

Shaping Biblical Community Devotions and Reflections for Wheaton Campus – April 2003

Table of Contents

An Opportune Moment Ephesians 5:15–16 - Ken Chase, Communications	2
<u>Reliance</u>	
The Covenantal Relationship Luke 22:10 – Richard Schultz, Biblical & Theological Studies	3
A Perspective from the Crossroads Jeremiah 6:16 – Paul Robinson, Human Needs and Global Research	4
A Latino Perspective Ephesians 3:14–15 – Alvaro L. Nieves, Sociology and Anthropology	5
<i>Hanging Together or Hanging Together</i> Colossians 2:2 – Marjorie Vander Wagen, Biology	6
<u>Freedom</u>	
The Challenge Ahead Jeremiah 26:13 – Richard Butman, Psychology	7
The Centrality of Narrative for Christian Community 1 Corinthians 10:23 – Daniel J. Treier, Biblical & Theological Studies	8
Playing by Heart Jeremiah 31:33–34 – Daniel Horn, Conservatory of Music	9
The Astonishing Way Romans 14:17–18 – Timothy Larson, Biblical & Theological Studies	10
<u>Openness</u>	
A Transforming Change Ephesians 5:8b–10 - Nancy J. Eckstein, Communications	11
Welcoming One Another Hebrews 13:1–2 – E. David Cook Philosophy	12
Multicultural Community Acts 1:8 – Hank Allen, Sociology & Anthropology	13
The <i>Community Covenant</i> and Gender John 12:32 – Mark Husbands, Biblical & Theological Studies	14
<u>Trust</u>	
<i>Life Together</i> in a Covenant Community Galatians 6:2 – David Setran, Christian Formation & Ministry	15
Reflections of an Art Historian 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – E. John Walford, Art	16
Words and Community Hebrews 1:1 – Jeffrey Davis, English	17
Creating a New Moral Vocabulary Mark 2:21–22 – Trey Buchanan, Psychology	18
The Long View Revelation 21:1–2 – Lynn Cohick, Biblical & Theological Studies	19

An Opportune Moment

Be very careful, then, how you live— not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:15–16

The change from the *Statement of Responsibilities* to our *Community Covenant* is an opportune moment for our campus. In Ephesians 5:16, Paul relies on the Greek term *kairos* (translated as “every opportunity”) to characterize the strategic significance of our times together. *Kairos* time is that moment ripe for action, a decisive opportunity when time can be turned through wise living. The presentation of the *Community Covenant* to Wheaton College is a *kairos* moment, a right and seasonable time for action in which we ought to take the opportunity to shape our days. The *Covenant* calls us to see afresh that we are responsible for the quality of our shared lives. In response, we need to enter fully into this moment and make the *Covenant* a vital and living document.

The promise of community is great. Through collaborative working and living, we experience the gifts of hospitality and generosity, of comfort and compassion. In its best moments, community is characterized by *shalom*, a rich and peaceful coexistence in which we flourish through the giving and receiving of gifts, such as our talents, insights, encouragements, and acceptance. John Milbank describes this great good as conviviality, the festive sociality of feasting in good company. Indeed, in community with others, we enjoy the highest pleasures of humankind.

Yet, the risks of community also are well-known. Due to our seriousness of purpose, and our depth of mutual involvement, we risk becoming overbearing and intrusive, micro-managing each other’s concerns and acutely aware of each other’s failings. Our efforts to bear each other’s burdens and to hold each other accountable can be stifling, as if every movement and motive is monitored. We may become for each other objects of studied concern rather than partners in social harmony.

The challenge, of course, is to become a community of responsibility and not a culture of retribution. Paul strikes this balance well when, in 1 Corinthians, he urges the believers to be mourning sin within their fellowship (5:2), but denies them the right to cast judgment on the spiritual integrity of others’ motives (4:5). It is not our place to judge the spiritual condition of others, or to judge how they live freedom in Christ. It is our place, though, to share concern for the behaviors that incur the wrath of God.

We have before us an unparalleled opportunity to explore community first-hand, to vividly experience the ups and downs of shaping life together. Coordinating freedom with responsibility, and accountability with grace, is a life-long challenge. Our privilege at this time, at this moment, is to redeem our collective lives by making the most of the opportunity, “because the days are evil.”

Kenneth R. Chase
Communication

The Covenantal Relationship

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” Luke 22:20

In Christian circles, we so frequently refer to the “New Testament” that we seldom reflect on the origin of this designation. Perhaps this is due to the fact that we primarily associate the term “testament” with the phrase “last will and testament.” But that is misleading, since “testament” is simply an archaic “King James” synonym for “covenant.” The foundational event here is the Last Supper (according to Lk. 22:20) when “after the supper he [Jesus] took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. . . .’” Jesus, in turn, probably derived the term “new covenant” from Jeremiah 31:31-34 which begins: “‘The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the [old] covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them. . . .’”

Although we seldom use the word “covenant” today, the concept is one of the most important motifs in biblical theology, the word occurring more than three hundred times in the Bible. Covenants were commonplace in the Old Testament world, functionally similar to modern-day treaties or contracts. Jonathan made a covenant with David (1 Sam. 18:3; 23:18), and Malachi 2:14 also describes marriage as a covenantal relationship. According to P. R. Williamson (“Covenant,” *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, IVP, 2000, p. 420), the term “covenant” “conveys the idea of a solemn commitment, guaranteeing promises or obligations undertaken by one or both covenanting parties. God’s relationship to humanity after the Flood (Gen. 9:9-11), with Abraham (Gen. 15:18), with Israel at Sinai (Ex. 19:5; 24:7-8) and with David (2 Sam. 23:5) are all formalized through a covenant.

Interestingly, Jeremiah 31 describes the “Old” Covenant as in need of replacing, even though it had served its purpose in ancient Israel for more than four centuries. The most significant provision of the New Covenant is that God would internalize His instructions to His people (Jer. 31:33), helping them to obey Him through inward motivations rather than through outward constraints. Similarly, our new *Community Covenant* seeks to develop a campus community whose members exhibit a lifestyle that is not simply mutually edifying but also pleasing to Jesus Christ—not through a detailed list of prohibitions but through fostering an intimate relationship to Him and a commitment to carrying out His will in all that we do.

Richard Schultz

Biblical and Theological Studies, Archaeology, and World Religions

A Perspective From the Crossroads

This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it. . . .” Jeremiah 6:16

My life experiences and scholarship, as an historian, anthropologist, and development consultant, have largely been an ongoing encounter with the narratives of non-Western cultures. What I (and my students) have learned is that *community* is the central focus of these societies. Our Christian faith traditions were birthed in interpretive contexts that have far more in common with contemporary non-Western cultures than with our highly individualized society.

Several years ago, we were on a mountain top in the company of a cohort of Samburu elders. We were discussing issues of survival during times of crisis. They told us the following story:

It was during *mutai*, that is “the finishing,” when the cattle, sheep, and goats upon which the people subsisted had been virtually annihilated by rinderpest and drought, leaving nothing for the Samburu to eat. Among one clan of people, only one cow, which gave one cap-full of milk a day, remained. This was not enough to sustain even one person until more food could be found. There ensued a discussion of how the milk could be best utilized.

Those people had several options: they could have chosen to give the milk to one person and hoped that person would survive. They could have fought over the milk, in which case the strongest would have won the capful. They could have killed the cow and eaten its meat. They could have abandoned the cow and each other and gone looking for other kinds of food. The elders continued:

In the end, they *all* agreed together that each person would dip their *mswaki* (toothbrush stick) into the lid containing the milk, and each would suck the nourishment from the brushy end of their own stick. With that they would survive.

The discussion among those Samburu centered on how they could consume the milk so that *each* person would have an equal share. They chose a radically different solution, one founded in community. This choice required as much faith as that required of the disciples when Jesus took the five loaves and two fishes and distributed them in faith to 5,000 people gathered on a hillside.

Was the milk enough for the Samburu to survive? Of course. The elders relating the story were the direct descendants of those survivors. But we also must understand Samburu philosophy to know why they believe their ancestors lived. They stayed together and shared what little they had and believed that it would be enough to keep them alive until more food could be found. Their philosophy maintains that if people believe and if people share that belief with others, they will live. For the Samburu, sharing is the essential ingredient of life—putting others’ interests before one’s own, sharing what one has with others, valuing networks which bond one to another and which create ties of interdependence. This is community.

Similarly, Paul writing to the Colossians states,

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (3:12-14).

Paul Robinson
Human Needs and Global Resources

A Latino Perspective

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. Ephesians 3:14–15

A community covenant is a hard sell in a society that idealizes and sometimes idolizes *rugged individualism*, promoting and perpetuating the myth of the meritocracy. Starting in the post-Civil War period, the Horatio Alger myth came to represent the new American ideology of success—the notion that anyone could make it with enough hard work. The link to individualism is clear. Social or opportunity structures are ignored. Family and community seem to play little or no role. Latinos could not have contrived such a myth. They would have been too aware of the contribution of family and community to individual success. It is the willingness of the community and the family to assist and hold accountable that motivates and enables the individual to succeed. It is loyalty to the family and a sense of the transcendent that gives the individual the courage to take risks for the greater good.

The preface of the *Community Covenant* considers Wheaton College a “community” variously described as academic, residential, Christian, and educational. It is not a church and not a religious order, but is referenced as the “College family.” This latter is a conception that Latinos will understand, relate to, and accept. Two vitally important characteristics to most Latinos are *la familia* (family) and *la dignidad* (dignity). The dignity of the individual and commitment to the family include loyalty, a strong support system, a belief that a member’s behavior reflects on the honor of the family, and a duty to care for family members. There is an other-directedness that yields an emphasis on cooperation in the attainment of goals. Sometimes this seems contrary to the dominant culture’s theme of rugged independence and an ideology of success. In a setting like ours, however, Latinos have a contribution to make. If we accept our differences in culture, style, and language, we will model support, encouragement, loyalty, and mutual accountability that is not at all foreign to our experience—for we understand the importance of *la familia* and community.

Alvaro L. Nieves
Sociology and Anthropology

Hanging Together or Hanging Together

***My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding. . . .
Colossians 2:2***

How will the new *Community Covenant* help us to be “hanging together?” Will the new *Covenant* help us as a community grow and continue our species or will it be a divisive tool causing our downfall? Will our hanging together be a rich experience with clear understanding?

Biologists understand community as “a group of plants and animals inhabiting a given area” (Robert Smith, *Ecology and Field Biology*, New York: Harper Collins, 1996). The Wheaton College student body can be viewed as a group inhabiting these few acres of Northern Illinois soil. As students and faculty, we hang together. Biologists also offer another idea about community: “A group of species that interact in such a way that a change in the population of one species has consequences for the other species in the community” (Eli Minkoff and Pamela Baker, *Biology Today*, New York: Garland Publishing, 2001). With this second definition, we are getting to the heart of the *Community Covenant*. Actions on the part of one species will have consequences on another species in the community. What I do and what you do will have effects on the total community.

Turning our attention to the concept of covenant, we are familiar with the covenant between God and Abraham in Genesis 17. It was a contract in which both parties agreed to certain terms. A covenant is an agreement entered into by two or more persons or parties—a compact. In a sense, the *Community Covenant* is an agreement between Wheaton College and the students as well as the students with each other. The actions of one will affect positively or negatively the development of another.

From a biological perspective, a community involves competition, aggregation, and cooperation that may keep the community strong and growing. Resistance and resilience also are necessary to keep it strong; sometimes we must change and sometimes we must stand firm. The *Community Covenant*, with the sections “Affirming Biblical Standards,” “Living the Christian Life,” and “Exercising Responsible Freedom,” help keep our community spiritually healthy. By purposefully selecting our actions (behavior), we can enhance individuals (species) and the whole community.

As Wheaton College lives with the *Community Covenant*, will we *hang* together or will we hang *together* for Christ and His kingdom?

Marjorie Vander Wagen
Biology

The Challenge Ahead

Amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God. Jeremiah 26:13 (NRSV)

The new *Community Covenant* is a fresh, hard look at important aspects of our faith. It makes our work easier in some ways—and more difficult in others.

I applaud the emphasis placed on the Christian virtues. Far too often, I think there has been an attempt on the part of well-meaning evangelicals to add to the revelation of God. As Wheaton alumnus Horace Fenton remarked, “If the sin of liberalism has been the attempt to subtract from the revelation of God, it may well be that the sin of evangelicals is too often an unwitting attempt to add to it” (*The Trouble with Barnacles*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973, p. 15). The *Community Covenant* makes a clear distinction between scriptural truths and cultural or social convictions, a prerequisite distinction that any young adult needs to make in order to develop more principled moral reasoning. If we are concerned about shaping a distinctly Christian worldview and lifestyle, this is a most important starting point.

In another sense, the new *Community Covenant* makes our work even more challenging. We need to model, shape, prompt, and reinforce Godly character and conviction in our community of faith and learning. It would be easier if we could appeal to a list of rules and regulations. But central to the Gospel message is the awesome responsibility to “discern the limits implicit in the liberty—and the liberty within the limits”—in efforts to move closer to God and each other (Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976, p. 25). Perhaps the clearest finding from the social science research on moral development is that ethical reasoning is forged in the context of significant relationships. If we sincerely desire to grow in wisdom and compassion, we all will need to find more effective ways to balance grace and truth in our interactions with one another.

Richard E. Butman
Psychology

The Centrality of Narrative for Christian Community

“Everything is permissible”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is constructive. 1 Corinthians 10:23

During childhood, my brother and I were sometimes given “chores.” For a while, these took the form of a weekly checklist posted on the refrigerator. Our time was free once we had completed our list.

Often modern Christians see their moral life as something like a checklist, with do’s and do-not’s that would hold true for everyone. We have lived morally if we have avoided certain sins, and could “check boxes” for completing good acts. Consequently, much of our ethical thinking has focused on moral dilemmas: e.g., “May we lie to save lives?”

Perhaps, though, such an ethic *produces* moral dilemmas! Starting with the good, can biblical commands such as “love one another” be accomplished as if they were on a checklist? The dilemma of “when have I done enough?” seems always to crouch at the door. A checklist mentality means scratching my head about most choices: “What shall I do?”

Surely, wisdom is needed to become a person of virtue—with habits *and* dispositions for knowing *and* doing what is true, good, and beautifully fitting, often without needing to reflect on the situation as if it were a moral dilemma or discrete act of the will.

The recent recovery of “virtue” in ethics is a biblical emphasis, if we remember that virtues are only possible as God gives Himself to us in Christ, and that virtues are patterned after Him rather than human excellences in general. Moral people possess the virtue of prudence: within biblical boundaries they are freed by the Spirit to become who they truly are—not only to know boundaries, but to live out the possibilities of freedom in Christ faithfully. Paul prays constantly in his letters for the Holy Spirit to give Christians such prudence—an understanding of God’s will beyond what is “permissible” to what is “profitable” (1 Co. 6:12, 10:23). This development of discernment, as persons in and for communities, is a crucial component within the moral life itself. Such character is formed in community, “caught” as well as taught.

Community rules can be useful guides, but they must not eclipse the clarity of which rules are God’s. Nor can we evade the limits of biblical rules, which require discernment to apply: for example, Christians are not merely individuals who avoid killing, but persons in community who affirm life and give their own. Rules may *describe* and help to *direct* a virtuous person; however, they usually do not *determine* for them only one action in each and every situation. We can only fulfill the obligation to “love one another,” and figure out how we live up to that, over time, as we learn and live the gospel story with others.

Daniel J. Treier

Biblical and Theological Studies, Archaeology, and World Religions

Playing By Heart

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Jeremiah 31:33–34

“Playing by heart” is an old-fashioned phrase that describes performing music from memory. It is a wonderfully descriptive phrase. In a simple and effective way, it sums up the process that a performing artist goes through in order to project someone else’s work convincingly and passionately. Musicians wrestle with a composer’s ideas, working constantly to come to the place where they do not merely reproduce those ideas, but so identify with them that they seem to come from within the musician’s very being. Likewise, actors take on another persona and speak another’s words so as to make the audience experience those words as being spoken “from the heart.” It is not enough merely to do what is on the page, or what a teacher directs—those are only starting points on the long road to making a work of art one’s own. Performers journey this road as long as they make art. It is, at its deepest level, not a process for artists alone.

God calls all of us to a journey of which this artistic struggle is only the faintest picture. He wants us to live “by heart.” In Jeremiah 31, God proclaims that He will put His law in the minds of His people, and write it on their hearts. In this proclamation, the Lord alludes to His commandments, carved on stone tablets and placed in a sacred ark, to be approached with awe and obeyed with fear and trembling. Yet obedience must be accompanied with inner transformation. Such transformation is ultimately not possible for us apart from Him. As important as it is for us in community to encourage our brothers, sisters, and neighbors to “know the Lord,” that knowledge truly comes only as He Himself transforms us interiorly, forgiving our wickedness and forgetting our sins. Being thus transformed, we can begin learning, for as long as we may live, what it is to live His ways “by heart.”

Daniel Horn
Conservatory of Music

The Astonishing Way

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Romans 14:17–18

Wheaton College's wonderful motto, *For Christ and His Kingdom*, is almost embedded in this text. Here in one sentence in Romans, the apostle Paul speaks both of serving Christ and of the true nature of His Kingdom. He is addressing the issue of how a community of believers ought to handle conscientious differences on disputable matters. The section begins, "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another" (Ro. 14:13). Paul's teaching seems to cut both ways, challenging ideologues on both sides simultaneously. Both those who insist that certain forms of eating and drinking are forbidden, and those who insist upon exercising their perceived right to indulge in them, don't really understand Christ's Kingdom. Jesus is creating a community in which people bear with one another in their weaknesses and in their differences of opinions. A judgmental, accusatory community is not the Kingdom of God. That kind of community is an unpleasant place to live, a threatening world in which one can do no right. Jesus spoke of His generation as having produced such a culture:

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.'" (Lk. 7:33-34)

The Holy Spirit fosters a very different kind of community from this depiction: one characterized by charity, consideration for others and, above all, a preeminent resolve to forgo one's lesser preferences in a single-minded commitment to serve Christ and His Kingdom. That community is not marked by, nor known for, either what it forbids or what it allows people to eat and drink, but rather for the astonishing way that it has appropriated righteousness, peace, and joy.

Timothy Larsen
Biblical and Theological Studies, Archaeology, and World Religions

A Transforming Change

Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Ephesians 5:8b–10

When my college age children are trying to make a difficult decision, they often say to me, “Mom, just *tell* me what to do!” While it is tempting at times, I realize the best path for each of them is to pray it through, seek wise counsel, and follow the direction of the Holy Spirit. Just as it is easier to be told what to do than to have to decipher God’s will for our lives, it is easier to know what is expected of us when holiness is defined and laid out before us as a set of rules or a “code of conduct.” This approach conveniently saves us from Bible study, devotions, and prayer time. Ask anyone who has struggled on the path to holiness, it is easier to live by “rules and regulations” than to be directed by God’s Holy Spirit as we seek to become “Christ-like.”

The *Community Covenant* is a call set before us, not to meet Wheaton College’s expectations, but to meet Christ’s expectations—to act, behave, care for, and love as Christ would. The stakes are higher: we have to examine our hearts for purity of motive in every interaction. It is tempting to respond to those in need with a closed fist, to fulfill *rules* without examining the heart’s cries. The *Community Covenant* calls us to respond with one hand cupped to our ear to hear God’s directives, purpose, and heart while the other hand extends open-palmed to offer our sister or brother encouragement, love, prayers, and, yes, even material goods.

The *Community Covenant* requires a high level of accountability—a strong call in our service to God. We are not to *stand* and assert what rules we will live by, but we are to *kneel* before the throne of God seeking His direction for our actions, His forgiveness for our failures. Through this high calling and directive, we open up ourselves, our college, and our community to change, to transformation, and to active discipleship.

Change my heart, O God, make it ever new
Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.
Eddie Espinosa

Nancy J. Eckstein
Communication

Welcoming One Another

Keep on loving each other as brothers [and sisters]. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:1–2

The *Wheaton Record* has a section “Outside the Bubble.” It is a useful reminder that there is a world outside which really matters, and that one danger of any community is that it lives only for itself. Some early monastic communities were enclosed and inward looking; others were open and outward looking, serving the needs of others. It is no accident that the hospice movement has its roots in the Christian communities who cared for the stranger, the traveler, and those in physical and spiritual need.

Abraham and Sarah were used to meeting nomadic strangers, and they faced a choice whether to welcome or to ignore and reject such folk. Genesis 18 recounts the lovely lengths they went to in showing practical care and concern for three strangers who in the end turned out to be angels, bringing the promises of God to the infertile couple. Simon Peter, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and Zacchaeus show the gift and grace of hospitality to our Lord Jesus. They all made Jesus feel at home. It is no wonder then that one of the key qualifications for church leaders in the New Testament is that they are lovers of and given to hospitality (1Ti. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). But hospitality and care of the stranger is not just an Old Testament requirement or Church leader qualification. It is for all of us. Peter urges us to “offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Pe. 4:9), and Paul indicates that we are to distribute to the needs of the saints and be given to hospitality (Ro. 12:13). Jesus rewards those who invited in the stranger (Mt. 25:34–35).

One crucial test of any and every community is how it welcomes strangers. How far do we make them feel at home, putting their convenience before our own? We must try to imagine what it is like to be a stranger in a strange land and how we can make such folk at home and show them the love of Christ in action. Failure has a high price (Mt. 25:41–46).

E. David Cook
Philosophy

A Biblical Sanction for Multicultural Community

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

The quest for authentic multicultural community must always begin with an accurate diagnosis of the social context in which people live and breathe. To a major extent, all orthodox Christians now live in a global cultural milieu that has selected, exaggerated, and reified outward, physical characteristics over the last few centuries. Unfortunately, in all too many historical situations, the church failed to act as an effective antidote to the apostasy of racism. The virus of racism mutated and produced ethnic stratification, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes. One must realize, Christian or not, that while visual distinctions are natural or inevitable, the perceptual apparatus we use to interpret these physical distinctions and the values or priorities that emanate from our perceptions are socially constructed (determined by human symbols and choices).

A biblical perspective of multicultural community is anchored in God's general revelation. As evidenced by creation, God loves diversity in all His created order: fish, birds, animals, planets, stars, and peoples. The Lord of Hosts seems to be bored with sameness. It appears that God sanctions diversity, for it reflects His character. Thus, multicultural community is the corporate reflection of God's image. God vindicates multicultural community by His deposit of life in diverse vessels as well as in His ultimate plan for all the nations (Isa. 61:11). To be like God is to be intrigued by diversity in peoples and all life forms.

A biblical perspective on multicultural community is anchored in special or biblical revelation, too. Through the unfolding of the Abrahamic Covenant, God's pivotal agenda was to bless all ethnic groups. Moreover, the Lord told Israel never to forget the bitter slavery they endured in Egypt in order to inoculate them from racial bigotry. In the New Testament, Christ told His disciples to convert all nations via the Great Commission. In Acts 1:8, the release of the Holy Spirit's supernatural power is correlated to pursuing this divine mandate from local jurisdictions (Jerusalem, Judea) through stigmatized ethnic groups (the Samaritans) to the nations in the uttermost regions of the planet. Hence, over time, the very name "Christian" was used to designate a unique, multicultural community that embraced all people, transcending typical, segregated Jewish and Gentile cultural interactions. All believers are headed to an eschatological, multicultural community, as depicted in the Book of Revelation.

Sociologists have long studied the centrality of community for the health, welfare, and identity of individuals in groups. Homogeneous communities inherently have many cognitive and behavioral blind spots that could be rather easily corrected by the synergy of heterogeneous, inclusive communities. Multicultural community can not be sustained apart from empathy, biblical submission, listening skills, vulnerability, conflict resolution, investments in positive interactions, reciprocity, tangible as well as persistent service, compassion, faith, hope, and love: indeed, the very best biblical virtues. Such virtues must be personalized as well as institutionalized if a community is to reflect legitimately the ethnic diversity of the Kingdom of God.

Hank Allen
Sociology and Anthropology

The Community Covenant and Gender

***And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.
John 12:32 (NRSV)***

One of the most remarkable facets of the Wheaton College *Community Covenant* is its delightfully winsome appeal to “live, work, serve, and worship together as an educational community centered around the Lord Jesus Christ” (p. 3). This emphasis upon a *common life* of thought, witness, and devotion is remarkable, and it brings to mind the poignancy of Christ’s farewell discourse in the Gospel of John: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn. 12:32). In capturing this insight, the *Community Covenant* places before us the moral responsibility we have in the face of a number of considerable difficulties in the Christian life—not the least of which is the question of gender. Apart from Holy Scripture and the ongoing activity of God in our midst, we would of course be entirely unable to take up the challenges raised by the *Community Covenant*.

In our life together here at Wheaton College, we live with a confidence in the belief that the living and eloquent God of the Gospel has not abandoned us to our own inner resources. As the *Covenant* wisely indicates, we live in the hope that our God is faithful, and He will make us “worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith” (2 Th. 1:11). This word of promise and comfort is precisely what we need in the face of the disquieting entailments of the *Community Covenant*.

We need to ask, for instance, will we trust God to enable us to responsibly exercise Christian freedom, particularly when such freedom requires a true and lasting commitment to mutual love and submission (Eph. 5:21ff)? What does such mutual love and attention to the “needs of others” have to say when it comes to the question of gender? This question is, of course, a quite pressing issue given the great difficulty that some appear to have in sustaining a belief in the full equality, giftedness, and ministry of women. The life and teaching of Jesus is no less challenging here, than is it anywhere else in the Gospels.

Perhaps an example might help to express what I am aiming at. When Jesus permits Mary to take the position of a male rabbinical student at the feet of her Master, are we willing to permit the full weight of this event to press in upon us? For in this very act, Jesus breaks with an established tradition in which it was believed that it is better for the Torah to be burned than to be entrusted to a woman. In the face of Martha’s foreboding, Jesus turns to her and says “there is need of only one thing”—to which He adds—“Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Lk. 10:42).

None of us, it seems, would wish to align ourselves with tradition over against the example and teaching of Jesus. Perhaps only time will tell how far such an example might move us in the direction of mutual submission and responsible care for one another in Christ (Eph. 5:21). May God give us the courage to pursue “righteousness, mercy, and justice” (p. 6) for women in our midst, who, like Mary, have come to realize how truly fitting and delightful it is to hear and study the Master’s voice. May our *Covenant* and our desire to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel (p. 6) issue in unequivocal support and care for the calling and gifts of women *and* men in the service of the Church, for Christ and His Kingdom.

Mark Husbands

Biblical and Theological Studies, Archaeological, World Religions

Life Together in a Covenant Community

***Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2***

As we covenant to live together in a Christ-centered academic community dedicated to the love of God and neighbor, the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together* hold special relevance for our campus.

Bonhoeffer speaks to the importance of listening to one another in community. He notes that, in our interactions, we often listen to each other with an impatient ear, eager to speak our own words of advice or reproof. Without the ability to listen attentively, we begin to view others, not as unique image-bearers of God, but as problems requiring technical solutions. Listening rightly, however, we begin to bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2) and serve each other (Gal. 5:13), practices that require significant and ongoing personal investment. Bonhoeffer asks if we are willing to be interrupted by God as He sends us people who make time-consuming claims upon us. He asks if we consider our work so important that we will allow no one to disturb our agendas. If so, we reveal a lack of humility in our hearts. One who worries excessively about such personal interruptions, he notes, is "usually taking the importance of his own career too solemnly." Are we prepared not only to give advice, but to listen and serve?

Only by listening actively are we able to do effectively what our *Covenant* requires in "holding one another accountable" and "confronting one another in love." The final breakthrough to community does not come until individuals can have fellowship together as sinners saved by grace. We often seek to form "pious fellowship" where we dare not allow our sin to be known either to ourselves or to others. But our *Covenant* calls us together as rescued sinners broken before the cross and growing in the awareness of our need for grace. By confessing sin to each other rather than to God alone, we receive the benefits of certainty of forgiveness, protection against self-deception and pride, and the accountability of brothers and sisters. Recognizing that sin thrives in isolation, we seek to encourage one another and warn each other in love when we recognize unhealthy life choices. To those who feel that offering right rebuke is unduly harsh, Bonhoeffer suggests that, "Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin." To those who feel that their own inadequacies stand in the way of proclaiming truth to others, he notes that we speak from the basis of a common sinful humanity. Bonhoeffer cautions that we "warn one another against the disobedience that is our common destruction."

Bonhoeffer suggests that community is not an "ideal which we must realize" but rather a "reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate." If we seek to build a Christian community upon our own "wish dreams" rather than the reality of our bond in and through Jesus Christ, we will quickly become demanding of one another rather than thankful for the blessing of the body of Christ. Community is not an ideal but a divine reality, a gift. As we covenant to live the story of the Gospel together at Wheaton, may we be thankful for the opportunity to share together in the riches of grace, listening, serving, and speaking truth so that the body may "build itself up in love" for God's glory (Eph. 4:16).

David Setran
Christian Formation and Ministry

Reflections of an Art Historian

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

The community was the University of Cambridge, the occasion was a dinner in one of the Colleges, and the specific company consisted of assorted scholars of various disciplines, as well as the head of the Department of Art History—a distinguished Medievalist—and myself, as his guest. The conversation turned to Modern art, and an English professor asked me for my opinion on some issue relating to a Modern artist. I boldly ventured my views, and then the conversation moved on, except in the mind of the Medievalist. No sooner had we left the table than he turned on me roundly, poured scorn on me—a “Baroque man”—for pontificating about Modernity, and he never spoke to me again.

That was twenty years ago. Today, I—a Baroque man—meet with a group of students three times a week for an hour after lunch, and sit down and talk. True, it is structured talk, but we talk. And what do we talk about? We talk about all the diverse challenges that face Christians who would engage the arts, either directly as artists, or indirectly as critics, or in other capacities. We consider what Christians have thought about and done with the arts over the centuries, and the contemporary alienation of Christians from the art world. We review positions that Christians have adopted historically in the tension between Christ and culture, and we explore various theologies of art, as these have emerged in various branches of the Christian tradition. We then consider some of the current issues and topics of debate within the art world and consider how and at what points a Christian can most effectively participate and engage these debates, and the possible positions one might adopt in relation to them. Students come from differing Christian traditions, each bringing their unique biases, suspicions, and hang-ups with them. As we talk, these come into the open, and students observe the reactions of others to their received ideas, as well as measuring them against the viewpoints of other Christian scholars from the past and present.

All this would be very strange indeed to the Cambridge Medievalist who attacked me so vehemently, notwithstanding that his area of expertise is Medieval Christian art. In contrast to the so-rigidly compartmentalized mental world and intellectual society that he was inhabiting, what I do with students three times a week after lunch has everything to do with living in Christian community. Our goal is to apply the best Christian wisdom we can find to the most challenging secular problems that our discipline can throw at us, and to do it in an environment of mutual respect and trust. Indeed, we do it in an environment in which participants are free to express the range of their thoughts, beliefs, and doubts, knowing that they do so in an environment of trust and Christian nurture. Participating in such an enterprise is—at least to me—a good part of what it means to be a Christian art historian, living in Christian community.

E. John Walford
Art

Words and Community

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways. . . . Hebrews 1:1

Words hold particular importance for those who live and work together in the name of Jesus. Christian community—whether experienced in a small discipleship group, a medium-sized classroom, or a large dorm—depends partly upon our wise use of words.

Why should followers of Christ work hard to use words well? Consider the following two reasons.

First, words clearly matter to God. The opening sentence of Genesis 1 reveals that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” An important question emerges from this chapter of the Bible: By what means did God create? The answer is almost so obvious that it evades us, along with its implications. God used *words* to create the physical universe we spend so much time studying. One simple sentence did it: “Let there be. . . .” And it was so. Of the many ways that the Lord could have chosen to create the heavens and the earth, He chose to do it with words, showing us an important truth — words can be powerful tools for good.

Second, words prove to be central to the work of God’s people. Take, for example, the faithful servants who responded to God’s call by writing the various books of the Bible. When God spoke to them, as Hebrews 1:1 says, “at many times and in various ways,” the authors of scripture worked hard to craft God’s revelations into words. Perspiration followed inspiration, as believers became obedient to the task at hand—writing—so that future generations could read about God’s redemptive work and experience His salvation. As the biblical writers show, the words we use can make a difference for the Kingdom.

“A good community,” explains Wendell Berry, a writer dedicated to the Word, “insures itself by trust.” But in a culture inundated by manipulative ads and trivial language, one in which words are routinely misused and abused, how can Christians promote trust? The answer appears obvious, though not easy: we must use words thoughtfully, and then stand by our words.

Jeffrey Davis
English

Creating a New Moral Vocabulary

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins. Mark 2:21–22

Words shape our lives. Developmental psychologists tell us that as young children begin to learn language they acquire a new way of categorizing and understanding their own experiences. Their ability to think, plan, solve problems, and feel emotion are fundamentally transformed by the words they use in understanding and communicating their experience. Neither are our own spiritual and moral lives exempt from the power of words to create for us meaningful realities with which we make sense of how to live. The stories and teachings of scripture challenge us, through the power of their words, to regard ourselves as created and loved by God and redeemed through His Son, Christ Jesus. Part of the power of scripture lies in its ability to fill our hearts and minds with words that speak to the truth of our human condition and to the hope of the Gospel.

Do words ever lose their power to transform us? They can become comfortable to us in their use, like a worn leather jacket. But this familiarity can also breed a certain kind of contempt as the sharp edges of our words become soft. Replacing a “Pledge” with a “Covenant” at first may breathe life into our community; however, if the past is any indicator, this new term will eventually lose some of its power to call us to live out the Gospel together. One solution to this dilemma is to resign ourselves to creating new statements and words in the future. A second lies in the acknowledgement that it is not the words, per se, that order our life together. When we agree to live together under a covenant, one that seeks to order our lives as a Christian academic community, we do so with one another and with God. The power of the words binding us together comes through believers committed to following the call to love God and our neighbors with our total being. As we seek to respond to that call, our words *do* matter. They matter because they can come to be for us shared symbols of how we wish to live as an intentional moral community.

It is amazing to see a young child learn a new word, especially one that allows her to enter into a larger world of experience, an experience shared with a caring parent, an interested sibling, an attentive teacher. Perhaps our life together as a covenantal community is a challenge to do just that—to take the time to learn a new vocabulary of living together in Christ.

Trey Buchanan
Psychology

The Long View

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 21:1–2 (NRSV)

My pace slowed as I stared at the pavement just a few yards in front of me. I thought of quitting as my muscles cried out for relief. But then I raised my eyes and I saw the finish line where a small crowd had gathered to cheer on the runners. My pace steadied as I kept my focus on the finish. Paul claims that he too found it necessary to keep his eyes on the prize; he encourages believers to “run in such a way that you may win it” (1 Co. 9:24). Paul adds that he trains seriously and with much vigor so as not to disqualify himself from the prize (1 Co. 9:26-27; Php. 3:14).

We might usefully think of the *Community Covenant* as a “life training” guide for the Christian. Therefore, we must keep in mind the goal of all our training—life with God now and in the new Jerusalem, enjoying the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). Our preparation can be a joyful journey of obedience as we keep in mind the incredible riches awaiting us. Words like “responsibility” and “duty” lose their negative connotation as we understand them in the context of “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Php. 3:8). We encourage one another to obedience, even as others’ examples of steadfastness lift our eyes yet again to the goal of the “glory about to be revealed” (Ro. 8:18). We wait in eager expectation for God to bring about His Kingdom fully. We recognize that this life is but a training ground for the “real thing,” life with God in heaven. That truth shapes our priorities, our commitments, and our loves.

In living out the *Community Covenant*, we rejoice that we can participate in Christ’s Kingdom through faithful service. In fact, God promises that our labor is not in vain, for our obedience furthers His plan for the nations. This truth serves to energize our commitment to act lovingly to others, to build up the community, and to expand the community of faith.

When I crossed the finish line of that race, I felt exhilarated, even though my reward was only in completing a modest human challenge. How much greater will be our joy when we finish the race set before us by God (Heb. 12:1). Then we can proclaim as Paul did, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Ti. 4:7–8). The anticipation of that joy sustains us as we faithfully live out the call to holy life in community.

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