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Dukedom Large Enough

Reflections on Academic Administration

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This article is the address delivered by Dr. Pelikan at the inauguration of Dr. Robert V. Schnabel as president of Concordia College, Bronxville, N. Y., on Feb. 5, 1972. The article is printed in this journal with the permission of Dr. Pelikan and the college. Dr. Pelikan is Sterling Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University.

This is my twenty-sixth year as a scholar and educator. More and more in recent years I have been watching my colleagues, schoolmates, and even former students move into positions as deans, provosts, and presidents; and I, as a lifelong draft dodger in relation to all such jobs, am being asked from time to time to speak at their academic inaugurations. Such an address usually takes up some version of the theme, "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" This is still a fitting question, also at this inauguration, but I want to use this opportunity to raise the question in a rather different form. As my text (or pretext) I would quote some words of Prospero in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Like Mozart's *Magic Flute*, *The Tempest* was my earliest introduction as a boy to the creativity of the master and is now the one work to which as a man I find myself turning most. You will recall that Prospero, sorcerer plenipotentiary and magician extraordinary, has been deposed as Duke of Milan and banished to a remote island with his beauteous daughter, Miranda. Reminiscing about his days of power in Italy and his interest in the lore

of black magic, Prospero sighs: "Me, poor man, my library was dukedom large enough."

This, I propose, is a lesson that academic institutions and their administrators must begin to learn again in the 1970s. The time has come for us in the academy to overcome our defensive self-consciousness about teaching and learning and to reassert the centrality of library and laboratory and classroom in our lives as institutions and as scholars. The usage of words often tells one a lot about an age. In our age, for example, the word "rationalize," which used to mean "to introduce some system and rational order into, as, to rationalize a schedule," has come to mean, presumably under the influence of Freudian thought, "to offer a rational explanation, usually a specious one, for actions and beliefs that have their origins in the nonrational regions of the consciousness." Similarly the word "academic" has come to be a synonym for abstract, impractical, useless. One hears even professors—not to mention deans and presidents—say of some issue: "That question is merely academic," which is to say that it doesn't matter in the "real

world." Merely academic, indeed! There is nothing so "mere" about the academic. Nor does the academic need to justify itself on the grounds that it is not as academic as it appears, but is in fact practical and utilitarian in its immediate import. Such justification is both specious and, to use current policy jargon, counter-productive. It may also be successful in diverting the academy to the supposedly burning needs of the moment and away from its deepest responsibilities, with the result that neither the ultimate responsibilities nor the immediate needs will be met.

What is often forgotten by the zealous spokesmen of both left and right is that the academy is essentially a future-oriented institution. A student who enters Concordia College this autumn will be less than fifty when this century ends. The college owes it to that man or woman to protect this boy or girl from the dictatorship of the moment, and thus to protect the future from the present. Many of the schemes of so-called education for relevance will have as their result an unleashing upon the 1980s and 1990s of people who have become the world's leading authorities on the problems of the 1970s. To paraphrase an epigram of Winston Churchill about war, if we as educators immerse ourselves and our students in the present, we shall lose both the present and the future. Of course students need to be protected also against the tyranny of the past, and in the church this need takes the special form of refusing to permit the dead hand of some particular theological past to dictate the conditions of teaching and study in the present—a lesson which I thought, perhaps naively, that the church had finally learned. Yet there is no less a need, also in the

church, for liberation from the present, from what Lord Acton called "the tyranny of the air we breathe." And in a culture like ours, which is mesmerized by each passing moment and has even taken to speaking of "the now generation," colleges and universities have the special responsibility to provide this liberation from the present—for the sake of the future. We dare not permit the issues of the here and now to crowd out of attention those perennial concerns and abiding resources by which alone students can learn to address both critically and constructively the issues of the unknown here and now into which we shall be sending them out. Otherwise we shall be betraying their trust and, by a false preoccupation with relevance, making them irrelevant.

Behind this insistence is the conviction that there are some things that the academy, and the academy alone, can do well, and others that it cannot do well at all. Colleges and universities are not good staging areas for constructive political action, as the experiences of the past decade have, I hope, taught most of us. They are not very skillful at solving the problems of poor housing, job discrimination, and social injustice. They do not even do as well as one would suppose in coping with the deterioration of the environment and the pollution of the natural world. As one of America's leading educators has put it, the university is neither a good organizer nor a good banker. And those who demand that the academy undertake direct responsibility for the solution of today's ills are not only doing a disservice to scholarship and teaching; but at the same time they are depriving today's problems of the expert attention they require and, even more, are

robbing tomorrow's problems of that which the academy, and in a real sense only the academy, can provide. For we are at our best in dealing with the past and with the future—and, I would insist as a humanist and a historian, in dealing simultaneously with the past and with the future. The engineers and planners of tomorrow's society, who are our students today, need the wisdom, stamina, perspective, and moral discernment that can come only from a truly liberal education; and we shall impoverish them if we substitute for this, even in the name of relevance, a near-sighted absorption in issues which will have changed beyond recognition by the time education can organize its resources to meet them. The library is dukedom large enough because it is in the library that this liberal education speaks most articulately.

Because this is the most crucial point of identification for the academy, it is also the most vulnerable point. The enemies of thought and scholarship, whether from the right or the left, have identified, and correctly, the preoccupation of scholars with research and study, with ideas and books, as their primary target. Differ though they do in their ideologies, both of these extremes have in common a hostility to the main business of the college. The right may want to destroy it by repression, seeking to invoke law and order or orthodoxy as its criterion for undercutting the free exchange of ideas in classroom, library, and laboratory: since we already know the truth, whether from common sense or tradition or the Bible, this free exchange of ideas is obliged to subject itself to *the* truth. Meanwhile, the left moves (at least in our society, although in Soviet society

it is different) not by repression but by subversion: with its cry of "all power to the people" it demands that the life of the college justify itself by its contribution to the revolutionary cause. Antithetical though they are to each other, these two positions share the conviction that they have the truth and that the college must obey this or perish. And precisely because I am committed to the orthodox tradition of the church catholic and precisely because I affirm the need for revolutionary change, and right now, I would demand that the college retain its independence and keep its soul. One would think that by now the defenders of tradition would have recognized that their last best hope is the free academy, with its concern for letting all viewpoints, however ancient they may be, have their say. One might even think, now that Stalin is really dead, that the advocates of revolution would have seen in the unimpaired research and teaching of the academy the one chance for a revolution to come about without introducing a greater tyranny than the one it overthrows.

The Christian churches—and in this morning's context I am, of course, chiefly concerned with Lutheranism—have a special place in this development. The church is, on the one hand, the primary repository of tradition in our culture; even those churches that insist on the sole authority of Scripture have been insisting on it for such a long time and with such learning that by now the principle of *sola Scriptura* against tradition has itself become a tradition. On the other hand, the church has long been the breeding ground of revolutionary change: from Augustine to Martin Luther King the church has been the one

place in Western culture where all sets of values, however long they have been cherished, have been subjected to fundamental examination and where the architects of the new order, even if they had to defy the structures of the church in the process, have learned to dream great new dreams and to act in their fulfillment. Thus the church and the academy are, it seems to me, inextricably intertwined in their commitment and in their fate. Neither can survive as we have known it without the other. How tragic — no, how stupid! — it is, then, that they should so often have been cast as adversaries in recent times. As one wise academic has observed, anti-Catholicism (which we can broaden to a general hostility to orthodox Christianity) is the anti-Semitism of the American academic liberal: professors who would never be caught dead casting suspicion on another professor because he is a Jew or a Negro or a Marxist are quite willing, at least by innuendo, to suggest that an orthodox and catholic theology is a deterrent to scholarly objectivity. And spokesmen for the church, who would not be what they are if the scholarship of the past had not had an opportunity to flow freely, now want the results of that past scholarship to set the limits for present scholarship. Thus, by a process that is not, alas, unknown in history, these natural allies have become enemies.

If such is indeed the responsibility of the academy, both inside and outside the institutional church, the academic president has a special opportunity and a special responsibility. He stands as a buffer between college and constituency, a part of both and therefore a lackey of neither. Each may therefore tend to regard him

as the alien representative of its opponents, as one who has sold out to the enemy, when he is in fact the principal — and often the only — mediator between the academy and its audience. As a teacher and scholar I may sometimes suspect administrators of a greater interest in form than in substance, of a concern for public relations at the cost of integrity, and of an indifference to those elements in the life of the university (some of them among the most precious to me) that do not happen, at this particular moment in history, to carry a high market value. But as a person with public concerns I can understand that the academic administrators may often be accused of the very opposite set of vices; for they do seem to be more interested in ideas than in people, more committed to the past and the future than to the present, more worried about violating academic freedom than about offending moral sensibilities. It is not easy to predict ahead of time what the path of the responsible administrator is going to be, but it does seem clear that one measure of his success is his skill at steering between these threatening shoals. The president is, indeed, the spokesman for the trustees and for their constituency within the academic structure. In the present atmosphere both of the academy and of the church there is very little danger that a president will ever be permitted to forget this aspect of his job for very long. Less prominent, but no less important, is the president's vocation as, in effect, the first professor of the faculty, the one whose intellectual vision and moral integrity encourage and even compel his colleagues to ask the important questions, even if they be dangerous, and to propose the significant answers, even if

they be novel or (more shocking yet) even if they be traditional.

To carry out this bilateral responsibility, the president needs to recognize, in the words of Prospero with which I began, that his library is dukedom large enough. It is very easy for a president to suppose, on the contrary, that a dukedom or a territory or a constituency can serve as a substitute for the library. There is a heady quality to public speaking, travel, and membership on national boards, all of which can make the real tasks of education seem trivial or fusty. Because he must belong to both town and gown, the president cannot afford to fade into the academy on the supposition that he need not be any more than a professor. But because he must be more than a professor, he dare not be less than a professor! And that means that the intellectual leadership of the campus is still primarily his task. Everything from the plumbing to the bookstore to parietal rules may become the president's concern, and properly so. But there are some things that must not *become* his concern because they must always *be* his concern; and among these the life of thought and learning on his campus takes first place. He does not need to be teaching students, but he must be teaching the campus — faculty and student body and constituency alike. And at least as important, he must embody the values of study and reading and research by which the academy lives. Both the members of the academy and the public outside must see in him a living demonstration of what it means to be a thoughtful, learned, critical, independent, and responsible man — especially at a time when so many have lost their heads and seem to be proud of it.

This suggests a special duty of the academic administrator in our age: he must be an articulate spokesman for the things he and his colleagues believe in. The spoken and written word has been debased so cynically in our age that sometimes there seems to be little hope of recovering its value. But every once in a while a man arises — one thinks inevitably of Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, and Adlai Stevenson — who combines depth of thought with clarity of language and who can summon his hearers to the duty of the hour. In the academy we continue to be blessed with at least some such spokesmen. And the church, after all, was said by the Reformation to live by the power of the spoken word. Thus any academic institution, and a fortiori one identified with the church of the Lutheran Reformation, must be a place where openness to all truth is respected, the power of speech cherished, and the arts of honest rhetoric practiced. The privilege of carrying this out falls inevitably on the president. He has the chance to speak of what all of us share, and to identify this for those who permit either the narrow irresponsibility of the campus or the shallow irresponsibility of the outside world to obscure the vision of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help us God, the college — and especially the college that is responsible to the church and therefore responsible to the Lord of the church even if this means opposing the institutional church — can still be a place where this truth can be spoken without fear or favor. When it stops being such a place, God have mercy on the college and on the church!

At a time when cities are burning and neighborhoods are seething, there is a temptation to marshal the academy as a direct participant, perhaps even as a leader, in the campaign to set things straight. No less insidious is the temptation to ignore all responsibilities and (as a Renaissance pope is apocryphally reported to have said) to enjoy the institution now that God has given it to us. The most difficult but also the most responsible and (if I may use the phrase) the most relevant path is to see the role that the academy can play and has played in changing the world. Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, and Karl Marx — and, lest we forget, Martin Luther also — all began to awake to their historic destiny in the "library." The library — which means here the study and

the laboratory and the lecture hall as well — could become a seedbed of change, not by being revolutionary but by being responsible. If tomorrow is to have leaders equal to its as yet unimaginable dangers and opportunities, we who today live and teach in the academy must have the courage to do what we have been called to do, in the study, the laboratory, the lecture hall, and the library. As students and professors, as parents and churchmen, we need that kind of academy; and we need administrators who recognize that kind of vocation. This vocation, this library, Mr. President and old friend, is dukedom large enough.

It had better be.

New Haven, Conn.