the data remained in the same set. I sent the survey invitation myself at two schools based on an email list provided by the institution. One institution asked for an email to send out on my behalf and the census survey invitation was distributed by the campus pastor. In order to preserve anonymity of participants I forwarded the sample from my own institution without looking at it to a member of my research team. She then sent the emails out on my behalf.

In the final qualitative phase, I conducted on-campus visits at two schools—Western Lutheran University which is located in the Western United States—and Valley

⁹ “Sample Size Calculator,” SurveyMonkey, accessed July 5, 2017, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/>.

College which is in the Midwest. At each of these visits I attended a worship service and campus ministry event and administered separate focus groups for students, faculty, and staff. I also conducted individual interviews with executive leaders.¹⁰

At Western Lutheran University only two students attended my focus groups. One was a multiracial Senior male from a Catholic background, the other was a white female graduate student from a non-Lutheran Presbyterian background. In order to fill out my sample I followed up with individual student interviews. I offered \$10 gift cards to these participants and conducted the interviews via Zoom.¹¹ I interviewed five students in this fashion, four female and one male. One was from a non-Lutheran mainline background, two were ELCA Lutheran, and two were from other world religions. They came from a variety of academic disciplines and years in school. Two of the individual interview participants were white, the other three came from diverse backgrounds. Most were practicing their faith in some manner.

The staff focus group at Western Lutheran had eight participants, five females and three males. The staff came from a variety of different administrative offices and included Lutherans, other Christians, unaffiliated individuals, and one from another world religion. Most of the participants were white. The faculty focus group had five participants from the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. All but one was white and Christian. One came from another world religion. I will not share much information

¹⁰ See Appendix H for focus group profile information.

¹¹ "Video Conferencing, Web Conferencing, Webinars, Screen Sharing," Zoom Video, accessed July 5, 2017, <https://zoom.us/>.

about the executive leaders who were interviewed since it is a small sample and would make anonymity difficult to maintain.

Valley College was conducting a related research project when I did my focus groups so I was able to simply add my questions to those being asked. Participants were offered a free sandwich in exchange for their participation. Finding participants was much easier because of the broader institutional research project. I had enough respondents (twenty-two) for three student focus groups. The groups had a good balance between areas of study, year in school, race, and place of origin. Participants came from a variety of Christian faith backgrounds with the largest groups being ELCA and Conservative Protestant. All the other categories were represented, including two adherents of other world religions.

The faculty focus group had six participants, five of whom were white and two were ELCA. All the other religious categories besides Atheist/Agnostic were represented. They came from the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. All but two had been at Valley College for more than five years.

The staff focus group had seven participants, six of whom were white. They came from virtually every administrative area of campus and included both hourly and salaried employees. The majority were ELCA Lutheran, but all other religious categories were represented except for other world religions. All but one had been at Valley College for more than five years. I conducted interviews with executive leaders at Valley College as well, but fewer than at Western Lutheran University.

Instruments

There were two primary independent variables in this study that were operationalized in analysis and survey instruments. The first was the espoused religious identity and mission of each college as defined by the institution through analysis of its website.

The second independent variable was the lived identity and mission (perceptions) of the institution as reported by the campus community (faculty, staff, and students). I operationalized this variable by asking participants about their perceptions in a number of areas in the quantitative survey and focus groups. Demographic data were also collected to measure the influence of intervening variables such as role on campus, year in school, gender identity, religious affiliation, and length of time at the institution. Before conducting focus groups and administering the survey, instruments were field tested by students, recent alumni, and members of my advisory team. None of the field testers was allowed to take the actual survey. The implied consent can be found in appendix A and the full questionnaire in appendix B. Focus group and interview protocols can be found in appendices C-F.

On-campus focus groups at Western Lutheran University were conducted by me and at Valley College they were conducted by trained faculty, staff, and students. Each focus group interview began with an explanation of the project, signing of informed consent waivers, and some time to review the mission and identity page from their institution. This had previously been sent to participants, but not all had read it beforehand. At the beginning of each group I asked each participant to identify themselves so that the recordings could be transcribed accurately.

Data Analysis

During the first qualitative phase I began by analyzing the religious identity and mission web pages of each institution using nVivo software.¹² Each institution had a mission and identity page but they appeared under different names.¹³ None of the institutions displayed this information on their front pages. Typically, it was located under the “about” tab. Page access took between two to three clicks on each site and the pages varied in length. Several institutions had more than one page that covered religious identity and mission. In these cases, I imported the text from each page.

After locating the information, I copied the text from the page into a word document and imported it into nVivo. I used the word document as a source because the import option in nVivo was not capturing all the website text. I then began coding the data using the process outlined by Kathy Charmaz in *Constructing Grounded Theory*.¹⁴

I began with word-by-word coding, proceeded line-by-line, and then created *in vivo* codes for important themes related to religious identity and mission.¹⁵ After analyzing my *in vivo* codes I created focused codes that brought together emerging themes in the data.¹⁶

¹² *NVivo Software*, accessed June 27, 2017, <http://www.qsrinternational.com/>.

¹³ Some examples of page titles included, *Identity and Mission*, *Lutheran Heritage*, *Faith and Learning*, *Mission, Values and Vision*, *The Lutheran Experience*, *Purpose and Principles*, *The Mission and Values*, and *Mission Statement*.

¹⁴ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014).

¹⁵ Charmaz, 343.

¹⁶ Charmaz, 138–47.

I then grouped the focused codes into axial codes as additional patterns emerged and began to create theoretical codes to represent the relationship between the axial codes. Theoretical coding takes the previously generated codes and places them together in a way that may explain what the data are saying.¹⁷

IRB Standards

My research conformed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards of Luther Seminary, my institution, and was approved by the IRBs at each institution I studied. Every attempt was made to maintain confidentiality, protect data, and fully inform participants of any risks or benefits. Some of the ethical safeguards in this study include;

- The use of pseudonyms for individuals and institutions.
- Storage of collected data in an encrypted file on my computer. All data will be destroyed after three years.
- Participation was completely voluntary.
- I trained and made use of other interviewers for focus groups where my presence might have inhibited open conversation.

Conclusion

After completing the three phases of research a number of questions arose that will be addressed in the next section.

¹⁷ Charmaz, 150.

- What does our reliance on certain contextual theological models indicate about the identity and mission of ELCA schools?
- Are there elements of the models we do not use that might enhance our self-understanding? Why does sin, a fundamental aspect of Lutheran-Christian theology, not appear in our theological discourse?
- Why does God never appear as an active subject on any of the colleges' web pages?
- Do we talk about our ecclesiological identity in a sufficiently robust fashion?

These questions and more will be considered in the next chapter which presents the results of the research.

CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS

This study has focused on the relationship between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission at five ELCA colleges. There were three research phases; a qualitative coding of each institution's website, a quantitative survey at each institution, and a qualitative process of focus groups and interviews at two of the institutions.

Phase #1: Qualitative Coding of Mission and Identity Statements

The first phase of my research involved qualitative coding of the mission and identity pages of the five participating institutions. These schools are all affiliated with the ELCA and are tuition-driven because of their modest endowments. All are selective in terms of admission but none are ranked in the most elite tier of schools in the *US News & World Report* rankings.¹ These are good schools but because of the size of their endowments they are subject to the market pressures of higher education. Attracting and retaining students is of utmost importance.

Three of the institutions are universities that offer some sort of professional post-baccalaureate degree. None of the graduate populations is larger than the undergraduate

¹ *US News & World Report*, "Best Colleges," accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges>.

student body, but the schools do vary in terms of size and areas of the country. Table 5 highlights the similarities and differences between the schools.

Table 5: Institutional Profiles

School	Location	Size ²	Endowment ³	Acceptance Rate ⁴
Foothills College	Eastern US	2,000	\$135 Million	73%
Plains University	Midwest	2,000*	\$65 Million	68%
Riverside University	Midwest	2,000*	\$98 Million	90%
Valley College	Midwest	1,500	\$64 Million	78%
Western Luth University	Western US	4,000*	\$92 Million	48%

The websites for these institutions are intended for external audiences, particularly prospective students and their families. The mission and identity statements introduce prospective students and their families to the religious character of the institution.

They were written by the admissions office, marketing and communications office, or a combination of the two. Typically, the campus ministry staff and/or the religion department had a voice in the conversation but the language was ultimately left to the communication professionals. Communicating the identity of the institution was largely viewed as a “branding” issue.

This was sort of written with a lot of input from the campus pastors and the brand strategy process to try to define how we could incorporate Lutheran ideals of vocation. When we first started working on this statement, there was a lot of

² * Includes graduate students. Source: *US News & World Report*, “Best Colleges,” accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges>.

³ 2016 endowment values as reported by *US News & World Report*, “Best Colleges,” accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges>.

⁴ 2016 data as reported by *US News & World Report*, “Best Colleges,” accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges>.

explanation of what Lutheran principles meant. And we tried to simplify that to really get at the idea of purpose. (WS2)⁵

There seemed to be a great deal of concern to try and distinguish themselves from other more conservative church-affiliated colleges in their context. This was especially evident in schools outside the Midwest, but it seemed to be some sort of factor at all the schools.

We put some language in our brand platform that hopefully is kind of an indicator, you know we use words like open-minded, there's, you know, the mission statement, the social-justice orientation, and I think for families who are looking for a particular kind of institution see those words and recognize that we're taking kind of a different approach. (WS2)⁶

These concerns about being associated with other more conservative schools are legitimate. ELCA colleges and universities are different from their more conservative counterparts and knowledge of Lutheranism is often limited. Perhaps that is why the mission and identity statements for the different institutions seemed to be rather generic.

The statements also seemed to share common language. An emphasis on service, inclusion, and discovering one's purpose in life were paramount. Another common theme was the intellectual benefits of a Lutheran education and a description of the relationship between faith and reason in the Lutheran tradition. These similarities are especially evident in the axial and focused codes.

Table 6: Qualitative Analysis of Websites: Axial and Focused Codes

A1 Institutional Mission

- FC1 Description of mission, vision, and values
- FC2 Structures that support mission

⁵ Quote taken from Western Lutheran University Staff focus group. See Appendix H for focus group profile information.

⁶ See Appendix H for focus group profile information.

Table 6: Qualitative Analysis of Websites: Axial and Focused Codes (continued)

A2 Faith and learning in the Lutheran tradition	FC3 Integration of faith and reason
	FC4 The Lutheran Scholarly Tradition
A3 Making the world a better place	FC5 Changing the world
	FC6 Global citizenship
	FC7 Interfaith understanding
	FC8 Servant leadership
	FC9 Working for justice
A4 Developing the whole person	FC10 Student growth
	FC11 Vocation
A5 Characteristics of an inclusive community	FC12 A welcoming community
	FC13 Benefits of an inclusive community
	FC14 Caring community
AC6 Lutheran-Christian identity as faithful openness	FC15 Christianity as faithful openness
	FC16 Lutheran identity as faithful openness
AC7 Academic excellence	FC17 Student benefits from the academic experience
	FC18 Advantages of a liberal arts perspective
	FC19 Value of intellectual inquiry

After examining the relationships among the axial codes theoretical codes were developed. These three codes provided further clarity about the espoused religious identity of each institution.

Table 7: Qualitative Analysis of Websites: Theoretical and Axial Codes

TC1 We are a Lutheran college or university	A1 Institutional Mission
	A2 Faith and learning in the Lutheran tradition
TC2 Being Lutheran means freedom and openness	A5 Characteristics of an inclusive community
	A6 Lutheran-Christian identity as faithful openness
TC3 These are the outcomes we produce	A3 Making the world a better place
	A4 Developing the whole person
	A7 Academic excellence

The institutions wish to communicate that they are student-focused, inclusive, and will be a good investment for families. They need to emphasize value because they are

competing for students against state schools with much lower educational costs. The most elite institutions are more likely to be recruiting students who have already decided on a private education. The schools in this study must compete against both private institutions and public colleges and universities. The economic pressures on the schools in this study cannot be overstated.

All of the statements began with an expression of Lutheran identity. This was often followed by a disclaimer that one does not have to be Lutheran in order to attend, and that being Lutheran is really about freedom and openness. The bulk of the statements were dedicated to highlighting the outcomes of a Lutheran education. The relationship between the theoretical codes is visualized in figure 3. Because there is no mention of God or other transcendent concepts that has been bracketed out of the figure.

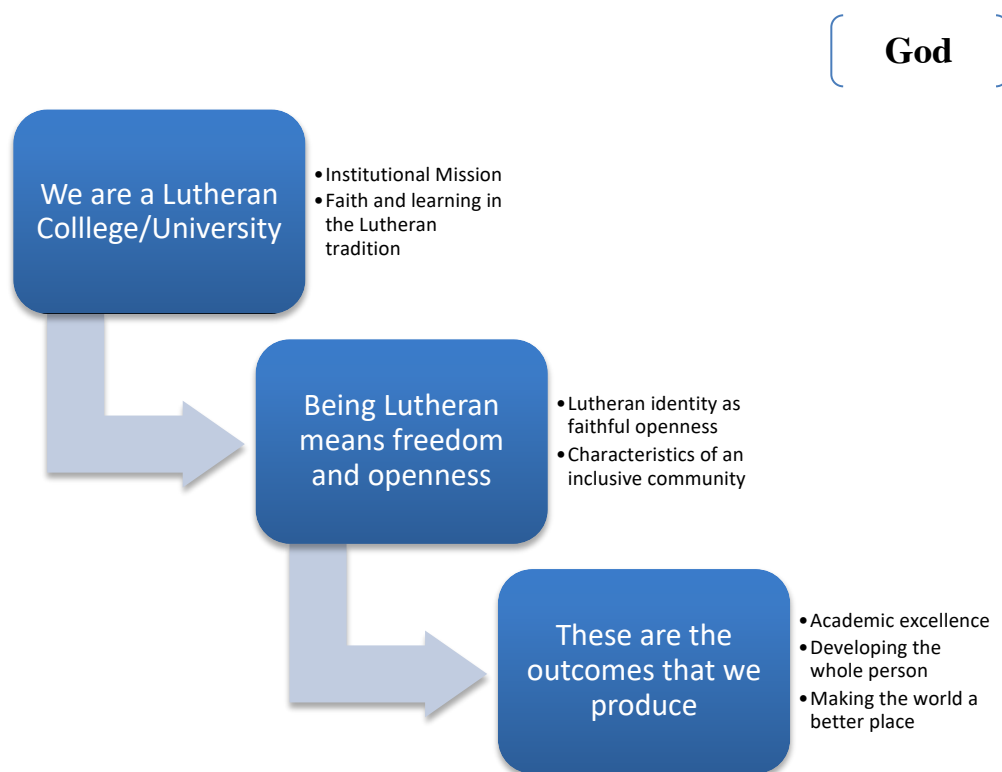


Figure 3: Qualitative Analysis of Websites: Relationship between Theoretical and Axial Codes

Some differences among the statements did emerge and were usually related to geography. Schools in the heart of the Midwest were more likely to identify a distinctively Lutheran and/or Christian identity. Plains University was the most assertive, even listing “Christian” as one of its institutional values. Valley College also makes frequent reference to its denominational affiliation and lists “faith” as one of the core values in its mission statement.

Riverside University is located in the Midwest but not in the heart of Lutheran territory. Its statement tends to emphasize the academic advantages of a liberal arts education as being a reflection of the school’s Lutheran identity. All of the institutions emphasized the concept of vocation, although typically using secular terms like “purpose” or “passions” rather than theological language. Western Lutheran University is perhaps the best example of this vocational focus which it ties directly to its Lutheran identity. Foothills College which is located in the Eastern United States talks a great deal about “passion” and “purpose,” but there is almost no mention of religious identity or mission.

Interpretations of Qualitative Phase #1

The language in these mission and identity statements could best be described as humanistic, which according to Charles Taylor means “accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything beyond this flourishing.”⁷ These statements are not anti-religious, but except for a few mentions of faith and

⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1st edition (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 18.

denominational affiliation almost everything else could be part of the identity statement of any institution. In fact, we are seeing a rise in the use of buzzwords like “passion” and “purpose” among public institutions.

To be fair, these statements were crafted primarily to communicate with prospective students and parents from a variety of faith backgrounds. They are not meant to be theological treatises, nor would that be a helpful format for achieving their purpose. But, the lack of transcendent language is important to note, as is the emphasis on individual growth and fulfillment. This is consistent with broader cultural and social trends that will be discussed in the final chapter. For now, it is sufficient to say that this focus on individual needs and finite concerns is consistent with the notion of a “buffered self” that has been freed from the influence of transcendent spiritual forces.⁸ This is a trend that has been developing for centuries in the Western world and is certainly not unique to Lutheran schools.

In his 1989 study of LaSallian Catholic colleges and universities, Stephen Markham examined the in-use ecclesiologies of the institutions. Markham used two primary categories, *other-worldly* and *immersed in the world*, to understand perceptions of the church on each campus.⁹ Markham found a much greater emphasis on immersed in the world ecclesiologies¹⁰ that is consistent with the identity and mission statements of

⁸ Taylor, 135.

⁹ Stephen Markham, *A Descriptive Study of the Espoused and In-Use Ecclesiology Found in Selected LaSallian Christian Brother Colleges and Universities* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Information Service, 1989), 129–45.

¹⁰ Markham, 158–294.

these five ELCA institutions that focus on the immediate benefits of a Lutheran college education rather than otherworldly aspects.

The underlying theory-in-use behind these statements is that the transcendent elements of the school's religious identity are a potential stumbling block for prospective students. This seems to be informed by assumptions based on the secularization theory that have since been proven to either be false or at least more nuanced than assumed.

We will see in later results evidence to suggest that there is indeed anxiety among prospective students about the religious identity of the institution. There also is evidence to suggest the lack of clarity in these statements actually causes more anxiety among prospective students than the institutions realize. Further examination of the operative theory-in-use through research is needed to better understand the effect that religious identity has on the perceptions of prospective students.

An issue of greater concern is the fact that these rather generic statements are the primary way in which the institution espouses its religious identity and mission. There are sometimes conversations on campus about the identity of the institution, but it seems that they do not occur very frequently. One non-Lutheran faculty member remarked on the change during his time at the institution.

(T)he first few years (I was here) we did nothing but talk about the Lutheran identity. And I think, actually, we have completely moved away from it. So, we never have conversations about, what does Lutheran higher education mean? So much of that, I think we have gone the complete opposite direction. I think it was a little bit too much wrapped into, we need to talk about our Lutheran heritage so we don't lose it. And I think that now we don't talk about it at all for the fear of maybe being perceived as chauvinist. But there has got to be a way to talk about it. (WF5)¹¹

¹¹ See Appendix H for focus group profile information.

There may be reason to think strategically about the best way to communicate the institution's religious identity and mission to an audience that may be unfamiliar with the tradition or even religion in general. The problem is that there are no other espoused statements about the theological identity of the institution to guide its life. Chris Argyris argues that "the less an organization is guided by its overall objectives and the more the objectives of each part becomes paramount and is not relatable to the overall objectives, the less the firm approximates the essential characteristics of an organization."¹² Relying on a marketing statement that is designed to explain the religious identity and mission of the institution in a few paragraphs seems inadequate.

Phase #2: Quantitative Results

In the second phase of research a quantitative survey was administered at the five institutions between December 2016 and February 2017. Each institution had its own IRB process which accounts for the longer period of response collection. Every attempt was made to obtain a similar sample from each institution but there were some variations. Table 8 outlines the sample type, size of student and faculty/staff samples, and response rates for each institution.

Table 8: Sample Type, Sample Size (N), Valid Responses (n)

Institution	Sample Type	N	n	Response Rate
Foothills College	Stratified Probability	956	162	16.9%
Plains University	Census	1757	448	25.4%
Riverside University	Convenience	2243	218	9.6%
Valley College	Stratified Probability	966	348	36.4%
Western Luth University	Stratified Probability	1910	258 ¹³	13.5%

¹² Chris Argyris, *Integrating the Individual and the Organization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1964), 153.

¹³ Fifty-nine graduate students who answered the questionnaire were not included in the final number.

The Midwestern schools (Plains, Riverside, Valley) had a higher response rate than the non-Midwestern schools. There were 417 responses from non-Midwestern schools versus 1,014 from Midwestern schools. Riverside University is more secular than the other Midwestern schools and is not located in the heart of Lutheran country. Without Riverside included with the Midwestern schools the number falls to 796.

There are several other demographic factors that may be helpful to know about the population. The first is the gender breakdown as illustrated in table 9.

Table 9: Respondent's Gender

	N	%
Male	441	36
Female	778	64
Total	1219	100

A second important characteristic of the population is the religious affiliation of respondents which is illustrated in table 10. Not surprisingly Lutherans are the largest response group, followed by Conservative Protestants. The World Religions response is the smallest.

Table 10: Respondents by Religious Affiliation

Religious Affiliation	N	%
Lutheran	371	31.3
Conservative Protestant	179	15.1
Other Mainline	150	12.6
Catholic/Orthodox	172	14.5
Other World Religions	42	3.5
None/No labels	118	10.0
Atheist/Agnostic	153	13.0
Total	1185	100.0

Not all survey respondents persisted to the end of the questionnaire. I decided to use these incomplete responses unless the respondent only answered a few questions.

Another decision I made was to combine some of the original religious affiliation

categories in order to make my analysis more effective. I had sixteen original categories that were collapsed into seven.

Lutherans included all of the Lutheran groups even though the Missouri and Wisconsin synods are typically categorized as conservative Protestants. I did this for several reasons. First of all, I assumed that even if they were non-ELCA Lutherans, the fact that they came from a similar theological background would make them more likely to identify with the concept of a Lutheran college. My basis for this is experience with Missouri and Wisconsin synod students in my own context. Those who are willing to attend ELCA colleges tend to be less likely to disassociate themselves from other Lutherans.

The second reason I decided to include all Lutherans is that many students know they are Lutheran, and that is about it. Some are unaware there are other Lutheran bodies in the United States, which is understandable in certain geographical regions.

Conservative Protestants combined Pentecostals, evangelical, and non-denominational Christians. Many respondents coded themselves as “other” and then listed their denomination. I sorted them accordingly based on accepted social science categories. Conservative respondents were the most likely to know their denominational affiliation, but they did not always know in which category their denomination belonged. There were a small number of Mormon respondents whom I categorized as conservative Protestant because their outlook toward the world seemed the most similar to this group.

Other mainline Protestants included Episcopalians, Presbyterians (PCUSA), Reformed (RCA), United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Quakers, Methodists, and

Unitarian/Universalists. There were options for many of these groups, but some identified themselves in the other section by their denomination.

Catholic/Orthodox respondents are fairly self-explanatory. There were not many Orthodox Christian responses so it seemed logical to combine them with Roman Catholics, the closest denomination to their own. The same was true with *other world religions* and *Atheists/Agnostics*.

The category that was most difficult to determine was the *None/No labels*. This category included individuals who may have indicated a loose adherence to a religious identity. There were many comments about being raised in a particular tradition but not being sure where they fit now, and a substantial number that identified as having no religious affiliation (nones). The no label Christians were those who described themselves as “just Christian,” “a follower of Jesus,” etc. Those who did not claim a particular affiliation but expressed values more consistent with conservative Protestants, such as being “Bible believing” or “born again,” were categorized as conservative Protestants.

Non-denominational evangelical was one of the category options but some opted to choose “other” and then listed themselves as non-denominational in the comments. These were the hardest respondents to classify because non-denominational churches tend to be more conservative in nature. In our focus groups, we found that some students who did not identify with any particular denomination were referring to themselves as non-denominational even though their values and theology were more progressive. I ultimately decided to categorize all non-denominational respondents as conservative Protestants unless they indicated something in the comments that contradicted that

categorization. There were only a few that did not provide some sort of indication about whether their theology was more conservative or progressive.

Quantitative Research Results

I used an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) linear regression model for my analysis. Because I was measuring the relationship between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission I used participants' rating of the congruence between institutionally espoused religious identity and mission and their actual experience. Congruence was analyzed for these sources of information; publications, admissions materials, website, campus visits, public statements from leaders, and other official communications from the school – which meant that six different dependent variables were analyzed. I ran a different regression model for each of the six dependent variables. The regression analysis for each of the six dependent variables was measured on a Likert scale of 0 (do not know) -5 (very accurately). Before that is presented here is a summary of each of the independent and intervening variables.

Independent Variables

- *Familiarity with religious identity*: How familiar were you with the religious identity and mission of the institution before joining the community? (Six-point Likert scale: not familiar (1) -very familiar (6))
- *Preferred future*: How would you like to see the college/university express its faith identity in the future? (Likert scale: Don't care (0), less than current (1), same as current (2), more than current (3)).

- *Perceived level of religious identity*: How much do you think the college/university's religious affiliation influences its identity? (Six-point Likert scale: no influence (1)-major influence (6)).

Intervening Variables

The influences of additional intervening variables were measured for their effect on dependent variables. Dummy variables were created for each of the categorical variables and compared with the reference category. The first intervening variable (overall satisfaction) was a Likert scale so it did not have a reference category.

- *Satisfaction*: How satisfied are you overall with your experience at this college or university? (Six-point Likert scale: not satisfied (1)-very satisfied (6))
- *Undergraduate Institution (Faculty/Staff only)*: Which of the following best describes your undergraduate institution?
 - Options: Lutheran college or university (reference category), secular, non-Lutheran Christian, public, no college.
- *Role on Campus*: Which of the following options best describes your primary role on campus?
 - Options: Student (reference category), faculty, staff.
- *Characterization of religious identity of institution*: Which of the following best describes the religious identity and mission of the institution?
 - Options: This is a Lutheran college or university (reference category), this is a secular college or university, this is a Lutheran-Christian or Christian college or university.

- *Influence of Religious affiliation:* Which of the following options best describes your current religious identity?
 - Options: Lutheran (reference category), Conservative Protestant, Catholic/Orthodox, Other Mainline Protestant, Atheist/Agnostic, None/No label.

Dependent Variable: Publications

Table 11 illustrates how accurately different populations see the espoused religious identity and mission of the institution as expressed through publications. Respondents were asked to consider magazines, news releases, etc. when making their determination.

Familiarity with the religious identity and mission of the institution before joining the community has a negative effect on the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in publications. As the level of familiarity with the religious identity and mission of the institution before joining the community increased, the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity expressed in publications decreased. This could mean that respondents expected the religious identity and mission of the school to be more or less important than what is represented in publications. Those who identified the institution as secular also reported lower levels of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in publications than those who identified the institution as Lutheran.

The levels of influence of religious affiliation and overall satisfaction are positively related to the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in publications. As the perceived influence of religious affiliation on

campus and overall satisfaction increased, the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity expressed in publications increased. Those who identified as Atheist, Agnostic, or None/No label indicated higher levels of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in publications in comparison to Lutherans.

Table 11: OLS Regression Modeling for Congruence between Espoused and Perceived Religious Identity and Mission in Publications

Variables	b	B	t	p
Intercept	3.573	.000	8.474	.000
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
-Familiarity with religious identity and mission before joining community	-.113	-.094	-2.906	.004
-Preferred future	.003	.001	.043	.966
-Influence of religious affiliation	.150	.102	3.115	.002
-Overall satisfaction	.242	.130	4.206	.000
<u>Faculty/Staff Undergraduate College or University</u>				
ELCA (Ref. Category)				
Secular Undergrad	.522	.064	1.947	.052
Non-Luth. Christian	.116	.014	.420	.674
Public	.258	.047	1.219	.223
No College	.725	.058	1.776	.076
<u>Role on campus</u>				
Students (Ref. Category)				
Staff	-.375	-.077	-1.849	.065
Faculty	-.190	-.036	-.839	.401
<u>Gender</u>				
Female (Ref. Category)				
Male	-.175	-.041	-1.363	.173
<u>Description of college/university</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Lutheran-Christian	-.137	-.033	-1.078	.281
Secular	-.614	-.071	-2.258	.024
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Conservative Protestant	-.347	-.062	-1.872	.062
Catholic/Orthodox	-.183	-.033	-.975	.330
Other Mainline	.144	.024	.742	.458
Other World Religions	-.130	-.012	-.396	.692
Atheist/Agnostic	.653	.110	3.236	.001
None/No Label	.683	.102	3.106	.002

N = 1233

R² = .095Adjusted R² = .079F_(19, 1065) = 5.871

P < .001

Dependent Variable: Admissions Materials

Table 12 indicates the level of congruence between espoused mission and identity as communicated in admissions materials. Some significant relationships once again emerge in the data.

Familiarity with the religious identity and mission of an institution before joining the community has a negative effect on the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in admissions materials. As familiarity with the religious identity and mission of the institution before joining the community increased the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity expressed in admissions materials decreased. Most likely this means that people who were familiar with the religious mission and identity expected it to be more prominently displayed in admissions materials.

Identifying the institution as secular also had a negative effect on congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in admission materials in comparison to those who characterized it as a Lutheran college or university. Being a faculty member had a positive effect on the congruence between religious identity and mission versus students. This may be because students are more familiar with admissions materials or faculty have a deeper understanding of the subtleties of Lutheran higher education.

Staff members who did not attend college reported higher levels of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in admissions materials than those who attended ELCA institutions. This may mean that those who attended Lutheran schools expect the religious identity and mission to be more prominent in

admissions publications. It could also indicate that admissions materials have become less reflective of the religious identity and mission. An alternative explanation is that Lutheran college graduates' recollections of the admissions materials they received as prospective students are not accurate.

The levels of influence of religious affiliation and overall satisfaction are positively related to the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in admissions materials. As overall satisfaction and the reported level of influence of the religious affiliation of the institution increased, the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission expressed in admission materials also increased.

Those who identified as Atheist, Agnostic, or None/No label indicated higher levels of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in admissions materials compared to Lutherans. Since these groups presumably have the weakest sense of religious identity it may indicate that colleges and universities communication have placed less emphasis on the religious identity and mission. An alternative explanation is that these groups simply find that what they experience on campus is what they see in admissions materials.

Table 12: OLS Regression Modeling for Congruence Between Espoused and Perceived Religious Identity and Mission in Admissions Materials

Variables	b	B	t	p
Intercept	2.851	.000	6.906	.000
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
-Familiarity with religious identity and mission before joining community	-.127	-.107	-3.340	.001
-Preferred future	.069	.034	1.073	.283
-Influence of religious affiliation	.163	.112	3.460	.001
-Overall satisfaction	.286	.155	5.090	.000
<u>Faculty/Staff Undergraduate College or University</u>				
ELCA (Ref. Category)				
Secular Undergrad	.505	.063	1.925	.055
Non-Luth. Christian	.177	.022	.657	.512
Public	.206	.038	.996	.319
No College	.925	.076	2.328	.020
<u>Role on campus</u>				
Students (Ref. Category)				
Staff	.313	.065	1.573	.116
Faculty	.534	.103	2.410	.016
<u>Gender</u>				
Female (Ref. Category)				
Male	.011	.003	.090	.928
<u>Description of college/university</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Lutheran-Christian	-.176	-.043	-1.424	.155
Secular	-.852	-.099	-3.209	.001
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Conservative Protestant	-.074	-.013	-.408	.683
Catholic/Orthodox	-.079	-.014	-.436	.663
Other Mainline	.322	.054	1.699	.090
Other World Religions	-.159	-.015	-.498	.618
Atheist/Agnostic	.650	.111	3.289	.001
None/No Label	.436	.066	2.020	.044

N = 1224

R² = .124Adjusted R² = .108F_(19, 1056) = 7.859

P < .001

Dependent Variable: Website

Table 13 reports results of analysis of congruence between the espoused religious identity and mission of the institution as expressed on the college website and respondents' own experiences. The levels of influence of religious affiliation and overall satisfaction are positively related to the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission on the website. As overall satisfaction and the reported level of influence of the religious affiliation of the institution increased, the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission expressed regarding the website also increased.

Attending a secular undergraduate institution had a positive effect on the congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission when compared to those who attended ELCA colleges or universities. This may be due to the fact that there is no institutional religious identity and mission at secular schools so any expression seems sufficient. Identifying as an Atheist/Agnostics or None/No label had a positive effect on the congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission of the website. Characterizing the institution as secular had a negative effect on congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission on the institution's website when compared to those who describe it as a Lutheran college or university. Being a Conservative Protestant also had a negative impact on congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission when compared to those who are Lutheran.

Table 13: OLS Regression Modeling for Congruence between Espoused and Perceived Religious Identity and Mission on College or University Website

Variables	b	B	t	p
Intercept	2.653	.000	7.214	.000
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
-Familiarity with religious identity and mission before joining community	-.030	-.029	-.890	.374
-Preferred future	.059	.033	1.036	.300
-Influence of religious affiliation	.180	.141	4.290	.000
-Overall satisfaction	.232	.142	4.616	.000
<u>Faculty/Staff Undergraduate College or University</u>				
ELCA (Ref. Category)				
Secular Undergrad	.466	.065	1.989	.047
Non-Luth. Christian	.158	.022	.655	.513
Public	-.031	-.006	-.168	.867
No College	.396	.037	1.117	.264
<u>Role on campus</u>				
Students (Ref. Category)				
Staff	-.076	-.018	-.429	.668
Faculty	-.154	-.034	-.781	.435
<u>Gender</u>				
Female (Ref. Category)				
Male	-.175	-.048	-1.571	.116
<u>Description of college/university</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Lutheran-Christian	-.055	-.015	-.495	.621
Secular	-.806	-.106	-3.390	.001
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Conservative Protestant	-.326	-.067	-2.013	.044
Catholic/Orthodox	.024	.005	.143	.886
Other Mainline	.295	.056	1.752	.080
Other World Religions	.251	.026	.873	.383
Atheist/Agnostic	.425	.082	2.407	.016
None/No Label	.688	.118	3.582	.000

N = 1225

R² = .109Adjusted R² = .093F_(19, 1056) = 6.796

P < .001

Dependent Variable: Public Statements from Leaders

Leaders communicate the religious identity and mission of the institution both by what they say and what they do not say. Table 14 reports results of analysis of perceived congruence between these statements and the experiences of respondents.

Overall satisfaction and perceived influence of religious affiliation on the campus had a positive impact on the congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in public statements. As the level of overall satisfaction and reported influence of the impact of religious affiliation on campus increased, the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in public statements from leaders also increases. This positive effect is also true for those who attended secular undergraduate institutions in comparison to ELCA graduates and those who are None/No Label in comparison to Lutherans.

Greater familiarity with religious identity and mission has a negative effect on the perceived congruence of public statements. As the level of familiarity with the religious identity and mission before joining the community increases, the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission expressed in public statements from leaders decreases.

Characterizing the institution as secular also has a negative effect on the congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in public statements when compared to those who identify it as Lutheran. It is important to note that characterizing the institution as Lutheran does not imply that the respondent is Lutheran or attended an ELCA college or university. It may be that these respondents

indicate higher levels of congruence because their only experience with Lutheran higher education is at their current institution.

Table 14: OLS Regression Modeling for Congruence between Espoused and Perceived Religious Identity and Mission in Public Statements from Leaders

Variables	b	B	t	p
Intercept	2.845	.000	7.334	.000
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
-Familiarity with religious identity and mission before joining community	-.071	-.063	-1.974	.049
-Preferred future	.053	.027	.872	.383
-Influence of religious affiliation	.212	.154	4.791	.000
-Overall satisfaction	.282	.162	5.335	.000
<u>Faculty/Staff Undergraduate College or University</u>				
ELCA (Ref. Category)				
Secular Undergrad	.511	.067	2.072	.039
Non-Luth. Christian	.172	.023	.676	.499
Public	-.029	-.006	-.147	.883
No College	.226	.019	.602	.547
<u>Role on campus</u>				
Students (Ref. Category)				
Staff	-.149	-.032	-.796	.426
Faculty	-.154	-.032	-.742	.458
<u>Gender</u>				
Female (Ref. Category)				
Male	-.144	-.036	-1.218	.224
<u>Description of college/university</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Lutheran-Christian	-.079	-.021	-.678	.498
Secular	-1.183	-.146	-4.734	.000
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Conservative Protestant	-.331	-.063	-1.942	.052
Catholic/Orthodox	-.020	-.004	-.114	.910
Other Mainline	.131	.023	.734	.463
Other World Religions	-.172	-.017	-.570	.569
Atheist/Agnostic	.282	.051	1.512	.131
None/No Label	.649	.104	3.196	.001

N = 1232

R² = .128Adjusted R² = .113F_(19, 1063) = 8.222

P < .001

Dependent Variable: Campus Visits

Almost everyone has a first official visit to campus. It may be as a prospective student or for an interview for potential employment as faculty and staff. Table 15 demonstrates how accurately the religious identity and mission of the institution is communicated on these visits.

The campus visit dependent variable has the greatest number of statistically significant intervening and independent variables. As overall satisfaction and reported influence of religious affiliation on campus life increases so does the congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in campus visits.

Being an Atheist/Agnostic or None/No label again has a positive effect on levels of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission when compared to Lutherans. Characterizing the institution as secular has a negative effect on the congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission for campus visits when compared to those who characterized it as a Lutheran college or university. Attending a non-Lutheran Christian or public institution as an undergraduate has a positive effect on the congruence between religious identity and mission when compared to those who attended Lutheran colleges or universities. The same is true for other Mainline Protestants in comparison to Lutherans.

Being a faculty or staff member also has a positive impact on the congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in campus visits in comparison to students. The fact that faculty and staff believe that campus visits accurately portray the religious mission and identity of the college than students is interesting. It is not clear whether faculty and staff were responding to their own first

visits to campus or their perception of the experience students are having. Clearly students do not feel that they are getting an accurate picture of the religious environment when they visit campus. Whether that means religious identity and mission are presented as more or less of a factor than they actually are is not immediately evident.

Table 15: OLS Regression Modeling for Congruence between Espoused and Perceived Religious Identity and Mission in Campus Visits

Variables	b	B	t	p
Intercept	2.901	.000	6.985	.000
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
-Familiarity with religious identity and mission before joining community	-.038	-.032	-1.003	.316
-Preferred future	.004	.002	.067	.947
-Influence of religious affiliation	.192	.131	4.067	.000
-Overall satisfaction	.181	.097	3.209	.001
<u>Faculty/Staff Undergraduate College or University</u>				
ELCA (Ref. Category)				
Secular Undergrad	.332	.041	1.263	.207
Non-Luth. Christian	.742	.091	2.741	.006
Public	.494	.090	2.369	.018
No College	.470	.038	1.176	.240
<u>Role on campus</u>				
Students (Ref. Category)				
Staff	.520	.106	2.609	.009
Faculty	.627	.120	2.814	.005
<u>Gender</u>				
Female (Ref. Category)				
Male	-.073	-.017	-.578	.563
<u>Description of college/university</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Lutheran-Christian	-.107	-.026	-.860	.390
Secular	-.721	-.083	-2.707	.007
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Conservative Protestant	-.118	-.021	-.652	.514
Catholic/Orthodox	.045	.008	.248	.804
Other Mainline	.480	.080	2.516	.012
Other World Religions	.561	.052	1.749	.081
Atheist/Agnostic	.682	.113	3.409	.001
None/No Label	.683	.102	3.154	.002

N = 1226

R² = .139Adjusted R² = .123F_(19, 1057) = 8.976

P < .001

Dependent Variable: Other Forms of Communication

I have the least confidence in this final variable because it allowed respondents to define the variable themselves. I asked them to indicate in the comments what other forms of communication they were rating. The biggest response category was “internal communication” including campus emails, newsletters, and social media. Table 16 indicates participants’ perceptions of the level of congruence between these forms of communication and their experience.

Familiarity with the religious identity and mission before joining the community had a negative effect on the level of congruence. As the level of familiarity with the religious identity and mission of the institution before joining the community increased, the level of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission expressed in other forms of communication decreased. Levels of reported influence of religious affiliation on campus life had the opposite effect. As reported influence of religious affiliation on campus life increased so did the congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission in other forms of communication.

Being an Atheist/Agnostic or None/No label had a positive effect on levels of congruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission when compared to Lutherans. Characterizing the institution as secular also had a negative effect on the perceived congruence of other forms of communication when compared to those who identified it as Lutheran.

Table 16: OLS Regression Modeling for Congruence between Espoused and Perceived Religious Identity and Mission in Other Forms of Communication

Variables	b	B	t	p
Intercept	5.555	.000	10.073	.000
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
-Familiarity with religious identity and mission before joining community	-.115	-.085	-2.234	.026
-Preferred future	-.126	-.055	-1.475	.141
-Influence of religious affiliation	.139	.085	2.210	.027
-Overall satisfaction	.123	.059	1.615	.107
<u>Faculty/Staff Undergraduate College or University</u>				
ELCA (Ref. Category)				
Secular Undergrad	.421	.044	1.154	.249
Non-Luth. Christian	.181	.019	.489	.625
Public	-.083	-.013	-.289	.773
No College	.315	.023	.596	.552
<u>Role on campus</u>				
Students (Ref. Category)				
Staff	-.249	-.045	-.916	.360
Faculty	.161	.026	.518	.604
<u>Gender</u>				
Female (Ref. Category)				
Male	-.151	-.031	-.878	.380
<u>Description of college/university</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Lutheran-Christian	-.112	-.024	-.657	.511
Secular	-1.118	-.113	-3.075	.002
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>				
Lutheran (Ref. Category)				
Conservative Protestant	.035	.006	.143	.886
Catholic/Orthodox	-.037	-.006	-.153	.879
Other Mainline	.285	.041	1.065	.287
Other World Religions	-.288	-.024	-.674	.500
Atheist/Agnostic	.783	.114	2.889	.004
None/No Label	1.216	.163	4.184	.000

N = 921

R² = .084Adjusted R² = .062F_(19, 779) = 3.767

P < .001

Summary of OLS Regression Models

A unique OLS Regression analysis was performed on each of the dependent variables. Because these models were unique it is difficult to reliably generalize about results. Nonetheless there were clearly some variables that had either positive or negative influence on the dependent variables in most if not all models. These consistently important variables are represented in the table below.

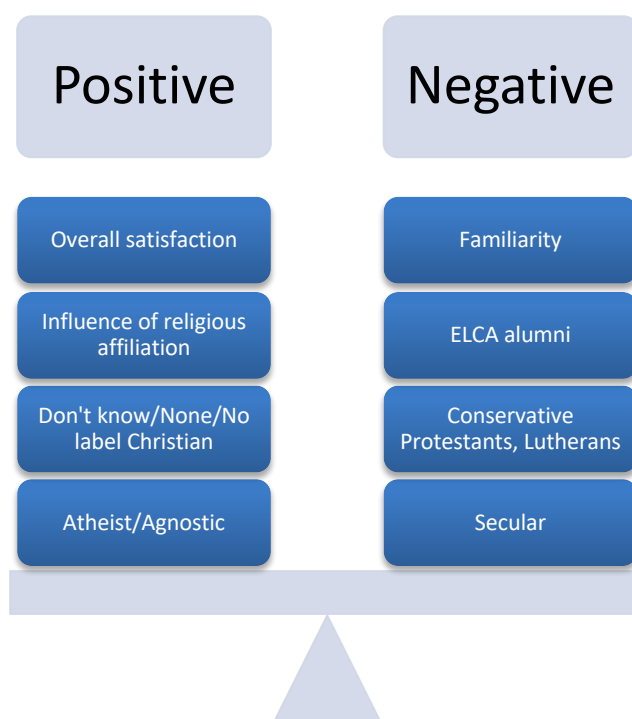


Figure 4: Effects of Independent and Intervening Variables on Dependent Variables

Qualitative Coding of Survey Comments

Another additional data source is qualitative coding of survey comments. There was an option for comments on nearly every question, but not all of them were conducive

for qualitative analysis. I excluded nominal content categories like religious affiliation but included all those that could be considered statements of opinion. Overall the tenor of the comments tended to be more negative than the data results. This is consistent with studies of survey data comments that have found them to be deleterious in tone.¹⁴

Table 17: Survey Comments: Axial and Focused Codes

AC1	There isn't much of a religious mission to support
	FC1 Desire for a stronger Lutheran and/or Christian identity and mission
	FC2 Impact of religious identity is inconsistent
AC2	Institution doesn't promote religious identity
	FC3 Institution has a hands-off approach to religious life
	FC4 Participation in religious life and identity is optional
AC3	Religious mission is a benefit to the institution
	FC5 Benefits of religious identity and mission
	FC6 Many are interested in keeping religious mission strong
	FC7 Religious identity was a positive factor in me joining the community
AC4	Supportive of the mission as long as religion isn't overbearing
	FC8 Institution shouldn't try to influence anyone's religious identity
	FC9 Religion not a factor in choosing school
	FC10 Supportive of the values of the mission but not the religious foundation
AC5	This is an inclusive religious environment with some room for improvement
	FC11 We could be more inclusive of other religious beliefs
	FC12 This is an inclusive religious environment
AC6	I'm confused about what the religious mission of the institution is
	FC13 Religious mission is unclear or I don't know enough about it
	FC14 This school has an educational and humanistic mission, not a religious one
AC7	Unfamiliar with religious identity and mission before joining community
	FC15 Didn't know much about religious identity and mission before I got here
	FC16 Sources of information about religious identity and mission

One of the trends to emerge in these comments is the role of off-campus religious groups. On some of the campuses there are conservative Protestant groups operating in partnership with the campus ministry. One faculty member expressed concern about this trend and its effect on the mission and identity of the institution.

¹⁴ Janine King et al., "2003 Employee Attitude Survey: Analysis of Employee Comments" (Oklahoma City, OK: Federal Aviation Administration, June 2005).

I am distressed that so much of what students hear is from people off campus who send several FTEs (full-time equivalent staff members) here to gain followers. These are commitments that shape a lifetime (not to mention core values) and we need to have more resources for this to give a Lutheran message that would be far more thoughtful and open than the fundamentalist orientation that comes from outside and that is antithetical to our educational mission.

Other faculty and staff see this as a reaction to the overly “liberal” orientation of campus ministry.

I would explain the religious mission (of the institution) as hyper liberal, non-gospel, anything but evangelical expression is celebrated. Unfortunately, I believe that campus ministry has little to offer a young Christian for developing and growing in their faith.

Both of these statements express uncertainty about the religious identity and mission of the institution and raise important questions. Is the institution responsible for transmitting some sort of theological identity? If so, is that being effectively communicated and carried out?

Table 18: Website Comments Theoretical and Axial Codes

TC1	Religious identity and mission are not promoted, too much focus on inclusivity
AC1	There isn't much of a religious mission to support
AC2	Institution doesn't promote religious identity
TC2	Religious identity and mission should stay as they are, inclusivity is important
AC3	Religious mission is a benefit to the institution
AC4	Supportive of the mission as long as religion isn't overbearing
AC5	This is an inclusive religious environment with some room for improvement
TC3	Confusion about religious identity and mission
AC6	I'm confused about what the religious mission of the institution is
AC7	Unfamiliar with religious identity and mission before joining community

Continuing confusion about the religious identity and mission of the institutions is another theme emerging in the focused, axial, and theoretical codes. Surprisingly very little antagonism towards religion was expressed in the comments. The relationship between the website comments theoretical codes can be visualized in this manner.



Figure 5: Relationship Between Theoretical Codes from Survey Comments

Phase #3: Second Qualitative Phase (Focus Groups and Interviews)

My final research phase consisted of site visits at two institutions where I conducted focus groups and interviews. I decided to visit one Midwestern and one non-Midwestern school to control for geography. The two institutions were Western Lutheran University and Valley College. Profiles of the focus group participants can be found in Appendix H. My student focus groups at Western Lutheran were not as well attended as I hoped so I had to rely on some interviews with students after my visit. I was also able to interview more of the executive staff at Western Lutheran than Valley College due to time constraints. Valley College was in the process of conducting a review of its campus ministry, so I piggybacked on its focus groups which included three student groups, one faculty group, and one staff group.

I tried several different ways of grouping the data but ultimately decided to combine students, faculty, staff, and executive staff by institution. I also combined students, faculty, staff, and executive staff across institutions but that did not seem to provide any different insights.

Western Lutheran University Focus Groups and Interviews

Western Lutheran University offers both bachelor's and master's degrees to a student body of approximately four thousand students spread out over several campuses. The main campus is for undergraduates, and that is the population on which I focused.

The axial and focused codes reveal a great deal of confusion about the religious identity and mission of Western Lutheran, but also a strong sense that it is important and distinctive. There also seems to be a theory-in-use that sees the religious identity as a liability with external audiences because the institution feels it gets lumped in with more conservative Christian schools. Clearly the institution has tried to address this issue through a strong interfaith emphasis and a process of rebranding the institution. One of the most frequent statements I heard on campus is that Western Lutheran cannot avoid talking about religion because the word Lutheran is in its name. Sometimes this sounded like a lament but in most cases, it seemed to be a statement of fact about institutional realities.

Table 19: Western Lutheran University Axial and Focused Codes

AC1	Confusion about religious identity and mission
FC1	Challenges of agreeing on our religious identity and mission
FC2	Identity and mission not clearly defined
FC3	Identity of Lutheran schools have to be experienced to be understood
AC2	Religious identity and mission are peripheral to institution
FC4	Not Christian or Lutheran enough for some
FC5	Religion is nice but not all that important

Table 19: Western Lutheran University Axial and Focused Codes (continued)

AC3	Inclusivity is our religious identity and an important part of education
FC6	Lutheran religious identity is about being open, welcoming, and inclusive
FC7	The University is committed to both religious identity and interfaith
AC4	We would not be distinctive without our religious identity
FC8	Lutheran religious identity is what makes us distinctive and attractive to many
FC9	Things that encourage the religious identity of the institution
AC5	Challenges of communicating our religious identity externally
FC10	Should we define our identity by what we are, or what we're not?
FC11	Challenges and benefits of our middle name
AC6	Identity statement a product of rebranding
FC12	Identity statement not tied directly to theological foundations
FC13	Pragmatic challenges of marketing a Lutheran institution

The tension between being grounded in a distinctive religious identity while being open to religious diversity is evident in the theoretical and axial coding. Western Lutheran is in an especially difficult position because it is a context with very few Lutherans and Christianity is usually defined by evangelical Protestantism. A great deal of non-Christian religious diversity also exists in the university's context, to which the institution has responded with an increased interfaith emphasis. The interfaith emphasis is grounded in the Lutheran theological tradition by the Campus Ministry but not as strongly in communication with off-campus constituencies. Perhaps this is because the University has tried to explain their religious identity in primarily secular terms to appeal to a broader audience.

Table 20: Western Lutheran Theoretical and Axial Codes

TC1	Identity Stew
AC1	Confusion about religious identity and mission
AC2	Religious identity and mission are peripheral to institution
TC2	The tension between identity and inclusivity
AC3	Inclusivity is our religious identity and an important part of education
AC4	We would not be distinctive without our religious identity
TC3	Translating our identity for a non-Lutheran audience
AC5	Challenges of communicating our religious identity externally
AC6	Identity statement a product of rebranding

Trying to capture the many competing ideas about the religious identity and mission of the institution was difficult to do. The best metaphor I could come up with is a “stew” because all these differing expectations of the religious identity and mission are like different ingredients that have been thrown together in a pot. What emerges can at times be special and unique, but it is also hard to know what the most important ingredients are. It is really difficult to describe the stew to anyone who has not tasted it because there is no recipe or list of ingredients. No one really knows what to expect, and even after tasting it people remain confused about what they have just experienced.

The relationship between theoretical and axial codes could be seen in this manner. There is a tension between Western Lutheran’s religious identity and the environment in which it is located. Translating its identity for a non-Lutheran audience is a genuine challenge because the dominant models of church-related higher education in their area are conservative and Reformed. This leads to an emphasis on the inclusive nature of the Lutheran model of higher education, but when translated through an instrumental humanistic understanding of religion, this leads to a sort of identity stew.

Figure 6 visualizes the relationship between theoretical codes at Western Lutheran University. Tension between identity and inclusivity has lead the institution to attempt to translate its religious identity and mission to a non-Lutheran audience. But because most of this external translation uses secular language it contributes to the identity stew. On-campus communication about the religious identity and mission has a more theological flavor, but responsibility for communicating it falls heavily on a few departments, particularly Campus Ministry. Campus Ministry’s influence is limited by the voluntary nature of participation in its programming.

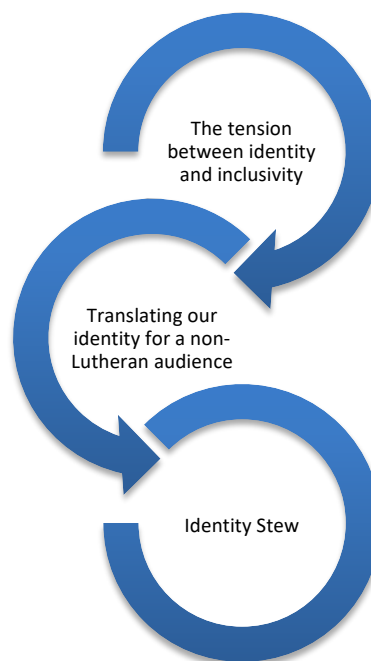


Figure 6: Relationship between Western Lutheran University Theoretical Codes

Despite the confusion about identity and mission it is clear that the people of Western Lutheran truly care about their religious identity and see it as a strength. It is not that Western Lutheran is doing a bad job communicating its religious identity and mission for its context. The issue is that its audience does not have enough of an understanding of Lutheran theology to interpret the differences. They know secular and they know Christian. And if they have to pick a category for Western Lutheran they will pick the secular category. Western Lutheran is not alone in this struggle as we will see when we turn our attention to Valley College.

Valley College Focus Groups and Interviews

Valley College is a primarily undergraduate institution with about fifteen hundred students. It is located in the heart of the Midwest where the high school graduation rate is declining at an alarming rate. Valley College had as many as eighteen hundred students

just five years ago and after years of enrollment decline seems to have stabilized at somewhere between fourteen to fifteen hundred students. The faculty recently approved its first master's degree program which will begin next year.

Because Valley College was undergoing a campus ministry review, my research was conducted alongside this process. This gives the data a slightly different flavor, including insights into the campus ministry as well as the overall identity and mission of the institution.

Table 21: Valley College Focused Codes

FC1	Campus ministry and institution have a religious identity crisis
FC2	Religion is nice but not necessarily important to the institution's identity
FC3	Reluctance of individuals to identify with denomination or religion
FC4	We are most comfortable expressing our religious identity and mission in humanistic terms
FC5	Need for discussion and more clarity about religious identity and mission
FC6	What is our story and who tells it?
FC7	Examples of the benefits of religious identity and mission
FC8	Influence of religious identity and mission on students
FC9	Challenges of pluralism
FC10	Promising elements of pluralism on campus
FC11	Campus is more decentralized, tribal
FC12	Engaging with faith in a diverse and changing world is important but challenging
FC13	Faith is less privileged on campus and increasingly decentralized
FC14	Personal faith practices and attitudes
FC15	Practicing faith in college is harder than expected for students
FC16	Valley is a welcoming faith environment

The focused codes reveal similar struggles to Western Lutheran with less concerns expressed about communicating the religious mission and identity with an external audience. This is likely due to the fact that more staff that deal with such issues were interviewed at Western Lutheran, and the fact that Valley is located in the Midwest. Valley College focuses less on interfaith ministry, although there are signs that the institution is grappling with how best to approach religious pluralism.

The focused codes also reveal a sense that the campus community is increasingly decentralized and “tribal” in nature. This is an interesting observation on a campus with fifteen hundred students. Referring to how students tend to support the public activities of their tribe members, one faculty member said,

My sense of how this place works because my own background in higher ed is at very large public institutions. My sense of how this place works is that people organize themselves, students in particular, but not just students into tribes around shared interest or identities, and so when you have for example a student Japanese speaker, his/her tribe comes out to support them. (VF5)

Another faculty member wondered how the institution and its campus ministry might adapt to this new reality.

I am wondering if there is a way to harness that dynamic, not to fight it because it is what it is, but to harness that so that maybe specific tribal identities are invited. Specifically, we have the interfaith tribal identity and athletic tribal identity for example that we could build on or other kinds or specific natures. If we have chapels around the raw theme of interfaith could there be other kinds of raw themes that specific groups of students or division students are invited to give chapel on. (VF4)

These themes of tribal identity and the changing nature of the community at Valley College, along with confusion about the institution’s religious identity and mission, continue to emerge in the axial codes.

Table 22: Valley College Focused and Axial Codes

AC1	Confusion about the institution’s religious identity and mission
	FC1 Campus ministry and institution have a religious identity crisis
	FC2 Religion is nice but not necessarily important to the institution’s identity
AC2	Religious identity: keeping all options open
	FC3 Reluctance of individuals to identify with denomination or religion
	FC4 We are most comfortable expressing our religious identity and mission in humanistic terms
AC3	Religious mission and identity are important but not often discussed
	FC5 Need for discussion and more clarity about religious identity and mission
	FC6 What is our story and who tells it?
AC4	Religious identity and mission are essential to institution
	FC7 Examples of the benefits of religious identity and mission
	FC8 Influence of religious identity and mission on students

Table 22: Valley College Focused and Axial Codes (continued)

AC5	The challenge and promise of pluralism
	FC9 Challenges of pluralism
	FC10 Promising elements of pluralism on campus
AC6	Campus culture has become decentralized, tribal, and more religiously diverse
	FC11 Campus is more decentralized, tribal
	FC12 Engaging with faith in a diverse and changing world is important but challenging
	FC13 Faith is less privileged on campus and increasingly decentralized
AC7	Perceptions of campus religious environment and patterns of faith practice
	FC14 Personal faith practices and attitudes
	FC15 Practicing faith in college is harder than expected for students
	FC16 Valley is a welcoming faith environment

Another theme emerging at the axial and focused code level are the attitudes toward religion itself. Religion is viewed as something that is “nice” but not necessarily at the heart of the institutional identity. This emerged in the well-intentioned efforts of campus tour guides who try to discern what a family wants to hear about religion and then adjust their message to fit those expectations. Often that means talking about religion on campus as something that is an option that can be avoided if one desires.

I just kinda (sic) talk about that role of church, we have a Lutheran-based chapel on Sundays, that we have campus pastors and we have those classes we have to take but then I end it with being a very diverse school and that you're not required. If you're religious coming here, you don't have to be a Lutheran. You do not have to come to chapel. You do not have to participate in any religious activities at all really on campus if you don't want to. That's the way I put it. So, I think the student body, though we're a Lutheran school the student body I would not say is a Lutheran student body. There's so many different religions and such a diversity that there's really not one thing you could say about it, there's just quite a few different religions, which is a great thing to have. (VSTU5)

There are a number of things at work in these scenarios. The tour guides are doing their best to represent the school in a way that is attractive to prospective students. They do this by highlighting the many “options” that one has when it comes to faith on campus. This is consistent with another emerging trend among students, the desire to keep all their options open when it comes to identity, even one’s religious identity.

An unintended consequence of presenting religion as peripheral to the college experience is that it gives the sense that religion is compartmentalized. One student who attends church at home made a distinction between her religious identity at home and at school; “At school I am not very religious. I would not consider myself to be a very religious person. I am more of an Agnostic (at school), if I would qualify myself as that.” (VSTU1) This spills over into the institutional religious identity and mission as well. A senior student who is very active in his Christian faith describes his impression of religion on campus.

I would like to add that that I got the impression on campus that it is Valley College, and then in the corner is the chapel and the religion department, but everything else at Valley is like that is their area, we will stay out of it kinda (sic) thing. And so, I do not think it's mixed in like athletics and other things. I do not know where it starts but I think that culture is there. That there are other things that are known about Valley. And then the religion area is off to the side. That is kind of what I started to...when I step back and look at it, it is something I am picking up on. (VSTU20)

Campus tour guides often get a bad rap for not accurately describing the religious identity of the institution, but perhaps they are actually describing the religious identity of the school accurately. Maybe those who are critical of their work are insulated within their own “tribes” on campus and unaware of what the experience is really like for students. Perhaps what seem like garbled messages from the tour guides are actually a reflection of the confusion about the religious identity and mission of the institution. That certainly seems to ring true at the theoretical and axial levels of coding

Table 23: Valley College Theoretical and Axial Codes

TC1	Identity Stew
AC1	Confusion about the institution’s religious identity and mission
AC2	Religious identity: keeping all options open
AC3	Religious mission and identity are important but not often discussed

Table 23: Valley College Theoretical and Axial Codes (continued)

TC2	Institutional religious identity is the foundation for mission
	AC4 Religious identity and mission are essential to institution
	AC5 The challenge and promise of pluralism
TC3	Religion on campus: patterns perceptions and practices
	AC6 Campus culture has become decentralized, tribal, and more religiously diverse
	AC7 Perceptions of campus religious environment and patterns of faith practice

Identity stew is the main course at Valley College, just as it was at Western Lutheran. There are many different expectations and assumptions competing with one another because the institution really has not defined its identity. When asked about the identity and mission of the college most respondents fell back on one of several responses.

The first was to describe the religious mission in a way that emphasized humanistic elements like service, social justice, educating the whole person, and inclusivity. Others clearly were surprised that the College was not “more Christian” in terms of its intentionality in faith formation or expecting some sort of doctrinal conformity.

Students fell back on the importance of individual choice and freedom when it came to one’s religious life. Inclusivity was also a major theme; in fact, it was the single most important aspect of the religious mission that participants mentioned. Figure 7 delineates the relationship between Valley College’s theoretical, axial and focused codes which gives a sense of the different ingredients in Valley’s identity stew.

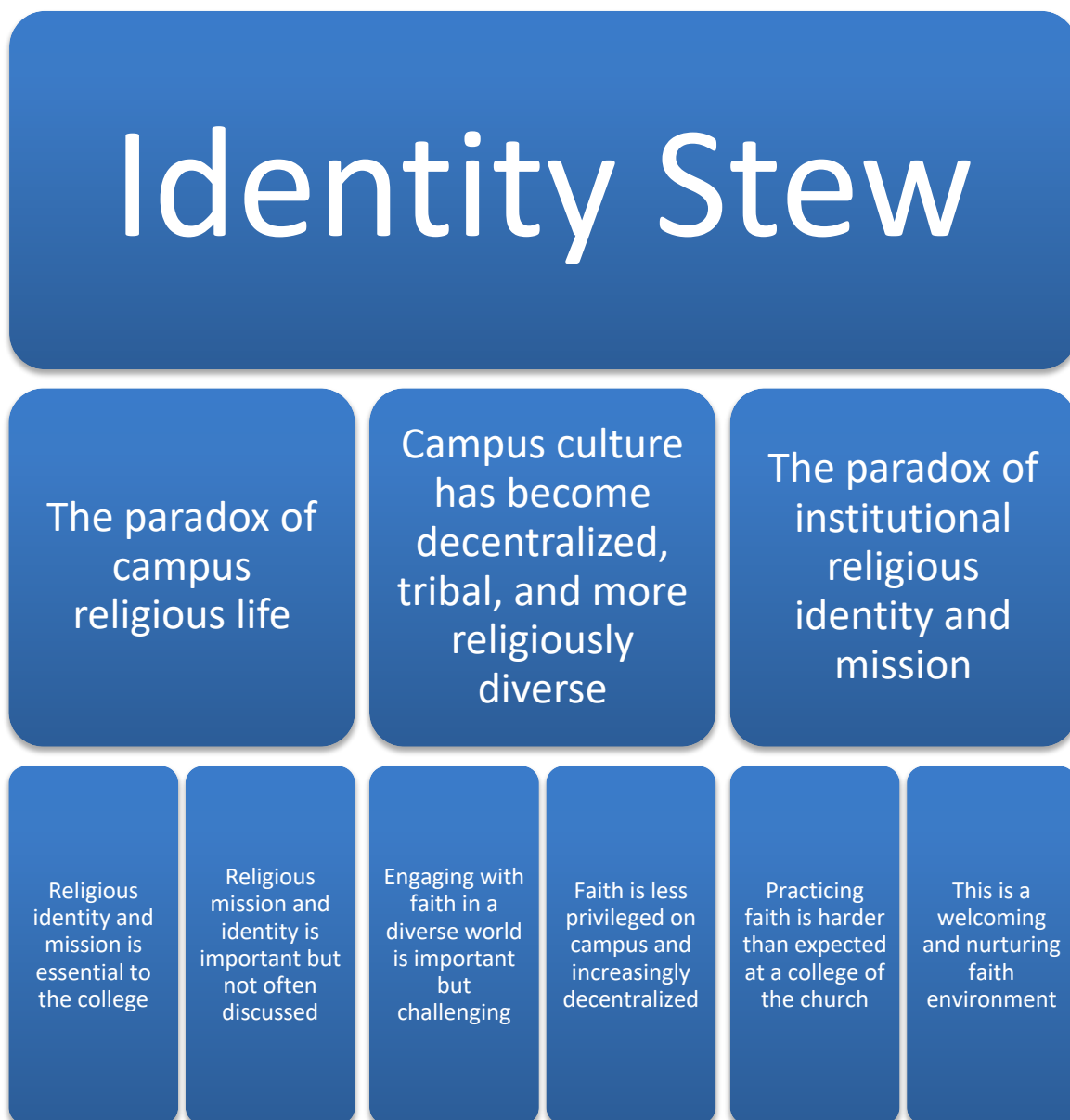


Figure 7: Relationship between Valley College Theoretical, Axial, and Focused Codes

Overall the general sense was that more conversation and clarification about the religious identity and mission of the college is needed. Several participants indicated that that the religious identity of the college is one of the primary things distinguishing it from other small liberal arts colleges in the area. There was a sense that this distinguishing

feature of their identity was underutilized, while others feared that it would merely turn people away from the community.

Triangulation of the Data

There are a lot of research data in this study, so it is now necessary to ask what common themes emerged over the three phases of research? The advantage of a mixed methods research model is that it increases the validity of the study with different sources of data collection and the emergence of common themes. John Creswell writes, “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding validity to the study.”¹⁵

Conversations about the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges have often been framed as a contest between secularism and religion. Critics contend that ELCA colleges have become more secular by loosening the religious requirements, enrolling fewer Lutheran students, and other measures. Based on this research I would have to disagree with this assessment. It seems that the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges enjoys broad support across the campus. The real issue is not whether ELCA institutions are becoming secularized, but rather whether religion itself is becoming so.

I say this because it seems that support for religious identity and mission remains robust, but the character of that religious identity and mission is increasingly described in generic, humanistic terms. ELCA schools have arrived at this stage with the best intentions, namely the inclusion of a broader and more diverse constituency. But this

¹⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, 201.

inclusivity has not been sufficiently grounded in a theological foundation. It draws identity from humanism and its values. I am not arguing that humanism is evil or insidious, but rather that it may not be a proper starting point for the mission and identity of a church college.

Humanism

Throughout the three phases of my research several important themes have emerged to support this argument. The first is the tendency to talk about religious mission and identity in strictly *humanistic* terms. I will explore this more in the next chapter, but when I say humanism I am referring to the current struggle between transcendence and immanence in the religious world. Charles Taylor writes, “we have moved from a world in which the place of fullness was understood as unproblematically outside of or “beyond” human life, to a conflicted age in which this construal is challenged by others which place it (in a wide range of different ways) ‘within’ human life.”¹⁶

Taylor’s use of the term conflicted is especially appropriate here because it implies an internal struggle. People often feel conflicted within themselves when they hold values that come into disagreement. In the same way, the religious world is currently conflicted when it comes to the relationship between transcendence and humanism. It is not that secularism is being imposed on the religious world by forces outside itself, but rather that the modern values of humanism have made it possible for even people of faith to see religion as an almost completely secular enterprise. Humanism and transcendence

¹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 15.

have always coexisted within religion. The balance between the two seems now to have tipped toward humanism.

We can see this in the mission and identity statements of the institutions studied. They emphasize the humanistic benefits of the institution's religious identity. Service, vocation, moral development, and intellectual growth are touted as the outcomes of a Lutheran education. These are all noble and important values that we should be promoting to students, but there is little to no mention of the relationship between these values and the theological claims that support them. Because there is nothing holding these values together they lack a sense of coherence that was once imbued through theology.

Identity Stew

I believe that this almost exclusive emphasis on humanistic expressions of the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges is directly related to the *identity stew* that is so prominent in the qualitative phases of this research. Most participants are so accustomed to the disconnect between the finite and transcendent that they do not even notice it. When presented with the identity and mission statement for their institution people of all religious backgrounds said that it seemed accurate. Once they began to think about it a bit more those from religious backgrounds began to realize that there was nothing holding it together.

One Lutheran focus group student at Valley College listened to the repeated use of a term in her college's identity statement. She finally summoned up the courage to ask what exactly that meant. "I just have a question, like a Lutheran approach to college

education...I guess what would be a Lutheran approach?" (VSTU10) This led to an interesting and lively conversation about her question.

It would just be like affiliation is that what they're talking about? Or maybe just an overall accepting classroom where no one is forcing their ideas, just kind of like general faith manners. I guess maybe I don't know. (VSTU10)¹⁷

I think we also have a worldly view like service towards others and the world I think. Growing up in a Lutheran church, it's always been something that we've done. You know, care about those who share the world with us kinda (sic) thing. And I think Valley does that and it coincides with the Lutheran faith.

So essentially, it is at the bottom (of the statement) in the reformation part. It's kind of like, we want you to wrestle with these big questions as you work through your faith here at Valley. We invite and encourage conversation with people of diverse backgrounds and with different experience perspectives. In turn, you will learn more about your own beliefs in your own eyes. So that is kind of the Lutheran theological perspective of learning. (VSTU9)¹⁸

You can see the participants struggling to figure out how the different pieces of the identity statement fit together. It is challenging because they are talking about religion but without the benefit of any transcendent language. It seems that even those who did grow up Lutheran are not able to draw upon transcendent language to interpret their experience. They know how to talk about the humanistic benefits of religion, but the transcendent element seems partitioned off from the rest of their experience.

If we have learned anything from this secular age, it is that choice is the most important value in human existence.¹⁹ Because of this, individuals and even the institution try to *keep all options open* when it comes to identity. This makes it almost impossible to ground one's identity in any sort of theology because we do not want to be

¹⁷ See Appendix H for focus group participant profiles

¹⁸ See Appendix H for focus group participant profiles

¹⁹ See Bauman and Vecchi, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*.

tied down to a particular identity, especially when it comes to something as controversial as religion. What we are left with then is this sort of identity stew in which some part of the population still wants a sense of transcendent meaning to hold their identity together, while others are completely happy with the ambiguity of vaguely religious humanism. When transcendent identity is expressed it usually can only be articulated in narrow terms.

The *identity stew* shows up in really interesting ways in the quantitative data. Participants were asked to rate the congruence between how the institution's religious identity is expressed in different forms of communication (publications, website, admission materials, campus visits, other communications) and their own experience. The results were at first rather perplexing. Not surprisingly, those who believed that the religious affiliation of the school had a significant effect on its identity tended to rate the level of congruence higher, as did those who were most satisfied with their overall experience.

The other groups that rated the congruence of these forms of communication highly were Atheists/Agnostics and None/No labels. This is strange because these two groups should have the weakest identification with the religious identity and mission of the institution, yet they feel the college communicates its identity quite clearly. This makes more sense in light of the fact that ELCA colleges and universities communicate almost exclusively in humanistic terms. Whether one believes in God, or knows what they believe, really has little bearing on one's support for the religious identity and mission of the college.

The use of reference categories for many of the intervening variables brought things into sharper relief. Lutherans have lower levels of congruence than any other group except conservative Protestants. Respondents who attended ELCA colleges and universities have lower levels of congruence than those who attended other types of institutions. But by far the group that was most critical of the religious identity and mission of their institutions were those who characterized their school as secular. They have lower levels of congruence than those who characterized their school as Lutheran or Lutheran-Christian.

Based on the survey comments and the fact that there is not a strong sense of transcendent religious identity and mission expressed by ELCA schools, this group is most likely expecting the Reformed model of education. That would explain why they are even more negatively disposed toward the congruence of institutional religious identity and mission than Lutherans and those who are more familiar with Lutheran colleges. Those who believed they were most familiar with the religious identity and mission of the institution before joining the community also see the espoused identity and mission as less accurate. This is a bit of an anomaly but may be explained by the kind of expectations they had of the school. If they were expecting to find a Christian school in the Reformed sense of the term they would certainly be disappointed.

What is emerging here is an interesting continuum. At one end are those who are satisfied with the rather generic, humanistic religious identity and mission that the schools are promoting. At the other end of the spectrum are those who have written the institution off as secular. Somewhere in the middle are Lutherans and those who attended ELCA colleges and universities who believe the institution could do a better job at

articulating its religious identity and mission, but presumably also understand the theological nuances of Lutheran higher education.

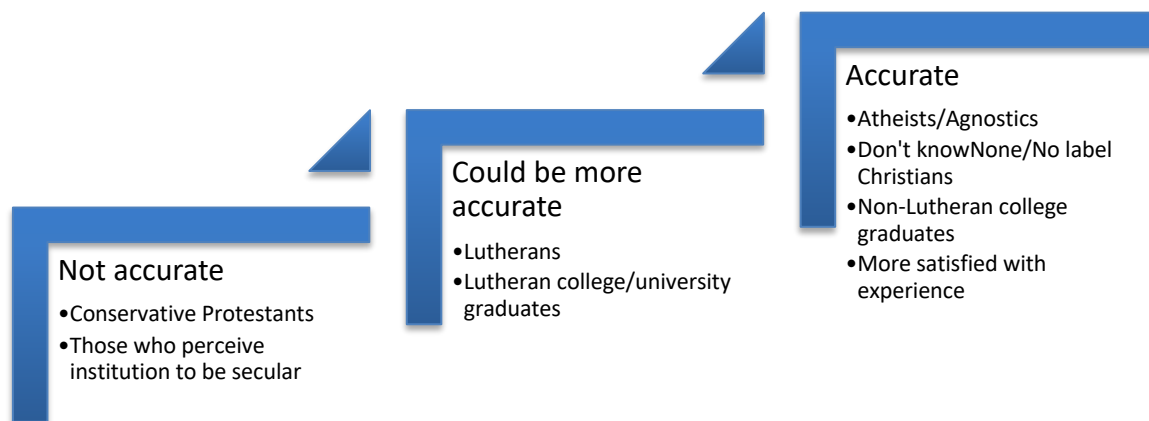


Figure 8: Continuum of Respondents

Conclusion

When I began coding the websites I was struck by the evasiveness of the language used to describe the religious identity and mission of these schools. Based on that analysis I was expecting to find some incongruence between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission. There certainly was dissonance for particular groups, namely Lutherans and those who attended ELCA colleges. The majority of respondents did not seem overly troubled by the manner in which their institutions articulated their religious identity and mission. This surprised me, but as a Lutheran graduate of an ELCA college I belong to the group most likely to want more clarity from these identity and mission statements.

Reflecting on my biases, I began to wonder if the relatively innocuous nature of these statements was an issue or not. As I pored over the data and had conversations with others I began to realize a pattern I had not seen at first. The institutions and individual respondents were very comfortable talking about the humanistic outcomes of their mission. Service, justice, and vocation are held in high esteem among nearly every population. What is more difficult for schools and respondents to talk about is the transcendent identity of these institutions.

At first, I thought this lack of transcendent language was related to concerns about identifying too closely with the church. But I began to realize the issue was not church affiliation but rather an aversion to any transcendent or otherworldly language. Thinking back on the literature of Lutheran higher education it also dawned on me that most of the focus is on humanism with little mention of transcendence. The question I am left pondering is, what effect has the loss of the transcendent elements of ELCA schools had on their mission and identity? What effect will such a trend have on the future? I hope to answer this question in the final chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSIONS

This journey began with a seemingly simple question – What is the relationship between espoused and perceived religious identity and mission at select ELCA colleges and universities? The plain answer is that most community members feel positively about the way their colleges and universities talk about their religious identity and mission. There are some notable exceptions. Lutherans, faculty and staff who attended ELCA colleges, those who describe the institution as secular, and conservative Protestants are less likely than others to believe that the institution’s espoused religious identity and mission are congruent with their personal experiences.

These outliers indicate that something interesting is going on. One would expect that Lutherans and ELCA college graduates would have relatively strong support for the espoused religious identity and mission of their institutions if it were accurately articulated and supported. The qualitative data also raises questions because of a sort of “identity stew” that indicates a lack of understanding about how to articulate the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities.

One might conclude from these results that there is a major problem with the way ELCA colleges and universities understand their identity and mission, or at the very least, that it is not communicated well. This would seem consistent with the tension on many

campuses between those who believe that ELCA institutions are not “Lutheran” or “Christian” enough, and those who view the religious identity and mission as a relic of the past or a potential liability.

I would like to propose an alternative theory for interpreting these results. Those who fear the secularization of ELCA colleges and universities, and those who believe it is an inevitability, are operating out of the same paradigm. Since at least the 1960s the United States has viewed religion through the lens of secularization. Both sides have operated under the assumption there is a sort of culture war taking place in which religion is either under assault or heading toward an inevitable obsolescence. This paradigm is so powerful that it is usually “camouflaged” so that even its most loyal adherents are unaware of how it influences their perceptions.¹

What if secularization is more complex than we initially realized? What if religion and secularization are not pitted in some sort of zero-sum contest in which one must triumph over the other? What if we actually are living in a secular age in which religion continues to be an important and vibrant force? This discordant explanation is exactly what Charles Taylor argues both sides must accept.

Both sides need a good dose of humility, that is, realism. If the encounter between faith and humanism (secularization) is carried through in this spirit we find that both sides are fragilized: and the issue is rather reshaped in a new form: not who has the final decisive argument in its armory—must Christianity crush human flourishing? must unbelief degrade human life? Rather, it appears as a matter of who can respond most profoundly and convincingly to what are ultimately commonly felt dilemmas.²

¹ Chris Argyris, *Inner Contradictions of Rigorous Research* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 26.

² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 675.

In this final chapter I intend to demonstrate that we are living in a secular age, but religion continues to be an important influence. This reality explains the seeming discrepancy in perceptions of religious identity and mission at ELCA colleges and universities.

There is a need for ELCA schools to claim the transcendent dimension of their mission and clarify their ecclesiological identity, but this need not entail the narrowing of that identity. ELCA colleges and universities may be better positioned to live in the strange tension of a secular age in which religion remains a vital force.

Denying Transcendence

In the first phase of my research, I looked at the identity statements of five ELCA colleges and universities. What I found was a rather vague and ambiguous sort of humanism that seemed intentionally designed to avoid any mention of God or the transcendent. The focus of these statements, as well as the ELCA's own statements about its colleges and universities, centers on the practical everyday realities and benefits of our faith affiliations.³

This is not an uncommon occurrence in a secular age in which even the church struggles to talk about notions of transcendence. Andy Root ruefully recounts a conversation he had with other ministry leaders in which faith was discussed in almost purely secular terms.

We talked about faith absent any language of transcendence or divine action. Here we were talking about “faith,” and yet we made no assertions about faith having anything to do with a realm beyond us, with a God who comes to us in death and

³ Brian A.F. Beckstrom, “Reforming Lutheran Higher Education: Ecclesiological Reflection and Theological Leadership,” *Intersections* 2017, no. 46 (November 1, 2017), <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2017/iss46/11>.

resurrection, Spirit and transformation. These were much deeper realities than just finding a way to keep people affiliated and an institution pertinent.⁴

My criticism of the identity statements of ELCA colleges and universities should not be construed as denigration of these institutions or those who drafted the statements. Religious professionals get paid to think about theology yet have a difficult time talking about God as an active subject. So, our primary focus as ELCA colleges and universities is on institutional survival and technical fixes to adaptive challenges. We try to find ways to keep what we have, afraid that we will lose ourselves to the looming specter of secularization.

When even the people who think about religious identity and mission have a difficult time talking about transcendence, it should be no surprise that our identity statements focus on humanistic concepts and institutional affiliations. We are all products of a secular age in which transcendence is overlooked because of a belief that we are losing the battle with secularism. The fact that many believe that religion is inexorably moving toward extinction merely deepens this unease with transcendence.

Secularization Theory Revisited

In chapter three we explored the contours of secularization theory that emerged in the late 1960s through sociologist Peter Berger and the “Death of God” theologians.⁵ The mere suggestion that the United States might be going the way of Western Europe was a

⁴ Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness*, Ministry in a Secular Age, Volume One (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), xvii.

⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 564–67.

bombshell, even though the roots of secularization reach back at least to the Enlightenment.

The United States had always had a peculiar religious sensibility that defied the forces of secularization. The country was founded under the auspices of freedom of religion and its civil religion reinforced the sense that it was impervious to secularization.⁶ But as the baby boomer generation emerged, Americans seemed less likely to conform to the religious expectations of previous generations. American culture appeared headed for spiritual desolation, but these fears never actually materialized.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many scholars claimed that Western society would become increasingly secular, that science would erode belief in God. Religion would, accordingly, go away. As it happened the twentieth century saw something of a rebirth of the sacred—and the once commanding secularization theory has fallen on academic hard times.⁷

The discrediting of the secularization theory does not mean that American religion is unchanged. The manner in which people are connecting to the divine does seem to have become secularized. Religious faith is now one option among many and that has changed the way religion is understood and practiced. This is evidenced in a variety of ways. On college and university campuses the most striking feature is the increasing diversity of religious expression. In fact, it is not always entirely clear what is “religious” and “secular.”

First, we point out that religion has “returned” to higher education in the last two decades; it has become much more visible. This is a simple statement of fact, but we add the qualification that the religion that has returned to university education in recent years is not the same kind of religion that dominated higher learning in America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Religion today is much

⁶ Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*.

⁷ Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, 48.

more pluriform than it was in the past and much less easily distinguished from other lifestyles that formerly might have been called secular. We now live in a foggy religio-secular world where many kinds of faiths (both traditionally religious and other) mingle together. This new shape of religion means that it would be virtually impossible to fence religion out of the academy even if such exclusion was preferred.⁸

The popular notions that faith disappears during the college years or that college faculty attempt to destroy the religious faith of students does not seem to be supported.⁹

A far greater challenge to faith practice of any kind is that students are merely trying to keep their heads above water. Sociologist Tim Clydesdale refers to this process as “daily life management.”

What in-depth, longitudinal interviews and field research with college freshmen reveal is that most freshmen are thoroughly consumed with the everyday matters of navigating relationships, managing gratifications, handling finances, and earning diplomas—and that they stow their (often vague) religious and spiritual identities in an identity lockbox well before entering college. This lockbox protects religious identities, along with political, racial, gender, and civic identities, from tampering that might affect their holders’ future entry into the American cultural mainstream.¹⁰

Faith and other important facets of identity are often locked away as newly minted adults attempt to navigate their newfound freedom. In previous chapters, we also explored the increased tendency of young adults to “try on” different religious identities and even construct them through a process of theological bricolage.¹¹ Much has also been made of the emergence of a theology known as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,” which

⁸ Jacobsen and Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible: Religion In University Education*, 153.

⁹ Neil Gross, “The Indoctrination Myth: [Op-Ed],” *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)*, March 4, 2012, sec. SR.

¹⁰ Timothy T. Clydesdale, “Abandoned, Pursued, Or Safely Stowed?,” <http://religion.ssrc.org/reform/Clydesdale.pdf>.

¹¹ See Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*.

seems to be the dominant spiritual worldview for most young people. These sociological factors are all important for understanding the role of religion in the world today, but they are merely outgrowths of a broader shift in consciousness.¹²

A Secular Age

Charles Taylor begins his book *A Secular Age* with the penetrating question, “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in say, 1500, in our Western society, while in 2000 many find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”¹³ He goes on to trace the development of this “secular age” through intellectual, political, and social currents.

At the heart of Taylor’s argument is his belief that we live in an age of “multiple modernities”¹⁴ that consist of at least three different secular worldviews. These secular worldviews do not preclude the prospect of religion, but all but the first alter its structure by either limiting or eliminating transcendence. This is why it is possible for a group of religious professionals to spend an entire meeting without ever mentioning God’s active presence in the world.

Secular 1 and 2

Five hundred years ago the concepts of sacred and secular existed but were understood in a very different way than now. People lived in a secular realm of daily existence, but it was not impervious to the influence of the sacred. In fact, “the point of

¹² Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 112, 156.

¹³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

¹⁴ Taylor, 21.

all life was to commune with, even be possessed by, a transcendent force.”¹⁵ This era which Taylor calls “Secular 1” was still very much an “enchanted universe” where supernatural forces acted in ordinary events and upon ordinary people.¹⁶

A key component of understanding the different modes of secularity is the concept of the self. In Secular 1 the self was “porous” and therefore open to being acted upon by supernatural forces.¹⁷ This illustration represents the Secular 1 worldview.

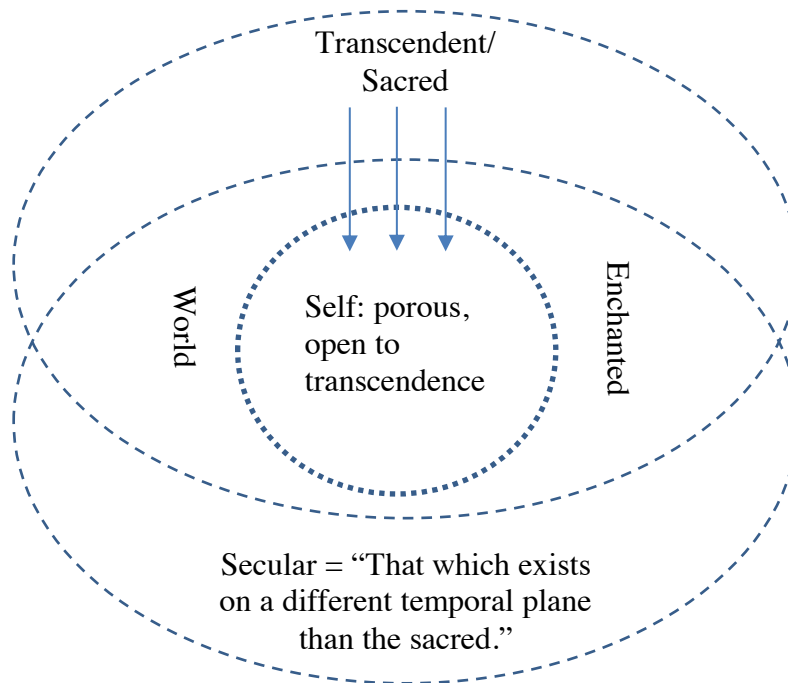


Figure 9: Secular 1 Worldview¹⁸

¹⁵ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 104–5. Root’s book provides a helpful overview of Taylor’s three modes of secularity on pg. 104-112.

¹⁶ See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 29–43.

¹⁷ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 4.

¹⁸ The definition of secular in the illustration is taken from Root, 104.

The Secular 1 worldview still exists in some contexts, but most of the Western world fits into Secular 2 or 3. This different sense of the self and the relationship between sacred and secular emerged through a process of change that included the Protestant reformation and the rise of modern science. In Secular 2 the self was no longer conceived as porous and open to the influence of supernatural elements. The self was now understood to be in the driver's seat. Instead of being acted upon by outside forces, the self was freed to be in charge, even to choose its own sense of identity from a variety of options.¹⁹

The world also underwent a process of "excarnation" in which seemingly primitive and mysterious forces were pushed to the fringes of existence.²⁰ This was inevitable as modern science developed and human beings began to understand the forces at work in the world in a more materialistic fashion.

Defining the sacred as the eternal plane that breaks into the temporal became impossible, because the independent reality of eternity became more and more unbelievable. There were still sacred realities, but they were located almost completely in the institutions made by the minds of human willing...to say "secular" in Secular 2 meant "a particular space that was a-religious." It was (is) a space where the willing of human minds promises to be absent religion. In turn, the sacred is now a unique space where human willing is allowed to seek the interest of the religious. It is a distinct and special location where religious belief and practice are allowed their freedom.²¹

The Secular 2 worldview made the development of concepts like the secularization theory possible. By delineating between sacred and secular spaces it was now possible to view them alongside one another and make comparisons. An unspoken

¹⁹ Bauman and Vecchi, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, 15–16.

²⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 614.

²¹ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 106–7.

assumption arose that as one increased the other would decrease. This was almost always applied to the sacred realm which was now represented by institutions like denominations. As church membership began to decrease it was assumed that people were abandoning faith and the sacred altogether. The assumption of Secular 2 had always been that eventually humans would be evolved enough to no longer need fairy tales like religion to understand our existence.²²

Secular 2 also created a new sense of the self as “buffered.”²³ If one believed in transcendent forces like God it was assumed that these beliefs belonged to the realm of the sacred and should not influence everyday life. After all this was a “disenchanted” universe that had no need of supernatural explanations.²⁴ Religious belief itself became secularized during this period, reduced to a sort of impersonal deism in which God minds God’s own business after setting the world in motion or devolving into a sense of moralism. The rise of moralistic therapeutic deism, the identity lockbox, and theological bricolage are the natural results of this process of excarnation, not its cause. Bonhoeffer realized this in the early twentieth century when he advised that the church must operate as if “God is not given.”²⁵

Secular humanists are not the only ones who buy into the Secular 2 worldview. It is far more pervasive than that. Although pure secular humanism may be awaiting the collapse of religion as foretold by the secularization theory, the church has bought into it

²² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 770.

²³ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 10.

²⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 446.

²⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison, Enlarged Edition*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, 4th Revised edition (London: SCM Press, 1971), 360.

as well. We just express it in different ways. The church has gone along with Secular 2's assertion that there are sacred and secular planes to existence. The sacred is limited to the institutional church or its offshoots, and transcendence exists only in such religious space.

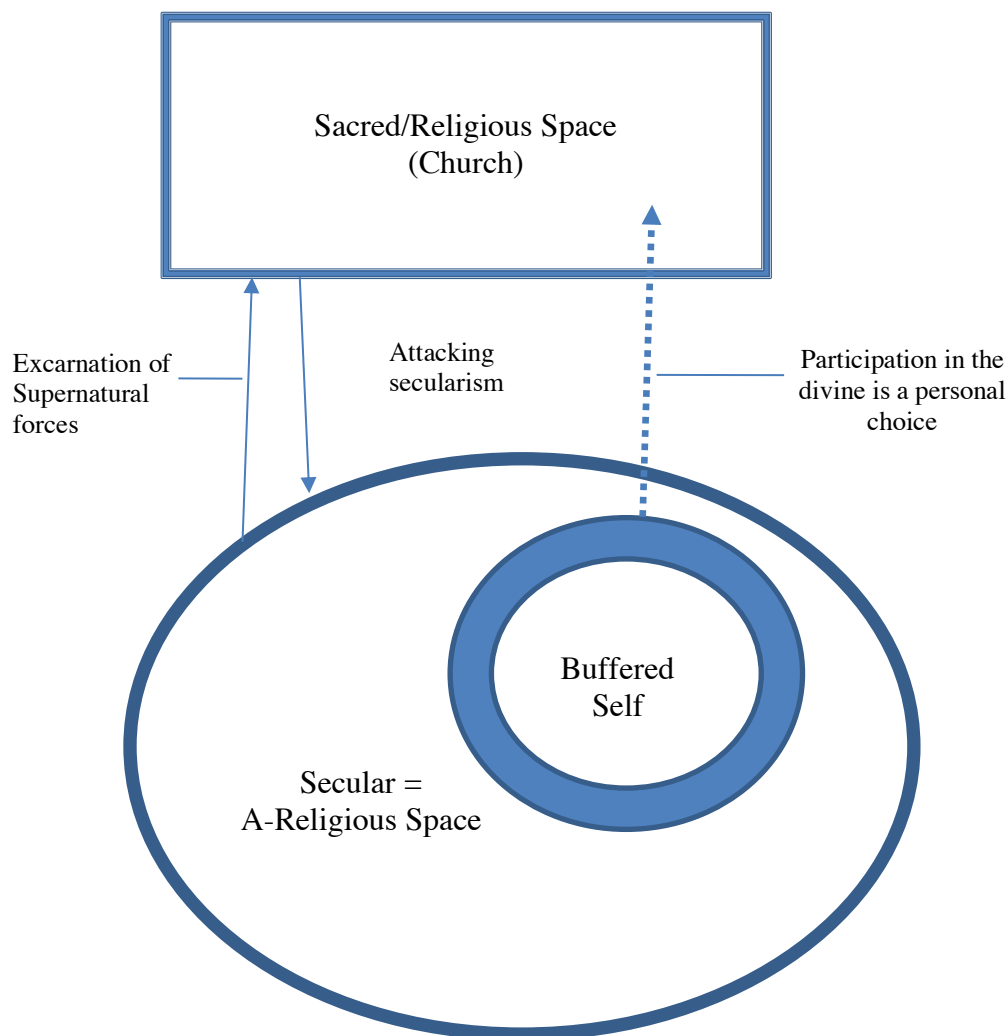


Figure 10: Secular 2 Worldview

Those who are fighting a battle against “secularism” have accepted the same preconditions as those who await its demise. Anytime that religious “territory” decreases with the closing of a church or the removal of a religious statue, it is interpreted as

another loss for transcendence. Churches and ministries that are growing are signs of transcendent gain which is part of the reason that we are attracted to their “success.”

The irony is that those who are working to “keep the church alive” and those who are resigned to its collapse are both driven by the same theory-in-use. Secularization is the dominant narrative in American religious consciousness. Everyone believes it is happening, the only question is whether one feels compelled to fight it or not.

Fight or Flight?

When I first began to analyze the results of the survey data from phase two of my research I was puzzled by an anomaly. Those who had the strongest belief that the religious identity of the institution was accurately portrayed included those who believed that the religious affiliation of the institution had a significant influence on campus, as well as Atheists and Agnostics, and those who were most ambiguous about their religious affiliation (nones/other/no label Christians), and those who were more satisfied with their overall experience at their institution.

This seemed like a strange group. Those whom one would assume would have the weakest identification with the Lutheran identity of the institution (Atheists/Agnostics, None/No Label) were answering in the same way as those who believed the religious affiliation had a major effect on campus. This was especially puzzling in light of the fact that Lutherans and those who attended ELCA colleges tended to view the congruence of espoused religious identity and mission more negatively.

As I thought about it in light of Charles Taylor’s work it began to make more sense. These results actually reinforce the influence of the Secular 2 worldview. On the one hand are those who perhaps unwittingly believe that transcendence has taken flight

from the world of everyday existence. They may either support the banishment of religion from the secular world or can only conceive of it in humanistic terms. If you believe that the humanistic expression of religious identity and mission at ELCA colleges and universities is what religion means, then of course you would agree with the statement that religion has a strong influence on campus. There is a place on campus (the chapel) where religious life happens, but for the most part religion does not impact your everyday experience.

This belief was continually affirmed in the final qualitative phase in which religion was described as “optional” or “it is there if you want it.” The idea that one might actually encounter the sacred anywhere but in the chapel or perhaps a religion class seems unthinkable.

The fact that those who are more satisfied with their experience also tended to view the espoused identity and mission more positively is further confirmation. If you are comfortable with the sort of humanistic approach to religion that is being expressed, you are going to interpret your experience through that humanistic lens. It also explains the strong support from Atheists/Agnostics and None/No labels. They feel as if what the institutions say about themselves (that their religious mission is humanistic) is what they experience. Religious identity is an optional facet of campus that can either be avoided or supported regardless of whether one believes in its transcendent influence.

Before this begins to sound like merely another attack on the “secularization” of ELCA colleges and universities, let us look at the other end of the spectrum; Lutherans, ELCA college and university graduates, those who were more familiar with the religious identity and mission before joining the community, and conservative Protestants. These

groups were less likely than others to believe that the espoused religious identity and mission of the institution was accurate. Based on the final qualitative phase and the coding of quantitative comments it appears this is an expression of the sense that religion was losing its place and/or influence on campus. This also is consistent with the Secular 2 worldview which views some places as religious and others as a-religious. There is a deep sense of loss and insecurity as these groups see the role of religion on campus changing.

It would make sense that conservative Protestants who are more likely to come from a Reformed worldview would feel even more negative than Lutherans about the college or university's religious identity and mission. If you came expecting a dominantly "Christian" worldview, the Lutheran model of higher education would be disappointing.

Those who reported higher levels of familiarity with the religious identity and mission of the campus before joining the community may also have similar preconceptions. Lutherans and ELCA graduates probably have a more nuanced understanding of the Lutheran model of higher education so they are not as disappointed as conservative Protestants, but they still sense that something has changed, and they would like to see more of a religious influence on campus.

What has changed is an entire way of looking at the world so there is no chance of going back to the way things were. The common factor in all these reactions is the dominance of the Secular 2 worldview. The responses of all are shaped by the presumption that secular and religious are in a zero-sum struggle for the soul of the institution. There can be no coexistence.

Secular 3

What if these assumptions are wrong? What if we are still interpreting this battle for the identity of our institutions through a lens that is becoming obsolete? I would suggest this is indeed the case. While faculty, staff, and even some students may still view this as a battle between the sacred and secular we now live in an age in which the mere idea of transcendence seems unbelievable. This is a much bigger challenge than pluralism. “The difference between our modern, “secular” age and past ages is not necessarily the catalogue of available beliefs but rather the default assumptions about what is believable.”²⁶ Welcome to the world of Secular 3.

In Secular 3 the notion of transcendence is unbelievable. This is not so much because of any antagonism to religion (although there is that)²⁷ but because the thought does not even enter most people’s mind. We live in a sort of closed universe in which the only things we think about are the immediate realities of life. Spirituality is something in which one may dabble in, but its purpose is to add meaning to everyday life, not transcend it.²⁸

The difference between Secular 2 and Secular 3 may seem relatively minor until you talk to young adults about how they view the world. They have a thoroughly secular worldview but not usually because of antipathy toward religion as was the case with previous generations. The truth is that many just have not thought much about it. In

²⁶ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 19.

²⁷ See the new Atheists such as Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006).

²⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 513.

Secular 2 the assumption was that non-believers had a “God-gap,” an ontological yearning for the transcendent. But that is not necessarily the case for people today.

Many people have constructed their lives in such a way that they feel no need for God. They have no sense of a gaping loss or of subtraction in their lives. Instead they have added new narratives, moral codes, and identities beyond God to direct their lives.²⁹

In a recent interview Pastor Lillian Daniel illustrated the transition from Secular 2 to Secular 3. Instead of dealing with informed skeptics of religion, those in ministry are increasingly encountering those who have little to no religious background and are asking very different questions. Much of the church is still working out of a Secular 2 worldview in which we feel that we have to defend the faith or apologize for the wrongs of the past. At one point this may have made sense, but if a person has no frame of reference or experience with Christianity apologizing for the Salem Witch trials will probably elicit the shocked response, “Wait, there was a time when you were burning witches?”³⁰

Despite the challenges of Secular 3 it is actually more promising than Secular 2 for religious faith. Taylor argues that the complete absence of any sense of transcendence leaves people feeling “cross-pressured.” He explains,

The secular age is schizophrenic, or better deeply cross-pressured. People seem at a safe distance to religion; and yet they are very moved to know that there are dedicated believers, like Mother Teresa... Many people were inspired by Pope John Paul’s public peripatetic preaching about world peace, about international economic justice. They are thrilled that these things are being said.³¹

²⁹ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 99.

³⁰ “January 25, 2013, Rev. Lillian Daniel on ‘Spiritual But Not Religious’ January 25, 2013 | Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly | PBS,” *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* (blog), January 25, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2013/01/25/january-25-2013-rev-lillian-daniel-on-spiritual-but-not-religious/14570/>.

³¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 727.

This same sentiment was expressed by community members over and over in terms of their on-campus religious practice. Even though they did not personally attend worship, and perhaps never would, they were glad to know that it was taking place on campus. They felt no antagonism toward religion and in truth, it had not really crossed their minds. When asked how he would describe the religious identity and mission to a prospective student one Agnostic student said:

I always mention (to prospective students) that it's college and it's your choice, how involved you choose to be in all these organizations on campus, but it is nice to know that there are options no matter if you are Lutheran or not. There's always options. (VCS 7)

Taylor believes that there are two forms of expression within Secular 3. These are the open worldview which may be curious about the existence of something beyond the temporal plane, and the closed view that can only perceive the material world.³² This presents an interesting opportunity for religious belief. Secular 3 is visualized in figure 11 on the next page.

³² Taylor, 555.

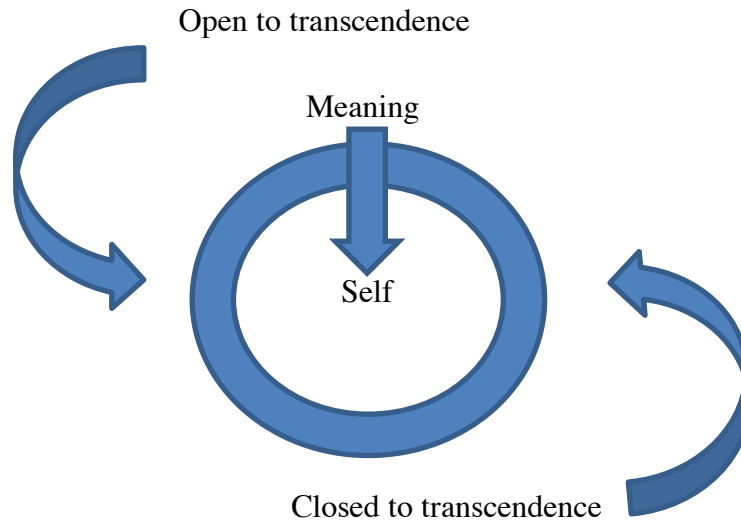


Figure 11: The Cross-Pressures of Secular 3

The secularism that we encounter in the future is more likely to be the result of either disinterest or a lack of awareness than outright antagonism toward religion. This is especially true as the younger generation emerges. As Kendra Creasy-Dean notes, most young people actually find religion “a very nice thing.”³³ This presents an opportunity for Lutheran colleges and universities to engage with their students in ways that were not possible in Secular 2. So, how do we move forward in articulating our religious identity and mission in a secular age?

Religious Identity and Mission in a Secular Age

The battle lines of Secular 2 must be abandoned in order to move forward in a world where Secular 3 is becoming the dominant worldview. We cannot go back to the past by simply trying to reclaim a-religious spaces. Religion has become more “fragile”

³³ Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*, 6.

than in the past but there is a continued openness, even a resurgence, in interest in the transcendent dimensions of human existence.³⁴

If secularization is not going to triumph but religious belief is going to be less monolithic, where does that leave ELCA colleges and universities and their religious identity and mission? In this last section I would like to offer a few constructive proposals to address this question. I believe ELCA colleges and universities are well positioned for life in this secular age. We need not abandon our religious identity and mission, but we must acknowledge that we need to adapt to the secular age in which we live.

Bringing God into the Conversation

The starting point for our identity as ELCA colleges and universities must be grounded in God's activity in the world. The previous discussion about the contours of the secular age have demonstrated that transcendence is difficult for many to conceive but it is not automatically rejected as the secularization theory assumes it will be. There are those in Secular 3 who are "closed" to the concept of God's activity in the world, but there are many who remain "open." One of the tasks of Lutheran higher education in a secular age is to encourage curiosity about the transcendent dimension of human existence. Joining a Lutheran college or university community may be the first opportunity that many have had to consider questions about God. Encouraging students to reflect on their faith commitments is something Lutheran schools have been doing for some time, but I believe that we need to be even more intentional about it.

³⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 595.

I am not arguing for indoctrination, but rather creating opportunities through classes and other experiential opportunities for community members to expand their theological consciousness. The secular age is actually ripe for such exploration because antipathy towards religion is being replaced with inexperience. Most people simply have not had the opportunity to think about these issues.

Many will be disinterested despite our best efforts, but the least we can do is help all community members develop a deeper understanding of religion. Although Lutheran colleges and universities may be grounded in a particular religious tradition, it is imperative that all our students develop a sense of religious literacy. The growth of non-Christian religious traditions alone is evidence that we are doing our students a disservice by not helping them think about their own religious beliefs and learn about their neighbor's faith.

How do we do that? Where do you start with people who have little to no religious experience or knowledge?

Authenticity and Experience as Means of Faith Exploration

Andy Root argues that the best way to help people explore the transcendent in a secular age is through personal experience. In the world of Secular 3, people are increasingly encouraged to go deeper within themselves to find meaning and purpose (see figure 11). That is usually framed as “authenticity.” If there is no transcendent meaning then one must turn inward in order to find it.³⁵ With nothing outside the self to provide meaning, the search for authenticity becomes tied up with experience. In fact, the only

³⁵ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 113.

thing that may be “real” in a secular age is our personal experience. Paradoxically this leads to the “cross-pressures” that Taylor describes.

There is no way to extract ourselves from the age of authenticity and the construal of Secular 3. But the attention to experience in the age of authenticity does nevertheless open up a possibility. By giving attention to people’s experience of cross-pressure, to the echoes of transcendence they experience (but doubt)...we may find ways to perceive the transcendent and seek divine action.³⁶

Everything we do at Lutheran colleges and universities becomes an opportunity for reflection on the transcendent, whether that is classes, music and athletics, campus ministry events, or simply conversations with caring mentors. All of these are opportunities to reflect on the “echoes of transcendence” that still exist in the secular age.³⁷

The greatest challenge ELCA colleges and universities face in this endeavor is our own lack of authenticity. Because almost everything we do has been reframed in humanistic terms, we leave little room for the transcendent.³⁸ We cannot expect our students to encounter anything beyond this world if we are not willing to acknowledge and claim it as institutions. But our identity statements and the reported experiences of community members confirm that we could do a better job modeling this for our students.

Furthermore, we cannot continue to be vague about our religious identity and mission if we want to be authentic. The way to do this is by claiming an active role for

³⁶ Root, 114.

³⁷ Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 22.

³⁸ As mentioned in chapter six this is in part due to the desire to “keep all options open” in our liquid modern age.

God in the life of the institution. Right now, we are content to hold up our religious affiliation as an identity when we are pressed to define it. But that does not help us claim a sense of connection to a transcendent God. Denominational affiliations may have been sufficient sources of institutional identity in Secular 2 when we were simply trying to keep our campuses from becoming secular a-religious spaces. But this makes little sense in Secular 3 where the idea of transcendence itself is an afterthought.

There is no doubt that Secular 2 is still holding on. Many students expressed concern that the environment they would find at a Lutheran college or university would be too “churchy,” but these were students from Christian backgrounds. They have a very different perspective than the increasing number of students who come from no faith background or other religious traditions.

In fact, the ambiguity of our religious identity also seemed to create a sense of anxiety among prospective students from all religious traditions. It seems as if they would rather we claim some sort of identity rather than leaving them to guess who we are. A prime example was a Muslim student who said he wished the Lutheran school he attended had been more upfront about its religious identity. He was not scared off by it at all, he just wanted to understand what to expect.

Constructing a Religious Identity

In a secular age, authenticity is important. But it cannot be the sort of overbearing authenticity that has sometimes characterized religious colleges and universities in the past. A different world is emerging now. The battles between religious and a-religious spaces of Secular 2 are going to make less and less sense as this happens. So, we need to

find a sense of authenticity that allows for diversity and freedom to explore the transcendent dimensions of existence. How do we do both?

I have argued throughout this project about the need for ELCA colleges and universities to acknowledge God as an active subject to guide their ecclesiological and organizational leadership. So, any discussion about the identity of ELCA schools must begin with the nature of God. I will not rehash the entire argument from Chapter 4, but I believe that to begin with God means to acknowledge that God's nature is triune. Fortunately, the triune God is an ideal foundation for this authentic yet open sense of religious identity and mission.

The Trinity is a model of both unity and diversity especially when understood perichoretically. The relationships within the Trinity (the immanent Trinity) are characterized by mutuality and love. They relate to one another subject to subject rather than as subject to object. But in addition to the diversity of the Trinity there is also unity. The Trinity is three and yet it is one. This relational pattern must then be the pattern for the church's identity.

Although the colleges and universities of the ELCA are not congregations they are the church and therefore have a triune ecclesiological identity that is to be patterned on the subject to subject relationships in the immanent Trinity. I would argue that our identity as ELCA colleges and universities needs to be more closely tied to the church. Perhaps that would mean reimagining ourselves as the educational ministry of the church. But how do we imitate the diversity, unity, and perichoretic nature of the triune God organizationally?

Adaptive Theological Leadership

ELCA colleges and universities have a pressing need for adaptive theological leadership. Adaptive leadership is necessary in environments that are unfamiliar and rapidly changing. Without a doubt, understanding how to embrace religious identity and mission in a secular age is an adaptive challenge, not to mention the immense financial and cultural challenges discussed in chapter two that private colleges and universities face.

It is not enough for leadership to be adaptive; it must also be theological. We either need to equip people without theological training, or intentionally seek out those who do, to interpret and guide our institutions in these rapidly changing times. Engaging the community in theological reflection is a necessity.

At some Lutheran and Catholic universities, there are people with theological training that tend to the mission and identity of the institution. This model has advantages and drawbacks. Having someone specifically articulating and integrating mission and identity on campus makes it more likely to happen. The danger is that one in such a position could easily become the “expert” on campus who is designated to attend to such issues. Identity and mission also cannot be imposed upon others; it must be an invitation to discovery. Because this is an adaptive challenge, the resources of all will be necessary in order to move forward. Anyone is capable of theological reflection, but they may need an invitation and some encouragement to get involved.

Centered, Bound, and Open Sets

Those who provide theological leadership for the institution’s identity and mission must carefully consider what that will look like organizationally in a secular age.

For that we return to another idea from chapter four, the concept of a centered set. A centered set must be distinguished from a bound set and an open set. When people think of church colleges, they usually conceive of a bound set in which there are clear markers for who belongs and who does not.

In a bound set, there is a defined religious identity and only those whose beliefs and actions conform to those standards can be allowed in. Colleges that require signed faith statements would be examples of bound sets because they have clear markers of institutional identity that everyone must conform to. A bound set places a premium on unity and sacrifices diversity to achieve it. The bound set looks like this.

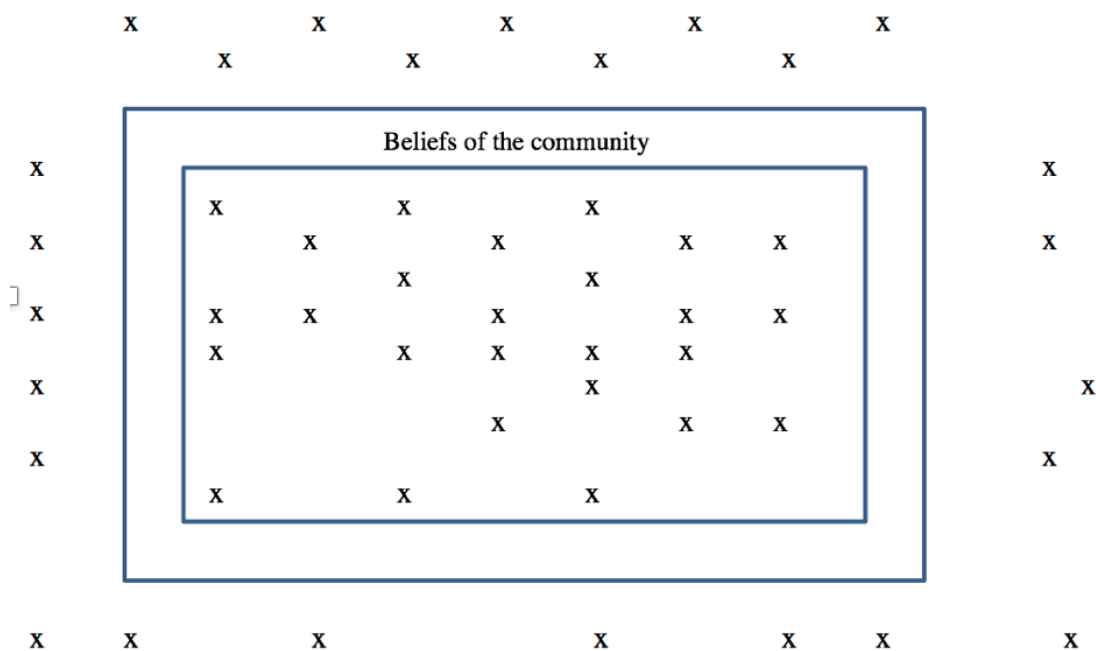


Figure 12: The Bound Set

At the other extreme is what would be characterized as an open set. In an open set, there are no boundaries in terms of membership in the community. It contains lots of diversity but no unity. No one really knows what the organization stands for because it claims no particular identity. An open set would look like this.

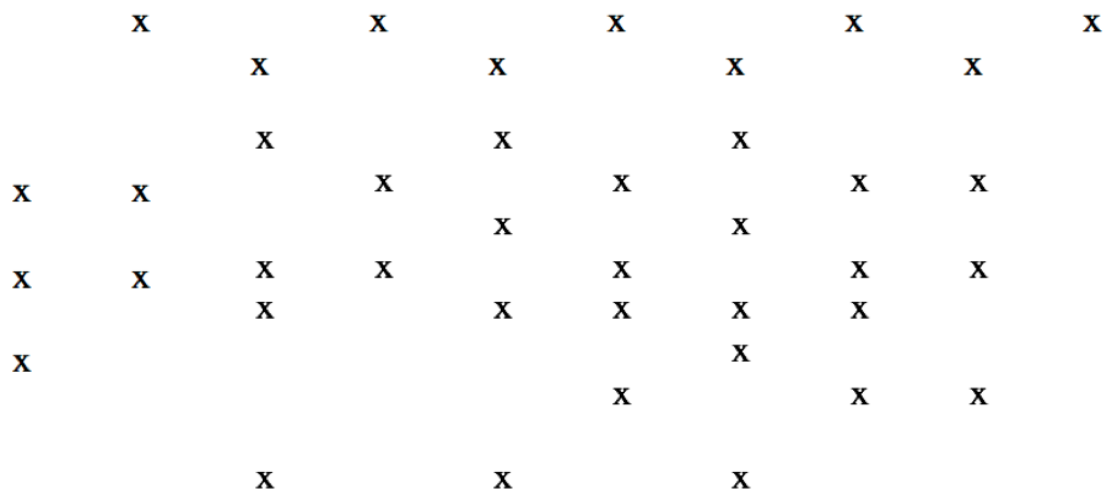


Figure 13: The Open Set

In contrast to the closed and open sets is the centered set. Like the open set, the centered set has no religious boundaries. People of all (and no) belief systems are welcomed into the community. Like the closed set, the centered set does have a particular institutional religious identity, a center, but does not use this identity as a boundary. A centered set could be visualized like this.

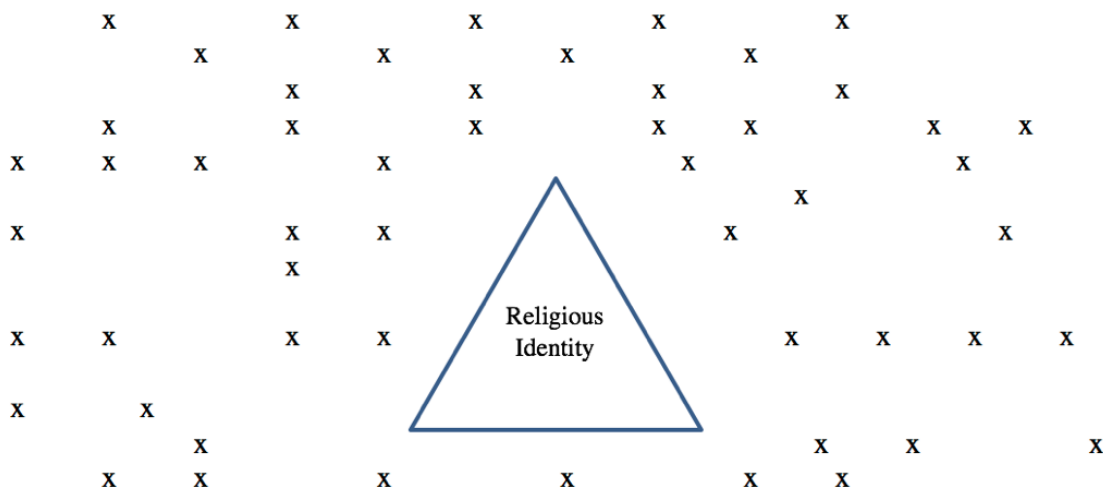


Figure 14: The Centered Set

Part of the role of adaptive theological leaders on campus will be to articulate a theology of pluralism. The biggest resistance to religious identity and mission comes from a Secular 2 hangover in which it is assumed that if the institution has an identity it cannot be inclusive. A triune ecclesiological foundation has the potential to hold diversity and unity in a sort of dynamic tension, but that needs to be articulated.

(L)eaders need to come to grips with the religious pluralism of our culture and of our world. They need to have an operative and articulated theological perspective when it comes to pluralism and other religions. Staking out an alternative between “different strokes for different folks” relativism and “my way or the highway” exclusivism is ground that mainline Protestants should occupy in the public square.³⁹

Some examples of theological vital agreements for ELCA colleges and universities, grounded in the Triune identity and mission of God and the Church, might include:

- This is a welcoming Christian college of the Lutheran tradition (unity) that embraces all people because they are created in the image of God and beloved by God (diversity).
- God is an active presence guiding this institution through the Holy Spirit. We believe that God is at work in your life and we will accompany you as you reflect on your beliefs and calling.
- The Holy Spirit creates and nurtures faith. We trust the Spirit to do that work.
- Our relationships with one another reflect the subject to subject relationship of the Triune God. People should never be treated as objects.
- We welcome all who come as Christ among us.

³⁹ Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*, 159.

- People of all cultural and religious backgrounds will be respected and honored. Differences are opportunities to learn from the diversity of God's creation and will not be minimized or ignored.

Concluding Thoughts

A centered set that is built on the foundation of a triune ecclesiology is a good model for ELCA colleges and universities in a secular age. It acknowledges the reality of a transcendent and active God, holds together both unity and diversity, and breaks out of the trap of treating anything secular as an enemy.

The Lutheran model for higher education is better positioned than any other for a secular age. We are not bound by a need for theological conformity which frees us to love and serve our neighbor through educational ministry. But we must remain grounded in an identity that embraces the reality of a transcendent triune God that is at work in the lives of all in our community.

EPILOGUE

The Doctor of Ministry program in congregational mission and leadership has deepened my understanding of the unique context in which I serve. Being a pastor at a Lutheran college or university is a distinct joy that comprises elements of congregational ministry with other unique components.

There are no academic programs dedicated to the study of Lutheran higher education, so the opportunity for contextualization afforded by this program has been especially valuable. Learning about the ministry contexts of my fellow cohort members has also been a valuable learning experience.

The Doctor of Ministry program made me more aware of God's active work in the world and gave me theological language to communally interpret and describe what God is doing. Learning social scientific methods was also an invaluable skill that I hope to use throughout the rest of my ministry.

I am finding it difficult to properly articulate the immense impact of this program. I think that I will be working to understand what I have learned and how it has formed me for some time.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for taking the time to complete this brief questionnaire. Your school is one of five institutions, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), where the survey is being administered. The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions of the religious identity and mission of ELCA Colleges. The results will be part of a Doctor of Ministry thesis being completed by Wartburg College Campus Pastor Brian Beckstrom at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

Participation in this study is voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. The risks associated with the survey are no greater than you would encounter in everyday life. If at any time you wish to discontinue your participation you can simply exit out of your browser window. You will not receive any compensation for your participation, but your help is greatly appreciated. The questionnaire will take 5-10 minutes to complete.

By continuing with the questionnaire, you are giving consent for your results to be used in this project and future publications. Your responses will remain confidential. If you have any concerns, please contact Pastor Brian Beckstrom or my faculty advisors.

Thank you in advance for your assistance

APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. Name of College or University you currently attend or work

- Valley College
- Western Lutheran University
- Foothills College
- Plains University
- Riverside University

2. How familiar were you with your school's faith affiliation before joining the community?

Not Familiar

Very Familiar

-

Additional comments:

3. Before joining the community, what were your primary sources of information about the college/university's faith affiliation? (Mark all that you consider primary sources) You may select more than one answer.

- Website
- Admissions Materials
- Campus Visit

- I attended and/or graduated from this institution
- Someone familiar with the school
- Church (or someone affiliated with a church)
- Mailings
- Current members of the college community
- Additional information about your answer

4. Based on your personal experience, how accurately does the college/university communicate its religious identity in...

Publications (Magazines, Newsletters, News Releases, etc.)

Don't Know	Not Accurately	Very Accurately
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional Comments:

Admissions Materials

Don't Know	Not Accurately	Very Accurately
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional Comments:

Website

Don't Know	Not Accurately	Very Accurately
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional Comments:

Public Statements from Leaders

Don't Know	Not Accurately		Very Accurately	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional Comments:

Campus Visits

Don't Know	Not Accurately		Very Accurately	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional Comments:

Other forms of communication (Please specify in comments)

Don't Know	Not Accurately		Very Accurately	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional Comments:

5. Which of the following options best describes the college or university's faith identity?

- This is a Lutheran college/university This is a Christian college/university
- This is a Lutheran-Christian college/university
- This is a secular college/university (the institution has no particular religious identity)
- Other (please specify)

6. How much do you think the college/university's faith affiliation influences its identity?

No Influence

Major Influence

Additional comments about your answer:

7. How inclusive of religious diversity (Those without religious beliefs and/or religious affiliation, different Christian denominations, World Religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc..) does the college/university seem to be?

Not Inclusive

Very Inclusive

Additional comments about your answer:

8. How would you like to see the college/university express its religious identity in the future?

Don't Care

Less than current

Same as current

More than current

Additional comments about your answer:

9. What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female

- Prefer not to answer

10. What is your primary role on campus?

- Student (Undergraduate)
- Faculty
- Staff
- Graduate Student

(Branch to student demographics)

11. How many years have you been at the college or university?

- Less than a year
- 1-2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- More than 4 years

12. Did you transfer from another college/university?

- Yes
- No

13. Overall how satisfied are you with your experience at this college/university?

Not Satisfied

Very Satisfied

Additional comments about your answer:

(Branch to faculty/staff demographics)

14. How many years have you been at this institution?

Less than a year 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 20+

Additional comments about your answer:

15. Overall how satisfied are you with your experience at this college/university?

Not Satisfied

Very Satisfied

Additional comments about your answer:

16. As an undergraduate did you attend or graduate from...(Check all that apply)

- An ELCA Lutheran college/university
- A non-Lutheran Christian affiliated college/university
- A secular college/university
- A college/university with a historic religious affiliation that it no longer identifies with

- A Bible college/university (a school that requires community members to sign a faith statement)
- A secular private institution
- A public college/university
- N/A
- Other/Comments

(Branch to student religious demographics)

17. Which of the following best describes your religious identity before joining the campus community? (Check all that apply)

- None
- Lutheran
- Pentecostal
- Catholic
- Judaism
- Methodist
- Atheist
- Islam
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon)
- Non-denominational evangelical
- Episcopal/Anglican
- Unitarian Universalist

- Agnostic
- Buddhism
- United Church of Christ (UCC)
- Reformed Church
- Presbyterian
- Baptist
- Hinduism
- Other Christian (Please specify in comments)
- Other (Please specify in comments)

Comments

18. Which of the following best describes your religious identity now? (Check all that apply)

- None
- Lutheran
- Pentecostal
- Catholic
- Judaism
- Methodist
- Atheist
- Islam
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon)
- Non-denominational evangelical

- Episcopal/Anglican
- Unitarian Universalist
- Agnostic
- Buddhism
- United Church of Christ (UCC)
- Reformed Church
- Presbyterian
- Baptist
- Hinduism
- Other Christian (Please specify in comments)
- Other (Please specify in comments)

Comments

(Branch to faculty/staff religious demographics)

19. Which of the following best describes your religious identity before joining the campus community? (Check all that apply)

- None
- Lutheran
- Pentecostal
- Catholic
- Judaism
- Methodist

- Atheist
- Islam
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon)
- Non-denominational evangelical
- Episcopal/Anglican
- Unitarian Universalist
- Agnostic
- Buddhism
- United Church of Christ (UCC)
- Reformed Church
- Presbyterian
- Baptist Hinduism
- Other Christian (Please specify in comments)
- Other (Please specify in comments)

Comments

20. Which of the following best describes your religious identity now? (Check all that apply)

- None
- Lutheran
- Pentecostal
- Catholic
- Judaism

- Methodist
- Atheist
- Islam
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon)
- Non-denominational evangelical
- Episcopal/Anglican
- Unitarian Universalist
- Agnostic
- Buddhism
- United Church of Christ (UCC)
- Reformed Church
- Presbyterian
- Baptist Hinduism
- Other Christian (Please specify in comments)
- Other (Please specify in comments)

Comments

(Branch to student mission questions)

21. How often is faith a topic of discussion in non-religion classes?

Never

Frequently

o o o o o o

Additional comments about your answer:

(Branch to faculty/staff mission questions)

22. How often do you have faith conversations on campus?

Never

Frequently

Additional comments about your answer:

(Branch to mission questions for all)

23. How much emphasis does the college/university place on the faith development of community members?

Not much emphasis

A great deal of emphasis

Additional comments about your answer:

24. How much emphasis should the college/university place on the faith development of community members?

Not much emphasis

A great deal of emphasis

Additional comments about your answer:

25. How involved in the religious life of the college are the following groups?

Unsure	Not involved					Very Involved
Faculty						

o	o	o	o	o	o	o
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Additional Comments:

Staff

o	o	o	o	o	o	o
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Additional Comments:

Website

o	o	o	o	o	o	o
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Additional Comments:

Executive Leadership (President's, Vice President's, Dean's)

o	o	o	o	o	o	o
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Additional Comments:

Other (Please specify in comments)

Comments:

26. How supportive do you feel of the college/university's religious identity and mission?

Not supportive

Very Supportive

o o o o o o

27. Could you explain the religious mission of the college/university to someone else?

Don't Know Not very well

Very Well

o o o o o o

Thank you for completing this survey. Your help is greatly appreciated and will contribute to the ongoing conversation about the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities.

APPENDIX C:
FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

Thank you for participating in this focus group. The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions of the religious identity and mission of ELCA Colleges. The results will be part of a Doctor of Ministry thesis being completed by Pastor Brian Beckstrom at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

Because this is an in-person focus group anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. By consenting to participate in this study you are also agreeing to keep conversations during the focus group confidential. Despite this safeguard we cannot guarantee that conversations will indeed remain confidential.

Each session will be recorded and transcribed. Participants and institutions will be given pseudonyms or referred to by number. Quotes from individuals will be used without identifying information. Transcripts, recordings, and notes associated with this project will be kept in an encrypted file on Pastor Brian Beckstrom's computer for a period of three years then destroyed.

The risks associated with the survey are no greater than you would encounter in everyday life. If at any time you wish to discontinue your participation you may inform the group facilitator. You will not receive any compensation for your participation, but your help is greatly appreciated.

By signing below, you are giving consent for your results to be used in this project and future publications. You are also agreeing to keep focus group conversations

confidential. Your quotations from these sessions may also be used without further notification but they will not be attributed to you.

If you have any concerns, please contact Pastor Brian Beckstrom or my faculty advisors

Please Print Full Name:

Participation Waiver:

Date:

Consent to be recorded:

Date:

Signature

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUPS WESTERN LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

Note: Focus group participants were emailed a copy of the institutions faith identity and mission page. At the focus group, they also received a printed copy for reference.

Interviewer Introduction:

Introduce yourself. Explain project.

- Go over informed consent, have them sign forms.
- Tell them they can keep informed consent/identity statement form.
- Participant Introduction/Demographics
- Introduce yourself, your role on campus, and tell us about your faith

background.

- Introduce research question: espoused and perceived religious identity and mission...

- Give instructions
- Define use of terms
- Ask participants to read through mission/identity statement

Q1) In your opinion, how accurately does this statement describe the religious environment on campus?

P1) Can you give me an example that supports your opinion?

P2) What would you add or change to make the statement more accurate?

Q2) Besides the statement, where (or from whom) do you hear about the religious identity and mission of the college?

P1) Are these messages the same or different than the statement?

P2) In what way are they the same or different?

Q3) Anything you'd like to add?

Q4) Think back to before you joined the college/university community...Based on what you had heard, what did you expect the religious life of the college to be like?

P1) How accurate did this understanding turn out to be?

P2) How did you form this opinion? What were your sources of information?

Q5) Can you think of some specific examples of how the college's religious identity influences campus life?

Q6) Anything you'd like to add?

Q7) How has the college/university responded to increasing religious diversity?

P1) Has the college's religious identity and mission changed as a result?

P2) Specific examples?

Q8) If the college/university decided to drop its religious identity what difference would it make?

Q9) What do you most appreciate about your college/university's religious identity and mission?

P1) What would you most like to change about the college/university's religious identity and mission if you could?

Q10) How do you describe the college's religious environment to a prospective student or someone who isn't familiar with the college?

APPENDIX E: VALLEY COLLEGE FOCUS GROUPS

Note: Focus group participants were emailed a copy of the institutions faith identity and mission page. At the focus group, they also received a printed copy for reference. Valley College was conducting a campus ministry review, so my questions were added to those being asked by the institution. In the interest of time I eliminated the least helpful questions from the groups at Western Lutheran University. Participants were also provided with a list of campus ministry activities

As participants arrive

- Welcome participant, introduce yourself and participants to one another.
- Get them their sandwich, nametag. Tell them to help themselves to drinks, get settled.

Instructions (5 minutes-10 minutes)

Interviewer(s) introduce yourself:

- Go over informed consent, reiterate confidentiality.
- Sign forms, collect forms.
- Explain project....
- Before beginning remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers. We're interested in your perspectives, experiences, and opinions.
- Ask participants to say name before they speak...this is Bill...

Q1. Please introduce yourself: your role on campus and tell us about your faith or spiritual background. (5 minutes)

- Recorder: note gender, ethnicity, etc.

Q2. Think back to when you were a prospective student/employee...what did you expect the religious environment at Valley College to be like?

- How accurate did those expectations turn out to be?
- What was similar/different?

Define use of term “mission” and “identity” (on mission page, will have sheet at the focus group)

Ask participants to read through mission/identity statement if they haven't

Q3) How accurately does the identity statement describe your experience at Valley College?

P1) How accurately does the mission statement describe your experience at Valley College?

P2) Did you look at them as a prospective student?

Q4) How would you describe the religious environment on campus to a prospective student, or someone who wasn't familiar with the college?

Q5) If the college decided to drop its religious identity what difference would it make?

Q6. What are you doing during your college years that connects you to your spiritual life, God, or a sense of meaning for your life? Please include on-campus or off-campus experiences and things that happened both during the school year and summers.

P1) When in your experience at Valley College have you felt most connected to your spiritual life, God or found a sense of meaning for your life?

P2) Who, if anyone, has fostered, encouraged, or been most involved in that experience with you?

P3) Does Campus Ministry support those activities or experiences? Do you want it to?

Q7) What are your impressions of Campus Ministry? (5 minutes)

P1) In your opinion who is responsible for providing leadership for Campus Ministry?

Q8. How have Valley College and its Campus Ministry responded to the increasing religious diversity of the student body?

P1) How would you like to see Campus Ministry engage with religious diversity?

Q9. Based on your experience, what would you say is the primary purpose of Campus Ministry?

P1) Is this what you think the primary purpose of Campus Ministry should be?

Why or why not?

Introduce campus ministry activities page

Q10) Have any of these activities supported your personal spiritual life and growth?

Are there things you would like to be part of, but have had obstacles to join?

What are those obstacles?

P1) What activities are most important to you?

P2) What activities are least important to you?

P3) What activities are missing? What are innovative ways that Campus Ministry can provide support that would affect your spiritual exploration and faith expression?

Q11) Is there anything else you'd like to add? (5 minutes)

P1) Is there anything you wished we had asked that we didn't?

Thank them for their time, reiterate importance of maintaining confidentiality of other participants.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

Thank you for participating in this interview. The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions of the religious identity and mission of ELCA colleges and universities. The results will be part of a Doctor of Ministry thesis being completed by Pastor Brian Beckstrom at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

Every effort to preserve anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Each session will be recorded and transcribed. Participants and institutions will be given pseudonyms or referred to by number. Quotes from individuals will be used without identifying information.

The risks associated with the interview are no greater than you would encounter in everyday life. If at any time, you wish to discontinue your participation you may inform the interviewer. You will not receive any compensation for your participation, but your help is greatly appreciated.

Transcripts, recordings, and notes associated with this project will be kept in an encrypted file on Pastor Brian Beckstrom's computer for a period of three years then destroyed.

By signing below, you are giving consent for your results to be used in this project and future publications. If you have any concerns, please contact Pastor Brian Beckstrom or my faculty advisors.

Please Print Full Name:

Participation Waiver:

Date:

Consent to be recorded:

Date:

Signature:

APPENDIX G: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Interviewer Introduction:

- Introduce yourself. Explain project.
- Go over informed consent, have them sign forms.
- Tell them they can keep informed consent/identity statement form.
- Have participants introduce themselves, their role on campus, and faith

background.

- Introduce research question: espoused and perceived religious identity and

mission...

- Give instructions
- Define use of terms
- Ask participants to read through mission/identity statement

Q1) In your opinion, how accurately does this statement describe the religious environment on campus?

P1) Can you give me an example that supports your opinion?

P2) What would you add or change to make the statement more accurate?

Q2) Besides the statement, where (or from whom) do you hear about the religious identity and mission of the college?

P1) Are these messages the same or different than the statement?

P2) In what way are they the same or different?

Q3) Anything you'd like to add?

Q4) Think back to before you joined the college/university community...Based on what you had heard, what did you expect the religious life of the college to be like?

P1) How accurate did this understanding turn out to be?

P2) How did you form this opinion? What were your sources of information?

Q5) Can you think of some specific examples of how the college's religious identity influences campus life?

Q6) Anything you'd like to add?

Q7) How has the college/university responded to increasing religious diversity?

P1) Has the college's religious identity and mission changed as a result?

P2) Specific examples?

Q8) If the college/university decided to drop its religious identity what difference would it make?

Q9) What do you most appreciate about your college/university's religious identity and mission?

P1) What would you most like to change about the college/university's religious identity and mission if you could?

Q10) How do you describe the college's religious environment to a prospective student or someone who isn't familiar with the college?

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROFILES

Valley College Student Focus Group #1:

- VSTU1: Junior female: STEM, white, in state-small town, ELCA
- VSTU2: Sophomore male, STEM, American Ethnic, out of state-suburb, ELCA
- VSTU3: Junior Female, Arts & Humanities, International, Non-Christian World Religion
- VSTU4: First Year Male, Humanities, White, Out of State-suburb, ELCA
- VSTU5: Junior Male, STEM, White, out of state-suburb, Agnostic
- VSTU6: Junior Male, STEM, White, out of state-suburb, Conservative Protestant
- VSTU7: Junior Female: Social Science, out of state-suburb, American Ethnic, Conservative Protestant

Valley College Student Focus Group #2:

- VSTU8: First year female, undecided, out of state, White, non-denominational
- VSTU9: First year female, Humanities, in state-small town, white, ELCA
- VSTU10: Senior female, Humanities, white, in-state suburb, ELCA
- VSTU11: First year female, STEM, in state-small town, white, Catholic
- VSTU12: Second-year female, social science, out of state-metro, American Ethnic, Christian-No affiliation
- VSTU13: Fourth Year female, humanities in state-small town, white, ELCA
- VSTU14: Fourth Year Male, Social Sciences, International, Christian-No affiliation.

Valley College Student Focus Group #3:

- VSTU15: Third-year male, social sciences, international, Christian-no affiliation.
- VSTU16: First-year female, social sciences, international, Christian-no affiliation.
- VSTU17: First-year female, humanities, out of state-rural, American Ethnic, Conservative Protestant
- VSTU18: Third-year female, social sciences, white, in state-rural, Catholic
- VSTU19: Second-year male, STEM, in state-metro, Non-Christian world religion.
- VSTU20: Fourth-Year male, humanities, white, in state suburb, Lutheran/Conservative Protestant
- VSTU21: Third-year female, social science, white, in state metro, Christian-no affiliation.
- VSTU22: First-year male, humanities, in state, suburb, white, ELCA

Valley College Faculty Focus Group:

- VF1: Catholic male, white, over 15 years, STEM
- VF2: Other mainline Protestant, White, Humanities, less than 5 years
- VF3: Other Mainline Protestant, female Social Science, less than 5 years, white
- VF4: ELCA male, humanities, over 15 years, white

- VF5: Female, humanities, over 20 years,
- VF6: ELCA male, White, STEM, over 20 years

Valley College Staff Focus Group

- VSTA1: Male Catholic, White, coach
- VSTA2: Female Conservative Protestant, White, hourly staff
- VSTA3: American Ethnic Female, administrator
- VSTA4: ELCA Female, white, administrator
- VSTA5: Male, No affiliation/Christian, white, Administrator
- VSTA6: ELCA Female, white, administrator
- VSTA7: ELCA Female, white, administrator

Valley College Individual Interviews

- VI1: Female Administrator
- VI2: Male Administrator

Western Lutheran University Student Focus Group

- WSTU1: Male, out of state, multiethnic, Catholic, humanities, not involved in campus ministry, Senior
- WSTU2: Female, in state, white, other mainline Protestant, social sciences, not involved in campus ministry, Grad Student (Western Lutheran Alum)

Western Lutheran University Faculty Focus Group

- WF1: Male, Catholic, STEM
- WF2: Female, Atheist, STEM
- WF3: Female, Jewish, non-white, Social Sciences
- WF4: Female, ELCA, white, Humanities
- WF5: Male, No Affiliation, non-white, Humanities

Western Lutheran University Staff Focus Group

- WS1: Male, Christian, White
- WS2: Female, Unaffiliated, White
- WS3: Female, Jewish, White
- WS4: Female, Christian, White
- WS5: Male, ELCA, White
- WS6: Female, Unknown, White
- WS7: Female, Unknown, White

Western Lutheran University Student Interviews

- WSTU3: Female, out of state, ELCA, white, Social Sciences, First Year, involved in campus ministry

- WSTU4: Female, in state, other world religion, STEM, non-white, Sophomore, not involved in campus ministry
- WSTU5: Female, in state, other world religion, STEM, non-white, Senior, not involved in campus ministry
- WSTU6: Female, in state, ELCA, Humanities, white, First-year, Involved in campus ministry
- WSTU7: Male, in state, other mainline Protestant, white, First-year, Involved in campus ministry

Western Lutheran University Staff Interviews

- WSI1: Female, White, Jewish
- WSI2: Female, White, ELCA
- WSI3: Male, White, ELCA
- WSI4: Female, White, Unaffiliated
- WSI5: Female, White, ELCA
- WSI6: Male, White, Unaffiliated

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