

THE IDEA OF A DIVINITY SCHOOL:

Ten Points on the Institutional Culture of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale

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Précis

This paper seeks to set forth a description of how Berkeley Divinity School can pursue its unique position as a seminary of the Episcopal Church embedded in a major research university through what might be described as the “Berkeley project,” based on the ambitious and even audacious intention of combining the broad ecumenical horizon of the Divinity School at Yale University with a focused intellectual and spiritual formation in Anglican worship, history, theology and spirituality.

The church can, and ought to be, a community that models in its own life how one gives careful, attentive thought to the true complexity of the human being as a fallen, sinful creature—and how deliberate, patient inquiry can lead to fresh insight and understanding.

The value which can be claimed within the academy by a school of divinity on behalf of the church is that the university’s embrace of the larger horizon of academic disciplines, and the principled disagreement which goes with it, is an engine of discovery and imagination which is itself a commitment at the heart of the church’s mission to teach people to love God with heart, soul *and* mind.

For the seminarian, the dynamic relationship between divinity study and the other academic disciplines is critical to his or her formation as a theological leader, for it is evocative of the relationship the church has to the wider world: the seminarian is schooled not just in the internal language of the church, but in the variety of discourses and constituencies to which the gospel must be related.

In such an educational setting, Berkeley’s embodiment of the tradition of Anglican intellectual toleration can only strengthen each student’s ultimate ability to give effectual leadership in the church, for the students will have already experienced in their formation the authentic diversity of the church, and will have developed the habits of mind and heart that make for a learned attitude of toleration that overcomes any fractious partisanship.

Among the three cultures which any theological school has to inhabit (church, academy, and society), a university divinity school is in a stronger position to mediate the three within its own spiritual and intellectual life, and thereby to produce the kind of graduate who is adept at making the gospel sensible and

sophisticated in an age which tends either to ignore it as irrelevant, or to appropriate it as a polarizing force for political purposes or a popularized message of positive thinking.

Unlike the other ten Episcopal seminaries, Berkeley has evolved into a distinctly university institution, and for its identity it must look to the intellectual discipline, breadth of perspective, academic climate of critique, and professional and institutional standards of the university, while at the same time remaining in service of the church.

The ten points are developed to describe the institutional culture that would support this vision:

- < Diversity of perspective.
- < Inter-disciplinary resources.
- < Open discourse.
- < Climate of critical inquiry.
- < High standards and expectations.
- < Excellence rather than comprehensiveness.
- < Cultivation of leadership.
- < Educational focus.
- < Distinctive identity.
- < Engagement with the University.

Berkeley's vision for formation consistently errs on the side of residing at the edge of the church, where it can authentically engage the complexity of the world by drawing on the depth of the Christian tradition even while drawing the church out of itself and into the world.

All of this is to say that the institutional culture of Berkeley will be related *to* the church, but it will not be entirely *of* the church (being also *of* the university)—yet it will understand that very marginality to be of utmost importance *for* the church because of the strength of religious leadership that it produces.

THE IDEA OF A DIVINITY SCHOOL

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.”

In his inaugural address for the 1996 academic year at Yale Divinity School, Professor David Kelsey argued that “a school is theological to the extent that everything done in its name has one overarching goal: more clearly to understand God and to understand everything in relation to God.”¹ Kelsey acknowledges that at one level, this statement “is almost embarrassingly obvious,” in that it is not in any way surprising to assert that a theology school should have as its focus the *logos*, or thoughtful speech, about the *theos*, or God. (One is reminded of Evelyn Underhill’s prescient remark to Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Lang that “God is the interesting thing about religion.”) Yet in his amplification of what more this statement might mean, Kelsey begins to describe a wider terrain for what gives rise to such speech about God, and to the understanding that such speech claims to possess. Turning to the idea that “theological schools are communities engaged in a lot of practices which have the same ultimate goal: to increase our understanding of God,” he argues that theology schools at their best are able to weave together a complex pattern of critical scholarly study, worship, communal practice, personal spiritual formation, and professional training that resists any narrow classification of its academic program in the conventional patterns of head versus heart, or theory versus practice, or denominational allegiance versus critical reflection. The desired result, as Kelsey puts it, is a love of God that is not just emotive, but “a passion and willed commitment to the Beloved, [and] also a fixed attentiveness on trying to understand the Beloved.” It is his conviction that it is with this attitude that one is best equipped to try to understand life in relation to God—and therefore to become an effective pastor or lay leader in congregations and other institutions of the church.

An ability to embrace the full intellectual complexity and potential of Kelsey’s model of theological education is, perhaps, what distinguishes a university divinity school from a denominational seminary—and by implication that which gives Berkeley Divinity School at Yale a unique role to play among the eleven theological schools of the Episcopal Church. Given such a promising opportunity, **this paper seeks to set forth a description of how Berkeley Divinity School can pursue its unique position as a seminary of the Episcopal Church embedded in a major research university through what might be described as the “Berkeley project,” based on the ambitious and even audacious intention of combining the broad ecumenical horizon of the Divinity School at Yale University with a focused intellectual and spiritual formation in Anglican worship, history, theology and spirituality.** The goal is to situate these academic strengths in an educational environment that can stimulate among the students a capacity for theological leadership in the church, both in the sense that the

¹ David Kelsey, “What’s Theological about a Theological School?” *Christian Century* Feb. 5-12, 1997, p. 131. The address was based on ideas set forth earlier in Kelsey’s book, *To Understand God Truly* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

School's graduates will be rigorously trained in the critical methods of theology and formed in a disciplined spirituality, and also in the sense that they will know how to apply that spirit of critique and insight to the creative and innovative leadership of congregations and other church institutions.

From the time of its founding in 1854, Berkeley Divinity School has several times reinvented itself to meet the changing challenges of the day, first in Middletown as a small *schola* in Bishop Williams' living room, then in New Haven as an independent Episcopal seminary near Yale, then in New Haven as a school of Anglican studies *at* Yale. The recently renewed affiliation agreement with Yale Divinity School (2002) sets a direction whose full implications we are only beginning to recognize: it challenges the School to look less toward the church for its institutional identity and more toward the university, making full advantage of the educational resources and example offered by Yale to construct an academic program that will give students a critical insight into the social, political, and cultural issues which the church must face. Indeed, the pursuit of such a broad theological formation is one which has characterized Berkeley from the beginning—one thinks of Dean Ladd's passionate defense of the School against charges of Bolshevism after he invited a Soviet citizen to lecture: "Our policy of preparing men to preach the gospel by giving them the opportunity in the course of their preparation to acquire some knowledge of the world in which they are to preach that gospel, is one which has long prevailed at the School." To that end, a challenge for Berkeley in the next several years is to structure its curricular program more as a workshop on the future of the church than as a retrospective on its past. Theological formation, in other words, must become through what Kelsey calls the "complex variety of practices" it encompasses, more worldly, more conversant with the times, and more savvy of what we confront in a society driven by so many conflicting impulses—whether they are secular, religious, global, individual, economic, moral, or otherwise. And yet at the same time, underlying that worldliness there must be a passionate, committed attachment to Christ as it has been embodied in the life of his church throughout the ages. What follows is an attempt to sketch out how that ambition might be achieved.

The Cultural Context of Discord

Any astute observer of the political landscape in contemporary American society will be struck by the degree to which public discourse has become polarized in antagonistic camps, with the result that so-called public debate is most often carried on at a superficial level with statements that are more intent to strike a defensive, rather than persuasive posture. By way of example, Frank Cioffi (a professor of writing at Scripps College) suggested in a recent article entitled "Argumentation in a Culture of Discord" that the media is guilty of "reducing issues to black/white, right/wrong dichotomies." It thereby fails, in his estimation, to provide a forum for genuine debate:

Instead [it's] a venue for self-promotion and squabbling, for hawking goods, for infomercials masquerading as news or serious commentary. In terms of discussing

issues, they offer two sides, pick one: Either you are for gay marriage or against it, either for abortion or for life, either for pulling the feeding tube or for “life.”²

Cioffi’s concern is that such an intellectual climate robs citizens (which in his case, are undergraduate students) of an understanding of “argument” as a concept. Rather than understanding argumentation as the natural product of an inquisitive and active language of inquiry, Cioffi suggests, today’s students suspect it of being a form of violence that does injury to those whose perspectives are challenged by the engagement and self-critique necessary to true argument. The result, he concludes, “is the decline in the general dissemination of intellectual, argumentative discourse more broadly construed.”

One might add to Cioffi’s observations that a correlative effect of such stringent polarization is that certain lightning-rod issues tend to dominate discussion (such as his own list of gay marriage, abortion, and other defense of life issues), to the exclusion of such fateful problems as environmental degradation, global poverty, the culture of violence, and so on. On the other hand, the polarized political climate can also have the opposite effect of strengthening the attraction of megachurch environments, which tend to sidestep political issues by focusing instead on such individualized themes as “the purpose driven life.” In either case, the resurgence of religious fervor in American society is by now a well-documented phenomenon, yet one that most mainline churches are still struggling to understand and to which they have yet to find a response.

As if validating the case that religious life is to a large extent determined by outside cultural influences, the Episcopal Church readily mirrors these cultural phenomena, having becoming polarized (as have other denominations) into warring parties who defend their positions with a self-confident bellicosity. This divisiveness has by now wearied a majority of members even as it has further eroded the church’s membership roles.³ The tragedy of this situation is that not only has the church succumbed to internal controversies that serve to distract it from its larger missionary goals, eating away at its institutional health and vitality—but its very inability to model constructive debate and disagreement robs it of one of the most prophetic witnesses the church has to offer to secular society: the value of constructive critique that comes from the life of the mind as it is illumined by a spirit of holiness. **The church can, and ought to be, a community that models in its own life how one gives careful, attentive thought to the true complexity of the human being as a fallen, sinful creature—and how deliberate, patient inquiry can lead to fresh insight and understanding.** Indeed, the great social movements that have been inspired by the church, whether the anti-slavery campaigns of the nineteenth century, or the confessing church of the mid-twentieth century, or the civil rights movement of the late twentieth century, have all had as their hallmark an ability to dig deeply into the theological tradition in order to rise above the immediate conflicts by finding a larger horizon on which the issues could be

² Frank L. Cioffi, “Argumentation in a Culture of Discord,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education Review* (May 20, 2005), p. B6.

³ For example, William Sachs of the Episcopal Church Foundation reports that regarding the Episcopal Church’s decision in 2003 to ordain an openly gay man as bishop, roughly 20% of the church was strongly in favor, 20% strongly opposed, and the 60% majority simply “bewildered.”

confronted, debated, and resolved. Ours is another era when religious leadership similarly needs to have a sphere of loyalty to the gospel that transcends any one denominational embodiment of it, and which is instinctively concerned with and draws inspiration from the whole of human experience.

An Academic Context of Inquiry and Discovery

Given the cultural setting of polarized conflict, the university has a crucial role to play in shaping an alternative pattern for the character of religious leadership. Although the academic environment is itself prone to a similar polarization of opinion, nevertheless in principle the university is committed to developing a breadth of perspective among its constituents through the valorization of reasoned discussion and debate, drawn from a diversity of disciplinary perspectives. For example, writing in an essay “On Controversy,” Yale’s President Richard Levin observes the importance of tolerating, even encouraging, controversy as a means by which the necessary compromises among competing values can be found:

In this university we have a strong tradition of tolerating controversy. Free expression is protected, even if the speaker’s words are bitter, disrespectful, insensitive, or hurtful. Those who utter offending words are not punished; instead, those who interfere with the rights of speakers to speak are subject to discipline. These rules combine to produce an atmosphere of free and open debate, a climate in which the answer to a false argument or a hurtful argument is not the suppression of speech but more speech; argument is met with counterargument.⁴

The value which can be claimed within the academy by a school of divinity on behalf of the church is that the university’s embrace of the larger horizon of academic disciplines, and the principled disagreement which goes with it, is an engine of discovery and imagination which is itself a commitment at the heart of the church’s mission to teach people to love God with heart, soul *and* mind. (One thinks, for example, of the form of the medieval disputation, where one’s ability as a theologian was in large part determined by being able to state authentically and fully opposing views, even those outside of a Christian worldview, if only to answer them. The rise of the medieval university, therefore, is not insignificant to our theme here, for it was the embodiment of a theological commitment to broad learning and disputation, in contrast to the more conventional learning of the cathedral schools.) The leadership of the church, therefore, must itself be schooled in the intellectual aptitudes which foster this kind of principled engagement—and hence the specific value of a university-based theological education.

What must emphatically be resisted, however, is the assumption that is too often made, that the formation of an intellectual capacity for inquiry is solely the province of academic theology. On the contrary, the Anglican tradition has typically understood that the patterns of thought which such a formation develops are the very ones needed to

⁴ Richard C. Levin, “On Controversy,” *The Work of the University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 116.

address the practical, local issues which shape and enliven individual and congregational life: How is the parish to support pastorally persons whose working lives are taken up with the overwhelming forces of market capitalism, and how is it to help them to challenge those forces in light of the gospel? How does the church answer the critiques of religious fundamentalism? How does an historically conscious faith such as Anglicanism engage the imagination and will of contemporary Americans? In other words, the development of a capacity on the part of future pastors for reflective, critical understanding of the concrete problems faced by ordinary people is not a diversion from the essential pastoral function, but a foundation for a more meaningful and substantive engagement with them.

Some persons, of course, would hold that the presence of a school of divinity in a university environment is itself antithetical to the larger institution's core values of criticism and debate. Such a viewpoint assumes that the faith commitments represented by ecclesial communities are out of keeping with the secular, research purposes of the university. This attitude, however, surely misrepresents and misunderstands the role of a divinity school, assuming that it is an advocate of established patterns of thought and commitment, rather than an exponent of critical evaluation and revision. As such, it represents within the academy a crucial instrument of thoughtful evaluation of religious faith as one of the most powerful and pervasive forces in our society. The resulting importance of theological education even in the context of a secular, liberal arts university was well expressed by James O. Freedman, president emeritus of Dartmouth College, in a recent essay entitled "A Theological Education," in which he reflected back on the influence that George Buttrick, sometime minister in Harvard's Memorial Church, had on him as an undergraduate. "From him," Freedman writes, "I grew to appreciate the significance of religious inquiry to the mission of an academic institution committed to liberal learning," for its ability to connect myth and reality, emotion and reason, symbol and substance in a way that is not commonly addressed in the classroom.⁵ The study of religion thus has an important role in the academy as a place where the larger questions of purpose, meaning and intent are routinely asked.

One of Buttrick's successors, Peter J. Gomes, expanded on the importance of divinity study in a university, appealing to the classical idea that truth is ultimately not simply the result of scientific inquiry, but the composite of human knowledge as it is understood in the light of God ("having more in common with Dante than with Einstein"). Speaking of Yale's tercentenary (in words later echoed in his sermon for the Berkeley Divinity School sesquicentennial), Gomes said:

At Yale, the university has *LUX ET VERITAS* as its motto, that is, *LIGHT AND TRUTH*. Its founders understood that truth is the result of enlightenment, and cannot be seen without the light that both shines in the darkness and eradicates the darkness. Truth in the darkness, while still true, is of no earthly good. Truth has to

⁵ James O. Freedman, "A Theological Education," *The Chronicle of Higher Education Review* (July 1, 2005), p. B9.

be seen for its goodness to be appreciated: both light and truth are essential to keep one from arrogance and ignorance.⁶

In short, the divinity school is not a strange bedfellow with a secular university, but in the specificity of its concern for truth, wherever it is found, it is part and parcel of the academic enterprise. **For the seminarian, the dynamic relationship between divinity study and the other academic disciplines is critical to his or her formation as a theological leader, for it is evocative of the relationship the church has to the wider world: the seminarian is schooled not just in the internal language of the church, but in the variety of discourses and constituencies to which the gospel must be related.**

Moreover, Berkeley has an especially important role to play in relation to the Divinity School at Yale, for as a representative of the Anglican ethos, it bears particular witness to a tradition of intellectual tolerance that—at its best—resists the temptation to suppress dissenting voices in favor of a presumed consensus of opinion. From the time of the Elizabethan settlement, Anglicans have found their unity in a common worship that has had room within it for such divergent trajectories as the evangelical, the catholic, and the broad church movements. Of course, the current strains in both the Episcopal Church and wider Anglican Communion seem to have undermined that tradition of toleration. Yet because of Berkeley's own historical commitment from the time of Bishop Williams to being a "mediating" voice in the church, it brings to the Divinity School environment a deeply rooted inclination to embrace a breadth of conviction and commitment that reflects the ecumenicity upon which Yale Divinity School is founded. **In such an educational setting, the embodiment of a genuine intellectual toleration can only strengthen each student's ultimate ability to give effectual leadership in the church, for the students will have already experienced in their formation the authentic diversity of the church, and will have developed the habits of mind and heart that make for a learned attitude of toleration that overcomes any fractious partisanship.**

The Institutional Context: Seminaries and Divinity Schools

To bring into sharper focus the unique opportunity given to the Berkeley Divinity School by its affiliation with a major research university, it may be helpful to distinguish between the nature of a seminary and a divinity school. Admittedly, the distinction should not be drawn too tightly, for there is a great deal of commonality between the two types of educational institutions, and the terms are in many cases used virtually interchangeably. (One dictionary definition of a "divinity school," for example, is simply "a protestant seminary.")

Nevertheless, for argument's sake one can draw out certain characteristics unique to each educational model that help to illuminate their contrasting emphases. In the first instance, a seminary might be described as a school devoted to the training of persons for ordained (and lay) ministry in the church. Often tied to a specific denomination, such a

⁶ Peter J. Gomes, "Lux et Veritas," *Growing Up and other Sermons Preached at Harvard* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 263-4.

school stresses the imparting of a certain body of knowledge deemed necessary to understand the particular theological and historical tradition of that church. Its curriculum is therefore didactically weighted, focusing on instructing students in a prescribed course of academic study which catechizes them into that church's doctrine, discipline and worship (what is, for example, roughly outlined in the Episcopal Church by the seven canonical areas of the General Ordination Examination). To this core curriculum is added a relatively strong emphasis on professional formation that prepares persons with a set of skills for work in congregations and other institutions of the denomination. The seminary's worship life authentically reflects that of its denominational parent; its students and faculty understand themselves to share the larger ecclesial identity of the denomination and to be accountable to it; and the church's issues implicitly become the seminary's issues as well. Because of this immersion, students learn to develop a great fluency in the discourse native to that particular tradition, though they remain relatively uninformed about other traditions.

A divinity school, on the other hand, is (as its name suggests) more oriented to the study of the science of understanding God's ways with humankind, or in other words, of theology broadly construed. By comparison with a denominational seminary, a divinity school stands more at the fringe of the church, openly questioning and critiquing the church's institutional culture by holding it accountable to the gospel and, by virtue of its ecumenical complexion, comparing it with other traditions. At its best, a divinity school remains committed to the advancement of the church's mission, but does so with a certain independence of mind and heart that is gained from its marginal position in relation to any one ecclesial tradition. Its object is less to replicate in students a strong denominational identity, and more to form them with an ability to see the implications of faith in all those components of culture in which the church must make its witness. A university divinity school, in particular, operates in an academic environment which is not necessarily more rigorous than that of a seminary, but which is conducted within the contours of a broader intellectual horizon that more readily embraces the whole spectrum of learning represented across the academic disciplines. In short, a divinity school focuses on what Stanley Hauerwas has called the task "to think out, for the church, the intellectual love of God," fulfilling the church's mandate to give constant attention to the question of how God is to be known in each successive era. As a university institution, such a school is strongly positioned both to be mindful of the theological heritage of the church, and to be at the forefront in examining contemporary developments and issues. This task is not, for Hauerwas, a "head trip," but rather (following Aquinas) a commitment to theology as "joy in the truth."⁷

To the extent that each of these two types of institutions exist in their own right—denominational seminaries and university divinity schools—they each occupy an important place in the overall preparation of persons for work in the church, offering in each case their own relative strengths. **Yet among the three cultures which any theological school has to inhabit (church, academy, and society), a university divinity school is in a stronger position to mediate the three within its own spiritual**

⁷ Quoted in Paul T. Stallworth, "The Story of an Encounter," *Theological Education and Moral Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), P. 145.

and intellectual life, and thereby to produce the kind of graduate who is adept at making the gospel sensible and sophisticated in an age which tends either to ignore it as irrelevant, or to appropriate it as a polarizing force for political purposes or a popularized message of positive thinking. The divinity school, therefore, has a crucial role to play in giving the church the words with which to express the gospel it seeks to proclaim, and its graduates have a particular vocation toward the growth and expansion of the church's mission based upon their own breadth of formation.

Why, then, would a student choose a divinity school over a denominational seminary? Clearly many students do: Berkeley/Yale receives twice as many applications as can be accepted, and the quality of students—though they tend to be young—is high in terms of academic standing, life experience, and vocational ambition. The essential reason for choosing a divinity school lies in the type of formation that one receives there: its intensity, its richness, its rigor, its breadth, its ability to challenge and inspire. At Berkeley, a particular constellation of educational resources and programs goes into this distinctive pattern of formation. The Anglican Studies program equips students with a foundational understanding of history, theology, and worship. The ambition of the Annand Program in Christian spirituality is both to shape students in a disciplined life of personal prayer, and to teach them how to do the same for others. Daily chapel establishes patterns of communal prayer, teaches students to lead worship, and exposes them both to the riches of traditional liturgies and music, and to the diversity of Christian worship that can fire the imagination and fuel the heart. The colloquium series focuses on developing and stimulating the personal character traits and skills for effective pastoral leadership in congregational and other church settings. Internships give students the chance to experience and learn first-hand the nature and skills of pastoral ministry, and the School intends to work more and more closely with supervisors to ensure that the students' learning is as substantive as possible. All this, within the wider context of Yale Divinity School's curricular offerings in Bible, moral and systematic theology, church history, ministerial arts, and cultural studies—as well as the University's wide-ranging departments and professional schools. The cumulative opportunity offered to a student to prepare for an imaginative and fruitful ministry in the church is, in a word, extraordinary.

The Educational Context: Identity and Culture

Among the eleven accredited seminaries of the Episcopal Church, there has historically been a recognizable difference in their several identities: General Theological Seminary has traditionally been more catholic, Virginia Theological Seminary more evangelical, Episcopal Divinity School more liberal, and so forth. In addition, some seminaries have maintained a strong regional identity, such as the Church Divinity School of the Pacific on the West Coast. In the current ecclesial climate, however, many seminaries have tried to shed the more partisan labels, positioning themselves as seminaries “for the whole church” (a slogan of the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest). Yet at the same time, others have reaffirmed their distinctly partisan identities, as for example Trinity School for the Ministry's avowedly conservative and evangelical commitment. Overall, the church should be glad of this diversity among its seminaries, and recognize the value of each.

In this mix of regional, partisan, and inclusive identities, however, there remains a unique place to be occupied by Berkeley Divinity School that distinguishes it from any of the others. **Unlike the other ten Episcopal seminaries, Berkeley has evolved into a distinctly university institution, and for its identity it must look to the intellectual discipline, breadth of perspective, academic climate of critique, and professional and institutional standards of the university, while at the same time remaining in service of the church.** In that sense, Berkeley represents what might be called “the best of both worlds”: the intellectual and ecumenical breadth of a university divinity school, coupled with the focused formation of an Episcopal seminary in Anglican history, worship, theology and spirituality. Historically, of course, Berkeley was very much the product of the church, though never with a strongly partisan identity, having been founded in 1854 by the Bishop of Connecticut “as a mediating seminary at a time of internal controversy.” Throughout its evolution, however, the School has consistently and intentionally moved closer to the university—a transition made all the more natural by Yale Divinity School’s own strong commitment to training ministers for the church (somewhat exceptional among university schools of divinity). In fact, it was Dean Ladd who moved the school to New Haven in 1928, with the express purpose of giving seminarians access to the wider horizon of the University—a dream that was fulfilled by the 1971 affiliation. This trajectory, which may in one light seem like the product of necessity, from a larger perspective seems entirely providential, for it has given the School a mission to offer a unique type of theological formation which is critical for the overall spiritual and intellectual vitality of the church. Not only is Berkeley positioned to educate a sophisticated and learned clergy for parish ministry—but it is also at the forefront of training the church’s educational leadership that will staff its seminaries and schools in the future. As Dean Franklin once wrote, “As a microcosm of the diversity of the Anglican Communion within a microcosm of the wider body of Christ—Yale Divinity School—within a microcosm of contemporary society—Yale University—Berkeley offers a singular context for the formation of future leaders.”⁸

Speaking at a 1988 conference on “Theological Education and Moral Formation,” James T. Burtchaell of the University of Notre Dame remarked that “any adjective by which an educational institution wants to be known has to represent a quality explicitly and unashamedly sought after and developed ...”⁹ If, then, one were to list adjectives that would describe the distinctive culture of Berkeley Divinity School that is to be “sought after and developed” in its faculty, staff and students, the list would include: rigorous, critical, innovative, academic, demanding, prayerful, engaged, broad-minded, bold, prophetic. Now, there are certain practices (to return to Professor Kelsey’s term) that can already be assumed in the Yale/Berkeley setting: the centrality of worship, high academic expectations in the traditional theological disciplines, an ecumenical spirit, and a diversity of perspective and intention. So many of the characteristics “to be sought after and developed” are already typical of the School. To succeed fully at the “Berkeley project” in today’s cultural situation, however, Berkeley needs to be guided by ten

⁸ R. William Franklin, “Dean’s Letter,” *Berkeley at Yale* 17 (Summer, 2000), p. 3.

⁹ Quoted in Paul T. Stallsworth, “The Story of an Encounter,” in Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *Theological Education and Moral Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 220.

principles that will draw it more fully into its identity as a university institution at the service of the church:

< Diversity of perspective. First, the School must have at the forefront of its planning a programmatic commitment to exposing students to a wide variety of disciplines and discourses, by way of encouraging them both to take inspiration from, and to be engaged with, perspectives outside the world of the church and the university.¹⁰

So, for example, the “Berkeley Visitors” need to be drawn from a wide range of disciplines and fields of expertise, and liturgy taught as a dramatic art ...

< Inter-disciplinary resources. Second, the pursuit of such an engagement must, whenever possible, seek out the opportunities afforded by the proximity of the various departments and schools of the university, seeking to make advantage of what President Levin has described as the university’s “substantial interconnectedness.”

So, for example, students should be encouraged to take courses in other departments and to attend extracurricular events, and people from around the university should be invited to speak in classes, colloquia, and chapel ...

< Open discourse. Third, the School must fully embrace the wider university’s commitment to open discourse on every variety of topic, resisting the temptation to edit any perspective not in keeping with a presumed consensus of opinion either in the university or the church.

So, for example, representatives of minority positions within the church should be invited to visit, as well as representatives of traditions outside the Episcopal Church ...

< Climate of critical inquiry. Fourth, to support the commitment to open discourse, the School must create a climate of critical inquiry in which students understand themselves to be engaged in a common pursuit of learning in which every perspective and opinion is subject to examination, argument and evaluation.

So, for example, classes should deal head-on with controversial topics, and encourage lively debate and disagreement ...

< High standards and expectations. Fifth, the School should have high expectations of the students, modeled by faculty and staff and reflected in the quality of its academic program, encouraging them to see themselves as

¹⁰ On the value for theology of engagement with fields beyond its ordinary scope, see Ian Markham, *A Theology of Engagement* (Blackwell, 200?).

“professionals in training” with all the maturity of conduct, self-responsibility, fortitude, and disciplined commitment which that status implies.

So, for example, Berkeley courses should be taught with the same rigor as any other Yale course; students should be expected to develop a certain independence personally and academically; spiritual formation in chapel and the Annand Program should emphasize the character of leadership; relations between staff and students should be governed by the highest professional standards ...

< Excellence rather than comprehensiveness. Sixth, given the limited time for Berkeley courses and activities, the School should follow Yale’s lead in having “an aspiration to excellence rather than a compulsion to comprehensiveness,”¹¹ seeking more to form lifelong patterns of thought than focusing on imparting a certain body of knowledge or set of skills.

So, for example, the colloquia should be organized for depth of content without trying to cover all aspects of ministry, with more advantage being made of the educational potential of supervised ministry for such practical learning ...

< Cultivation of leadership. Seventh, the School should consistently stimulate students’ own capacity for leadership, seeking to evoke the character traits that make for creative, innovative ministry, including an emphasis on international experience.

So, for example, “vocation” and “discernment” should be discussed in terms of vision and leadership, and Senior Visiting Fellows should be used to mentor students’ awareness of leadership issues ...

< Educational focus. Eighth, Berkeley Center and community life should move away from its “parish hall” ethos, becoming oriented toward events related to the educational purposes of the School.

So, for example, Berkeley Center could function similarly to Yale’s college system as a place of encounter between students, visitors and faculty ...

< Distinctive identity. Ninth, the School should not try to imitate other seminaries in its program and curriculum, but concentrate on developing its own distinctive identity as a program within a larger university environment.

So, for example, the colloquium should have its own pedagogical intent as a leadership workshop, examining current trends in American religious life ...

¹¹ President Richard Levin, “Yale’s Fourth Century,” *The Work of the University*, p. 169

< Engagement with the University. Tenth, Berkeley should understand itself not only as in service to the church, but also to the university, actively participating in Yale's publicly stated desire to reinvigorate religious life on campus.

So, for example, Berkeley could support a preaching series in Battell Chapel, or events at Berkeley Center could be a meeting point between the church and university, or Berkeley could partner with YDS, the Institute of Sacred Music and other parts of the University on conferences and events ...

How then can one describe the type of graduate Berkeley seeks to produce? A Berkeley graduate is someone who:

- Speaks a language of faith not bound by the institutional discourse of Episcopalianism, but has a knowledge of the Lord that is immediate and first-hand;
- Has a primary identity as a Christian, with all the depth of understanding and commitment that implies, but also rejoices in the particularity of living that commitment as an Anglican;
- Sees the church as an instrument of salvation, where issues of ultimate importance are confronted and addressed, and is skeptical of any tendency toward ecclesiastical tribalism or presumption;
- Is restless with the church's status quo, always seeking to find more authentic ways to articulate the faith, to apply its insights, to convince the unconverted, to draw the church into engagement with the communities in which it exists;
- Has a certain savvy in the world, and knows how to navigate its complexity;
- Is a preacher with something of substance to say because he or she has thought long and deeply about the issues and consequences of faith;
- Is a teacher who struggles against every temptation toward the platitudinous, knowing that each word must count in a media-driven age;
- Is a theologian who knows the ways of God with humanity, and who instinctively puts God at the center;
- Is a pastor who is passionate for the whole human condition, and who relates easily and naturally with all sorts and conditions of humanity out of pure enthusiasm for their individuality, affection for their eccentricity, and empathy for their suffering.

An Ecclesial Context: Intellectual and Spiritual Foundation for Ministry

It is said that when the outspoken African-American scholar Cornel West was on the faculty at Yale Divinity School, he once remarked that to one degree or another, all YDS students are on the fringe of their denomination. That there is an element of truth in this observation is corroborated by comments made by Professor George Lindbeck at the same “Theological Education and Moral Formation” conference mentioned above: “Since I began teaching at Yale in the 1950s, my way of approaching our problem [of distinguishing between academic culture and formation for the church] has been to take a large portion of the students and train them *not* to fit into the communities from which they came. ... The challenge is to educate ministers against their churches, as they actually exist, for the sake of the true church.”¹² Now, that attitude might seem paradoxical, but it echoes what our own Archbishop of Canterbury has said regarding reform in the church—that the church is renewed “from the edges, not the center.”¹³ This is so because there is a place outside the mainstream of any denomination’s ecclesial structures and dominant cultural assumptions where there is a greater sense of priority, a lighter weight of institutional inertia, and a more prophetic clarity of purpose than can ever be found at the more restrained center.

Given its affiliation with Yale Divinity School, Berkeley has risked a unique vision of priestly and lay formation that has historically located it at the fringe of the church. Even before the Yale connection, Bishop Williams himself embodied this ambition by focusing on forming students with a breadth of mind and depth of commitment that would propel them beyond the limitations of the internal debates to a larger commitment to Christ’s mission in the world. As such, his example still gives us our model of a theological formation emphasizing a capacity for analytical and critical thinking that seeks to inspire in Berkeley’s students an ability to bring the gospel to bear in today’s world not by any rote repetition of that which has preceded us, but by a genuinely relevant and imaginative deployment of the gospel’s stunning ability to make itself applicable to the here and now. **Berkeley’s vision for formation, in other words, consistently errs on the side of residing at the edge of the church, where it can authentically engage the complexity of the world by drawing on the depth of the Christian tradition even while drawing the church out of itself and into the world.** At a time when the church already feels destabilized, one might regard that positioning as unconstructive or even threatening. But our conviction is that the kind of renewing vision that can come from the fringe is exactly what the church needs in order to move beyond issues that often inhibit its purposeful commitment to the essential purpose of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Berkeley’s place at the edge has typically given its graduates a certain dexterity and imaginative grit when it comes to advancing the mission of the church, and so we regard our positioning as the very thing that bishops, commissions on ministry, and prospective students should seek in an educational setting for the preparation of a new generation of clergy and lay leaders in the church.

These instincts are succinctly summarized by the School motto, *in illa quae ultra sunt* (“into the regions beyond”), which is a phrase that, rather than enshrining some

¹² Ibid., p. 151.

¹³ Quoted in Scott Bader-Saye, “The Emergent Matrix,” *The Christian Century* (November 30, 2004), p. 27.

ancient platitude as do so many mottos, actually acts as an engine to drive the church forward into a more imaginative future. The text, of course, is biblical, taken from the tenth Chapter of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, where he urges them to realize that as their faith increases, their sphere of action on behalf of the gospel will likewise increase. Their growth in faith will beget growth in mission, and that growth will carry them "into regions beyond," beyond Corinth, beyond Greece, beyond the Mediterranean, into the whole of the world. But we would make a mistake to hear only a geographic reference in these words: they also refer to those regions of larger understanding and bolder resolve that characterize persons who, by inhabiting the fringe, become restless with the unexamined assumptions of a distracted center. They refer to the example set by the Bishop Williams's and the Dean Ladds of the world, "great men," as Berkeley's sometime administrator Elizabeth Raftery once remarked, "different in personality, but alike in courage, scholarship, vision, simplicity, and in love and service to God and Man."¹⁴ **All of this is to say that the institutional culture of Berkeley will be related to the church, but it will not be entirely of the church (being also of the university)—yet it will understand that very marginality to be of utmost importance for the church because of the strength of religious leadership that it produces in the church.**

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¹⁴ Elizabeth Raftery, "Berkeley's Three Founders," address given at the 1966 observance of Founders Day, published in the *Berkeley Divinity School Bulletin* 195 (Summer, 1966).