Discernment

So that you may be able to discern what is best. *Phil. 1:10*

Spiritual Formation and College Life

Inside:

■ A fresh wind is blowing through college and university campuses. Students are seeking a spiritual life, a devotion to deeper meanings and broader human connections. The most secular of campuses contain students passionate about forming a life suitable for withstanding the brutal forces of global commerce, war, and politics.

Students at Christian campuses share in this movement. As bastions of orthodox teaching and proper living, Christian colleges have nurtured generations of students to think and act rightly in important matters, but today's students want an internal life as robust as their cognitive and behavioral training. They are turning to matters of spiritual formation, to the growth and care of their souls.

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This issue of *Discernment* offers moral reflection on the processes of spiritual formation. What is the relationship between these two complementary processes? Any attempt to finely distinguish between moral and spiritual growth will fail, for moral and spiritual considerations are interdependent. Spiritual growth is necessary for the wisdom that leads to moral judgment, yet moral judgment lends considerable guidance to our pursuit of spiritual growth. In Psalm 74, for example, Asaph is driven to praise, a spiritual discipline, through moral indignation aroused from seeing God's enemies victorious. The moral judgment prompts the spiritual movement, while being itself shaped by spiritual insight.

We can think of these processes as analogous to breathing. We must breathe in (inhale) the word of God through disciplined prayer, meditation, worship, and study, and we breathe out (exhale) His word through our choices. Moral growth, then, is a maturing process in judgment and action, particularly regarding our relationships with others. Spiritual growth is a maturing process in reception, gradually expanding our capacity to listen to God and to be open to His word. Spiritual growth involves a reception of divine influence; moral growth involves the outworking of that influence with others.

C.S. Lewis famously lamented the educational processes producing "men without chests." To extend the analogy, today's college educators produce students without chests when they ignore the respiratory system, the moral and spiritual apparatus necessary for human growth.

Our authors write from within the interdependence of the moral and the spiritual. Important questions are at stake: What is the relation of spiritual formation to the pursuit of knowledge? How can we be knowers while cultivating our spiritual life? We also feature a forum on a spiritual discipline vexing the best of our students: What institutional contexts are appropriate for confession? How ought we speak of our innermost life with others? We have given additional space to our keynote essay by Steven Garber. His elegant reflection provocatively frames the entire discussion.

Kenneth Chase, director of CACE

On February 6, 2002, CACE hosted three leaders in the field of spiritual formation at a public lecture at Wheaton College. The following three articles and Q&A section are edited versions of their remarks.—Editor

Spiritual Formation as Counter-Cultural Action

By Jeannette A. Bakke

■ Spiritual formation is filled with surprises. Our words about Christian spirituality point toward our experience with God, but they can tell only part of the story. Our translation is partial. We are individuals, and God draws us individually. He invites and nourishes and pursues us. Yet, we are also part of a community, a legacy of God-seekers. We learn from each other, but we realize there is much we do not—perhaps we cannot—comprehend about ourselves and about God.

Scripture says we are created in the image of God—destined for intimacy with God. The phrase "spiritual formation" is used to point toward all the ways that the divine/human relationship is nourished. Spiritual formation describes the uneven path when we resist God and when we embrace what God seems to invite. As Jesus describes it in Luke 10:27, spiritual formation is about love. "You shall *love* the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (NRSV, emphasis added).

Divine and human love in relationship is the core of spiritual formation. Whatever we know and experience of spirituality takes place in the midst of ordinary human life. Our spiritual formation shapes the ways that we invest our deepest loves and our most costly loyalties. It is about our willingness to be bearers of God's love in and to the world. And knowing ourselves is an essential part of being bearers of God. As we grow, and grow up, we begin to learn more about ourselves—the particular self that we are—shaped in the image of God.

Who are you?

Developmental theorists who write about stages of faith development say we can choose to continue growing in faith, or we can choose to stop somewhere along the way at several stages. I will use a kind of shorthand by referring to the stages that Sam Keen talks about—child, rebel, adult, outlaw, and the lover or the fool.[1]

At the child stage, the operative word is "yes." We are open and assenting, vulnerable and surrendering. We say yes to God and yes to those in authority. We listen uncritically and we absorb. The next stage is like being a two year old: this is the rebel stage. The operative word is "no." We have new questions, and we need to figure out what we think. The third stage is the adult stage. We say both "yes" and "no" appropriately, and we are involved in responsible interactions in a community of faith. The fourth stage, the outlaw—funny that comes after the adult—is often triggered by personal or public tragedies. It may feel like life itself is exploding as questions we thought were settled are violently re-opened, bringing grief, outrage, and dismay. Perhaps the operative word at the outlaw stage is "why?" and often accompanied by "why me?" If we are shunned at this stage, we may not return to faith. But if we pursue our questions and passions with God, the next stage is called the lover or the fool. Having seen life's terrible possibilities, the phrase of the lover or the fool is, "Nevertheless, I trust in God." I am convinced that we all glimpse each of these stages all along the way, that we move back and forth among them.

What nourishes spiritual formation? Knowing yourself, knowing your personality, noticing your faith history, and appreciating how God has drawn you through numerous streams and traditions and Scriptural invitations. A pattern of life that includes disciplines helps us to be open to God, ourselves, and others.

A spiritual discipline is any wholesome practice we engage in for the purpose of hearing and responding to God. We hope the Spirit will use the

disciplines we choose to draw us to God—to be loved, renewed, and guided. We have discovered that we need to tend our spiritual heart as intentionally as we provide for physical and intellectual development.

Spiritual formation in the academy

Six hopeful possibilities and one paradox regarding spiritual formation and academia:

1. The leaders—faculty, staff, administrators, and student leaders—set the tone for a community which models, embodies, and expresses what it means to be people of faith.

2. We seek to be aware of the characteristics of spiritual development and become familiar with how generations naturally facilitate and hinder each other. We want to savor the possibilities in relationships between students and caring adults who are not their parents.

3. We long to describe spiritual formation in terms that are freeing, that demonstrate the principle that one size does not fit all, and that show there are opportunities for everyone to identify their gifts, strengths, and limitations.

4. We seek to facilitate confidential relationships where we listen to each other with prayerful attention, as we frame personal questions, pursue healing and development, and shape meaningful dreams which flow out of prayer and discernment.

5. We continue to show that we value Christian spirituality by offering courses which encourage everyone to learn about spiritual formation and explore practices and possibilities.

6. We want to develop an awareness of and a capacity for an inner life which influences outer choices.

And now for the paradox. Spiritual formation will always seem counter-cultural in academia. Where academic excellence reigns, students are learning to become competent, to be analytical, and to take control. Paradoxically, God beckons us to release our intense hold upon our self-designed programs and our self-designed self—to simplify, to lighten up, to invite the Spirit to speak to us, to listen, and to follow.

Losing control

We are keenly aware of our limitations when we recognize the enormity of the tasks of spiritual formation. There is a nearly endless range of facets which influence human development. How will we figure out what to do about spiritual formation?

The clearest possibility I know to suggest to any person or institution is to ask God and continue asking God, to pray about and in the midst of everything. Surprisingly, part of this process includes inviting each other to speak out loud about spiritual formation—to voice our hopes and fears. Perhaps this active part is easier. Maybe the more difficult invitation is to ask God by letting go of our clatter and questions, to cultivate more contemplative hearts, to provide opportunities for silence and solitude in which our questions, hopes, and choices can be transformed.

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Ask God, and then listen. Listen to people who nourish their divine/human love relationship, listen to those who are familiar with the experience of spiritual formation. Listen to your faith community. But, most of all, listen to the Holy Spirit. Do not create a complex program of spiritual formation. Instead, figure out ways to invite people to be and become beloved friends of God—friends who desire to be formed and transformed by the Spirit.

Ask God what is right for today. Live in the present. Allow the Spirit's timing for the fruit to ripen, for the new ways to be born. The movement of spiritual formation is God's life indwelling our lives, calling us to be awake and inviting us to be our true selves created in the image of God.

Hear the words of Jesus again, this time not as a command but a promise. "You *shall* love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27, emphasis added).

[1] James W. Fowler and Sam Keen, *Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith* (Waco: Word Book, 1985), pp. 118-124.

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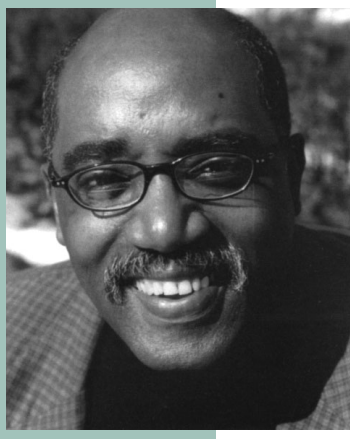
Shaping the Heart

By Glandion Carney



■ It was a Sunday afternoon. I was in East Jerusalem with Bishara, a Palestinian pastor. The Intifada was happening at the time, and as we drove, Bishara said, "Let me tell you a story about when one of my parishioners was in prison. He had been accused of throwing rocks at the Israeli occupying forces across the green belt in East Jerusalem. Because of this accusation, his home was threatened to be bulldozed and torn down by the military. So they took him and put him in prison, and while he was in prison, he began to pray. He was fearful of what might happen during his imprisonment, questioning everything that came to him—food, water, conversation—in doubt about what that might mean for his own safety and security. Now a young, tough eighteen-year-old Israeli soldier came to the door and saw this young man reading the Bible. He looked at the Palestinian, and said, 'You must eat to be strong.' But the young man did not respond to the young Israeli soldier, because he thought it was a trick. And the next day, the Israeli soldier said, 'I too am a believer. I see you reading the Bible. You must trust in Jesus also.' The young Palestinian man looked at the Israeli soldier and couldn't believe what he was hearing. He thought, 'This could be true or this could be a plant.' The next night, the Israeli soldier came in again with more food, and the young Palestinian man did not eat the food, but he prayed that night when the soldier left, saying, 'Lord, if this is you, let him bring me three chocolate bars tomorrow.' The next day, the Israeli soldier walked into the cell and brought three chocolate bars. They embraced. When the young Palestinian man got out of prison, he went back to East Jerusalem—and despite all that separates the two, they found themselves meeting and having communion, celebrating the Lord's Supper."

Now the question I pose to you: Was that spiritual formation? Was there a unique formation that took place in the life of that individual that shaped character, culture, values, and ethics? What took place in the act of godly kindness serving that young Palestinian lad and in that young Palestinian lad embracing that Israeli soldier? Was that true spiritual formation?

Christian spiritual formation defined

True spiritual formation is the resolution and the commitment to have a heart and a character that is changed. The purpose of spiritual formation is to change people from the inside so that through this personal relationship with God and Christ, they are committed to one another, and to love one another. It changes their beliefs, feelings, habits, and choices. It penetrates the deepest layer of the soul, which shapes character, thought, intellect, action, motives. It changes us into disciples of Jesus Christ, guiding us to live a life of Christ in a virtuous way. We will be formed by something—if not by Christ, then by culture, racism, materialism, elitism, paganism, or a thousand other things—and there is spiritual formation taking place in the world today. Mohammed Atta was formed spiritually when he flew those jets into the buildings and destroyed thousands of lives. We may not like the formation, but he was formed in what he believed.

So what is Christian spiritual formation? Christian spiritual formation refers to the Spirit-driven process reforming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ Himself. Social structures need to be reformed; educational systems need to be reformed; economic structures need to be reformed. So what moves us to understand that spiritual transformation and spiritual change can affect these structures of society? Amos 5:24 provides insight: "And righteousness will ever flow like streams of living water." Society today needs to see people who are formed in the image of Christ—who are committed to the life of spiritual formation, transformation, and change.

What happens in an institution when one can pursue four years of academic excellence and achieve the highest degrees and never have character formation? What happens when an institution chooses to develop its students with skills to succeed yet does not transform a corrupt heart? The question must be asked about an institution's ability to commit itself to the true transformation of persons and their character. An answer requires us to understand that the heart is the very core of the revolution. The heart is the very core of the renovation. The heart is the very core of change. But change is an uncomfortable kind of thing. It's personal, it's reflective, it's evaluative. We're asking about a change to the academic culture, asking students and professors not just to be committed to the development of minds, but the ongoing development of hearts. So how does one enter a collegiate institution and think about change?

I think every student attending college ought to get two simple little things: a journal, and *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. The same energy placed on the development of the academic mind ought to be placed on the transformation of character and the heart: the commitment to pursue life of integrity and faith through service, through inner-life formation, through pursuing what it means to follow the path of Jesus, and pursuing the Sermon on the Mount. Every once in a while, students ought to be forced to go on a retreat, to reflect, to think, to pray, to evaluate what it means that their lives are being changed in the ways that Christ would change their hearts. What would happen? We would have Christian students who understand that change is a dynamic process of developing character, a new value system that embraces justice, shalom, and the love of God.

> Society today needs to see people who are formed in the image of Christ—who are committed to the life of spiritual formation, transformation, and change.

Formation as an educational responsibility

Now we tend to leave spiritual formation to the church, don't we? We say that the process of formation and transformation is the church's responsibility. But it is also the educational system's responsibility. Education is a process of shaping character, and meaning, and purpose. The quest in this aspect of our life is the same as in any other: God seeks humanity, God loves humanity, God wants to transform humanity, God wants to bring His message to a broken humanity. God's commitment to this comes to a people who are committed to a life of spiritual formation.

Obedience is essential to Christian spiritual formation. External manifestation of Christ-likeness is not, however, the focus. The process of change is not a list of commands but rather a process of grace that comes to us through the love of God and affects our life deeply. Christ be formed in you, says Galatians; the watchwords for this process are Christian spiritual formation. This is fortified by the deeply moral and spiritual insight that change takes place in the most simple of ways.

When one is committed to the true character of Christ, and we all strive for that through the goals of spiritual formation, the question is this: How much good is good in the face of evil? A lot of good? Or a little good? What changes the equation of evil? It is the good you do. When you teach a child to read, that's the presence of Christ in spiritual formation. When you go and visit a prisoner, that's the presence of Christ in spiritual formation. When you stand in a community and say "No longer will we tolerate racist and sexist jokes," that's the spirit of Christ in spiritual formation. When you love your enemy, that's the spirit of Christ in spiritual formation. Change takes place when you are able to deal with habits of heart, when the manifestation of God's love is shaping your character so that you no longer are being driven by lust, deceit, and dishonesty. This is character change; this is true formation: to be like Christ in the inner world. So, do good, pursue the Lord, live out His grace, and let Him form you in all of your ways.

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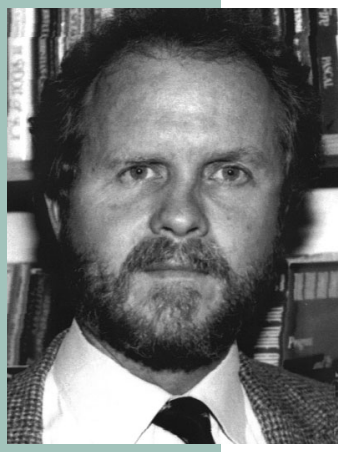
Loving, Mourning, Knowing

By Steven Garber



■ We are surrounded by the sociological phenomena of an information age; or as James Billington, our Librarian of Congress, prefers to call it, an "info-glut culture." Knowledge is power. At least that is the promise etched in stone over the doorway into the Library itself, a library which is the largest in the world. Knowledge is power? Yes, sometimes in some places. But knowledge is also overwhelming, as Billington himself understands. He asks, "With all our access to knowledge, are we becoming any wiser?" That challenge is not unique to our time. Byron's poetic insight echoes through the centuries, "He who knows the most, mourns the deepest."

This is a conversation about the nature of spiritual formation: wondering what that imagery and language means for a college, for a college curriculum, and for college students and faculty and administrators. I want to focus upon the last words of the 20th-century scholar and saint, Simone Weil. On the night of her much too early death, she wrote in her journal, "The most crucial task of teaching is to teach what it is to know."

What is it to know? What does it mean for a college committed to a Christ-centered curriculum? What does it mean for students, for faculty, for administrators committed to forming a coherent faith, to understanding the integral relationship between worship, worldview, and way of life? What does a strong position like—"The most crucial task of teaching is to teach what it is to know"—mean for a conversation like this one, a conversation about spiritual formation?

Some despair and smile. At Oxford University, one can find bookmarks, postcards, even sweatshirts with a gargoyle in grief, hands across his eyes, and these words:

The more I study the more I know
The more I know the more I forget
The more I forget the less I know
So why study?

So why study? As I live my life among students, listening in as I meet them in places far and wide, that question is harder that one might think.

To press the point: Why study, if he who knows the most, mourns the deepest? You see, if one takes the task of studying seriously, then one will sooner or later see and hear the groanings of the world. And that is very hard, always and everywhere.

I remember one student I had, who was raised in a home where reading the Word and reading the world were equally prized. She chose a college very much like Wheaton, a place where teaching is treasured, where the curriculum is centered around the conviction that we live in a coherent cosmos, and therefore that a coherent life is possible. As her passions grew, she studied both politics and parasitology, and at the end of her sophomore year initiated a remarkably stimulating six months of off-campus study. A summer's service in a medical clinic in the Kenyan bush, followed by a semester of study focused upon international health and development in Geneva, Switzerland, allowed her both micro and macro windows into the complex brokenness of the two-third's world. As the days passed into weeks, difficult questions cascaded down upon her developing conscience. If God is in heaven, how can there be so much grieving on earth? Who is God, anyway? Is He believable? Is He good and sovereign? Does the Word of God really give light into the ways of this world, with its social, economic, and political injustices? There were no cheap answers.

Because, you see, it is true: she who knows the most, mourns the deepest.

I want to underscore this: given what I do and where I go and who I meet, I hear stories like hers—each one completely unique—week after week, year after year.

The hunger for knowledge

So what is it that Simone Weil meant when she wrote, "The most crucial task of teaching is to teach what it is to know"?

She would not have been hired to teach

theology at most Christian colleges; at critical points she did not see clearly. Brilliant and committed, and yet she stumbled in understanding "mere Christianity." At the same time she hungered to know, in the deepest, most human way, in a way that by its very nature—embedded in the epistemology itself—would call her to responsibility. For that, she was passionate.

Do you know her hungers and passions? At ten, she told her parents she was a communist, and she meant it. At twenty, she had finished first in her class at the Sorbonne, studying philosophy. And then, wonder of wonders, she met Trotsky, the communist visionary. It was a profound disappointment. As she later reflected, he was for humanity, but did not really care for human beings.

And she walked away from Paris and from her Marxist idealism. Her hungers and passions were still alive though, and they took her into the factories and farms of France to live among the proletariat, the sufferers and groaners of her native land.

It was amazing grace that found Simone Weil several years later, and gave her eyes to see that in the hungers and passions implicit in the vocation of Jesus she would be able to find her own way to know the world in its multi-layered lament—and to love it too. Very self-consciously she began to worship Jesus, the God with tears.

As she grew in her understanding of what her profession meant, she began to reflect upon her own life and learning in light of her deepening love for Christ. Her work here is fascinating, and worthy of far more commentary than I will give. At its heart, she began to see that there was, in truth, a profoundly rich answer to the question, "Why study?"

In her essay, "Reflecting Upon the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," she wrote, "Although people seem to be unaware of it, . . . the faculty of attention forms the real object and almost the sole interest of studies. . . . Every school exercise, thought of in this way, is like a sacrament."[1]

> "Does the Word of God really give light into the ways of this world, with its social, economic, and political injustices?"

Hear her, carefully. "Every school exercise, thought of in this way, is like a sacrament."

One of her interpreters, John Hellman, comments:

"In the end all of the different forms of attention which Simone Weil described—attention to workers, attention to sufferers, attention to academic subjects, attention to languages or literary composition, attention to one's neighbor and to the peculiarities of the modern culture which oppresses him—even attention to God—were tied together."[2]

She began to see that coherence was possible. In stark contrast to Trotsky, she saw that belief and behavior could be held together with integrity; that one's worship, one's worldview, and one's way of life could be coherent. To have love for God and love for learning, together bound up with love for one's neighbor, especially the sufferers: By grace, it is possible. It was for her, and it is for you and for me.

A biblical epistemology

Weil's insight is profound, because it is true. It is true because it is deeply rooted in a biblical understanding of true knowing. Our own deepest roots as the people of God reach back into the Hebrew worldview with its assumptions about human beings and history about the ways we know and live in God's world. There is an epistemological vision that grows out of this fertile ground. If we were to listen in, from beginning to end, this deeply Hebrew and holy and human way of knowing could be summed up in this way: to have knowledge of, means to have responsibility to, means to have care for. If one knows, one cares; if one does not care, one does not know. It is personal knowledge, but not private or subjective; the differences are decisive. Rather it is rooted in the deepest realities of God's nature and character, and of our bearing His image, called to care for the world in imitation of Christ.

It is a million miles from an Enlightenment epistemology, with its prizing of detachment and

Continued on page 15

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Finding the Simple and the Profound

After finishing their prepared remarks, the three contributors participated in a guided question and answer session moderated by Dr. Edee Schulze, Wheaton College's Dean of Student Life. An edited transcript of their conversation is reproduced below. —Editor

■ **Schulze:** *What have you heard from each other: Is there is a message that stands out, a key point that struck you?*

Garber: A word like peace grows out of one of the most profound themes in the whole of Scripture—this is the way that God wants people to live in His world, this vision of Shalom. When I listened to Jeannette speak, I found myself thinking we are destined for intimacy with God. She called us into this pursuit, this destiny, this way of living that brings us deeper into a true knowledge of and intimacy with God Himself. One of the things I heard from Glandion was that we've got to see this language of spiritual formation as outside a privatized spirituality, a compartmentalized piety, and I deeply resonate with that. I think when we speak about piety and spiritual formation, and don't get to questions of truth and justice, we really haven't spoken about it biblically.

Bakke: I heard a real call to be awake, to be willing to see even when we would rather not see. I heard that when you [Garber] were saying, "He who knows the most, mourns the deepest." When we are willing to see more than we can possibly bear is when we finally begin to pray and invite God to bear our sorrow and carry our grief. When I was younger, I wanted to be like Jesus, but I didn't know what that really meant. Jesus was willing to do all kinds of things that naturally we aren't, including to see what was happening in His own day and time. So there is a real call to be awake and then to ask God what that means for each of us. Some days I say yes, and some days not so much, but there's a certain way to say, "God, can you do anything with two-percent willingness?"

Schulze: *I'm going to pick up on that, Jeannette. If God says, "Yes I can," what would be one small practical, pragmatic step for the beginner, someone new to the language of spiritual formation and direction. We heard about Thomas á Kempis'* The Imitation of Christ, *and the journal, the reflection time, some time away. If I'm a fairly young believer, perhaps a college student, or someone who's newly come to Christ, what would you tell me?*

Bakke: I would tell you to tell God the truth. To say, "I have 2-percent willingness. I would rather read another book besides the Bible. The Bible looks like a telephone book. Could you help me?"

Carney: With the two-percent, you can read the Beatitudes, think about what it means to be an apprentice of Jesus Christ, and ask Him to be your teacher. In little ways, your eyes will be opened, the heart will be opened, and you will be guided and instructed by Him. In little ways, see how much that grows you into character and Christ-likeness.

Garber: Ask God to teach you to love what He loves; look to God day by day and say "Teach me what you love, O God. Help me to examine what I love that isn't worth loving. Teach me to see and to hear the world as you do."

Schulze: *As you become more practiced in the spiritual life, is it still simple and profound, and what for you are the simple and profound things that God is calling you to personally these days? Where is your cutting edge?*

Carney: Simple and profound, because I have grandchildren, I have a dog, and I have a wife of 33 years. And there are grace-filled moments in that God uses those experiences to transform me and to speak to me. I have a chair, and a candle, and a little journal, and a couple saints that I reflect on, and the rest is just a roller-coaster ride.

Bakke: That's a hard question, because I think life becomes more ordinary all the time. Somehow, God is in all of it, differently, and the small things for me include having some solitude, because I need a way to be refreshed. Another discipline for me is swimming. I would find after I was teaching, by the time I'd get in the swimming pool, thinking about what the day was like, then gradually my day would settle down into a few words, whether the words were "thank you," or "have mercy," etc. It seems to me that some kind of physical activity helps me at times; when I try to sit and pray, it's deadly.

Garber: I would say that this business of learning to know and to love at the same time is just what I'm thinking about all the time these days. I am married to Meg, and she loves me, for which I am very grateful, but I find that the longer that I am married, the more I reflect on, "Is that possible, to know me and to love me at the same time." Even as I find myself remembering back to my first year of marriage and saying to her time and time again, "Can you still love me, now that you know me?" I could hide things from my roommates, but now, I was living with somebody all the time whom I wanted to know me, and yet I was afraid of what it would mean to know me, because I didn't know if she would be able to love me once she did.

I think this tension gets teased out into every part of life. Whether it is the student going to other countries or whether it is in the countless conversations I have with students who see things in this culture and all over the world that make them think, "I have to be a cynic now, because now I know the way it really is." Well, my challenge for them (and for me, I guess) would be: "How is it really? What is it really like?" We need to see the invitation of Christ, who wants us to think deeply about the possibility that God in Jesus has both known and loved me. He has both known and loved His broken world, and He calls me to that same vocation. That is what I am thinking about all the time.

Schulze: *My last question relates to the evangelical Church. Jesus had great hopes for the Church when He said to Peter, "You are Peter, the rock, and on you I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." What is the message that today's evangelical Church, as a collective, needs to hear in regard to spiritual formation?*

Bakke: It is not a do-it-ourselves project. Ask God.

Garber: I remember reading a book years ago by Richard Lovelace from Gordon-Conwell Seminary called *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life,* in which he does an inductive study of church history on what it means to be renewed by God, personally and institutionally, and he talks about how we are not only justified by grace, but we are sanctified by grace. And it is important to push grace out to sanctification as well.

There is so much that we ask of each other that gets passed on generation to generation and into attitudes and ways of being with each other, formularies which are intended for good but often turn out to be for evil. I think we need to be deeply, deeply touched by the gospel of grace, not only in terms of justification, but its sanctifying power in our lives.

> "...we need to be deeply touched by the gospel of grace, not only in terms of justification, but its sanctifying power in our lives."

Carney: That is a difficult question that you pose, because sociologically, the gospel is not working in our culture. There are over 33,000 Christian denominations out there. I don't think Jesus ever intended that. So what do we ask the Church to do? Humbly repent, seek the Lord, and ask the question, "What are we doing to be like Jesus?" The Church has much to do to herself in her own character development and formation. And it is we, the Church, who must embody the message of Christ to have an impact on society. We must embody the message of Christ, impact society, and have change of character and heart, speak to the brokenness of our world, and be the people of Jesus.

Edee Schulze, Ph.D. is the Dean of Student Life at Wheaton College. Prior to becoming dean, Schulze served as director of residence life at Wheaton. She is involved in music ministry, as well as a growing involvement with an orphanage in the Dominican Republic and a ministry to Native Americans.

Confession Symposium

Confession is vital to spiritual formation. Yet, confession also carries responsibilities and burdens. Interpersonal harm may result from confession done poorly, whereas community may grow from confession done rightly. Four individuals immersed in the practices of confession reflected on the ethics of confession for a November 2003 forum at Wheaton. Here are excerpts from their helpful discussion. —Editor

The Revd. Mr. Charles F. Edgar III is Rector of Church of the Apostles in Columbia, South Carolina. Fr. Edgar received his BA from Wheaton College, his M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and his STM from the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee.

■ As we think together about the role of confession, we might do well to begin with the church traditions that consider penance or confession to be sacraments. The Reformers held to only two sacraments, because Jesus directly commanded His church to do two things, baptize and take the Lord's Supper. Interestingly though, the claim in the Catholic tradition that penance is one of the sacraments is precisely because in John 20:23, Jesus tells his disciples that if they forgive the sins of anyone they are forgiven, and if they withhold forgiveness from anyone it is withheld. Confession and forgiveness are fundamental parts of the ministry entrusted by Christ to His church, regardless of whether we think it is a sacrament.

Confession is routinely a part of a public liturgy. The Catholic tradition of liturgy has two fundamental parts of the service. The first is the liturgy of the Word, and the second is the liturgy of the table, or the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, Holy Communion. Confession is the culminating moment of the liturgy of the Word. Three confessional moments follow the sermon. The first is the Creed being pronounced, which we can understand as a confession of the Christian faith in light of what we've just heard. Then comes a time for the people's prayers, which may be seen as a confession of our needs in light of what we've heard, as creatures before the creator; it is recognizing we're not self-sufficient. Finally comes what we properly call the Confession, which is a confession of our failures, particularly in light of having heard the Word expounded and applied. Thus, we are coming to terms with the reality that even in our best moments we fall short of that which is expected of us.

It's the nature of the confession that happens at that moment in the liturgy that it is general, and it is public. So the confession liturgically is not intended to be a kind of real wrestling with my own sin. It is more a sort of general and public recognition of my failures. Every Sunday people dressed in various degrees of nicety drop to their knees and generally confess their sins to some degree. And it is interesting that as I talk to folks who come into the liturgical tradition I find it is often this very part of the liturgy that draws people from other church traditions: the fact that as we gather together as the body of Christ, we make this general admission of our failings. This helps prevent the church from becoming a community of pretense.

Private confession is, in fact, a very rigorous spiritual discipline that meets a deep human need. It meets what is in fact a deep emotional and spiritual and psychological need to deal with the shortcomings in your lives and, more importantly, to actually hear somebody say to you, "Jesus has dealt with that." As much as we might know that theologically, there is a powerful experience when in private confession you hear, "Your sins are forgiven."

Morally speaking, there are two opportunities for private confession. The first opportunity, I think many people think of this kind initially, is in the wake of a particularly grievous failing. Oftentimes when Christians have really failed to live up to what Paul calls, you know, "a manner unworthy of the gospel of Christ," they'll feel that there's a need, a particular need, a more acute need for making a verbal confession of what has happened. Or, if not just

in relationship to one sin, perhaps after an extended period of having fallen away from the faith and wandering for a while, part of returning into the life of the church and into a more serious expression of the Christian faith would be this kind of private confession.

The second way that this is normally done is as a part of a regular and routine spiritual discipline. Normally, confession occurs in this fashion. This tends to be done most frequently in smaller, more intimate communities, which are intentionally gathered in certain ways. It seems to me from my pastoral experience in confession that the greatest difficulty with the entire business of making a private confession is specificity. The confessee will say, "I really struggle with pride," or, "I've had lustful thoughts." And my job as the confessor is to say, "Well, tell me about that. When? Give me an example." And that's a very difficult thing for people to do. We're much happier to speak in generalities, "I'm a failure." It's hard for us to say in particular, "This is where I have failed." In matter of fact, unless one in this process of private confession is willing to be personal and specific, then the absolution that is pronounced at the end of a confessional experience is largely meaningless. The quality of absolution is directly related to the willingness of the confessee to be specific.

Ruth Haley Barton is a co-founder of the Transforming Center in Warrenville, Illinois, which provides training in the areas of vision, community building, teaching, and content development. Her most recent work is *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (InterVarsity Press, 2004).

■ Confession is good for the soul. Confession, like any other spiritual practice, opens me up to the activity of God. All spiritual disciplines are based on the fact that we cannot work transformation in our own lives. We need concrete ways of showing up in God's presence—giving God access to those places in us that are not like Christ—and knowing that in that moment, even as we are opening up to God, we can't do anything about it. God must come in and do His transforming work. So, confession is a spiritual discipline.

But the matter of confession—particularly public confession—is confusing because we live in a culture where there are no boundaries around what is to be shared publicly and what is to be pondered privately. Not only are we boundary-less in terms of what we communicate to others, but we are also a voyeuristic culture. We are accustomed to viewing people's most private moments on national television. It is no longer good enough to be actors on a stage or an actor in a movie projecting what happens privately in people's lives; now we have reality television. We want more and more of all this private stuff to be right out there publicly. We want to see people's relational worlds, we want to see their sexuality, we want to see the betrayal happen, we want to see them love another person in a way that should be kept private. We want to see their failure and their shame and their disappointment or their sexual exploits or their flirtations. We're used to that now; we're used to that being public.

> "How is it that I can go through a service and confess, but it's so hard to do it face-to-face with someone that I have hurt in the moment?"

At the same time, we are a culture that promotes a profound sense of denial about the presence of sin in our lives and the way in which our sins wound others. We are intent on pinning the blame on somebody else rather than using language of confession and brokenness and ownership and responsibility. I remember dealing with a woman in a church who was also an elder; she was very, very bright. We had some difficult communications in which she was quite mean, and when I went with her to talk about it, the best that she could say was that her communication was less than artful. Is that confession? I don't think so. It's a way of using language to keep from having to own what we do to other people. So how do we move into this

discipline in such a way that it promotes true spiritual growth rather than helping us to capitulate to some of the excesses of our culture?

I think we need to practice public confession in the larger context of self-examination, as part of a wise and gracious plan for our personal self-examination. In fact, confession is really the culmination of the self-examination process. It is that place of self-examination where we invite God to show us what it is in us that's broken, what it is that's not like Him, what it is that's wounding other people. And that is a long and very gracious and wise process.

It involves, first of all, knowing that we are secure in God's love. We can't do self-examination if we're not sure that God unconditionally loves us. In a wise self-examination process, we are convinced that we cannot fall out of God's love no matter what we find within the recesses of our lives; we're convinced of that in the very souls of our being. If we have fears that we might be abandoned by God, it's going to be very hard for us to see ourselves as we need to see ourselves. So we must be clear that there is nothing we can do that can cause us to fall out of God's love or God's presence. And then there grows over time a desire to let God at least see everything that's true about us, or at least, to invite Him to show us what He already knows, and maybe we don't yet.

I also recommend that we practice confession in the ordinariness of our life. We need to engage in the more formal and structured formats for confession, but we also need to confess to those whom we have affected by our own sin. I love liturgy. I love all aspects of liturgy. I love the places that are built in for worship and confession and intercession and hearing the scriptures read without comment. But one of the most disturbing things I could say about myself is that I can do the silent confession or the general confession within a liturgical service too easily.

How is it, then, that I cannot bring myself to confess my selfishness to my husband or my jealousy to my friend or my impatience to my daughters or my ego-driven pushing to my colleagues. How is it that I can go through a service and confess, but it's so hard to do it face-to-face with someone that I have hurt in the moment? Why is it so hard for me to name that right now? "You know what, I can't celebrate your success, because I'm jealous. I'm sorry. I'm sorry that my jealousy kept me from joining you in this moment." Or, "I'm sorry that my own ego kept me pushing in a meeting in a way that was not productive for us. I'm sorry." So, one of the things I know for myself is that if I am not confessing my sin to one another in the ordinary moments of my life, in the nitty-grittiness of my life, in the company of others, there is not much spiritual transformation going on.

Andrew Comisky received his M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary and is currently the founder and director of Desert Stream Ministries. He has previously served as president of Exodus International. His most recent work is *Strength in Weakness: Healing Sexual and Relational Brokenness* (InterVarsity Press, 2003).

■ Confession is an important part of my life, my sobriety, my sanity. For me, it is fundamentally about integrity and wholeness, and wholeness begins with an honest reckoning with brokenness. Confession has been key to breaking through to community. My understanding of confession is tied into finding trustworthy priests. And by that, as a Protestant, I mean the priesthood of all believers: trustworthy individuals with whom your secrets are safe and with whom you will commit yourself to on an ongoing basis, especially in breaking free of repetitive sins, what might be considered familiar sins. That was really crucial to me. It was a breakthrough to community by bridging the split in my life, so I was not just being seen as a pious person by my peers but finding those with whom I could also clearly and concretely be a sinner. That was key to being known in the community. That's the only way I know to define covering in community.

A lot of us speak of church covering areas of weakness, yet the only way that actually happens is not just by being an audience member once a week, but by being known by members of your community with whom you can meet and pull aside regularly. Sometimes before a service you think, "My offering is not clean here. I'm not ready to raise my hands and worship here. My hands aren't clean." And you find those ones there to whom you can confess. My

understanding, then, is that given the priesthood of all believers, a Christian has the authority, as Jesus gave his disciples, to actually speak the word of forgiveness. So it's not just sort of a, "There, there. I'm so sorry that happened to you," but it really is the authority to say you are forgiven in Jesus' name.

The first aspect of the cross is, of course, dying. I die when I confess my sin. I hate it. I still hate it. I've been doing it for years, and yet I still hate it. There's something about that revelation of myself concretely as a sinner that is a death, but it is a good death, and it is Jesus that kills and is killing my sin, in a sense, as I speak it forth. Also, there is life in hearing the word, "You are forgiven." There is actually power that is able to come and meet me, to absolve me of the sin and to empower me in my weakness. I believe there is no empowering in weakness unless we confess our wickedness. In having done that, as a sinner in confession to a brother or a sister, I die, but I also live. There is more of the resurrection to take room in my heart and life to continue the journey towards purity, towards loving people well from the heart, even in the unseen places.

> "...given the priesthood of all believers, a Christian has the authority, as Jesus gave his disciples, to actually speak the word of forgiveness."

As a matter of course, in the groups that we run and the conferences we do and so on, there will always be a time to come up and confess and sometimes people say, "Well, I want to confess that I'm not willing to give it up." Or, "I want to confess my idolatry that I'm not going to let go of now." Basically, they are not willing to die to their sin. At which point we would not speak the word of forgiveness clearly. We would just say, "There needs to be a pairing of desire to turn along with the desire to be cleansed from the sin." So, I would pair repentance with cleansing full well knowing that this might take many confessions, but I think there has to be both, or else we're then back to what some of us from liturgical backgrounds wrote off as inauthentic: I was just mouthing what the priest told me to say, but I didn't believe it or know it or whatever. I think there has to be some reckoning, an understanding that this is wrong, and I want to be right. Unless that's the case, we may just be falling back into what I would see as a ritual that has no real power.

As leaders we need to make sure that our vulnerabilities towards sin are covered through people that we bring into our lives and that shelter us. I think that we ought to model expressions of vulnerability, speaking of how we have struggled through and found victory in areas of persistent difficulty. But for our people we have to do that from the standpoint of modeling the power of confession as it has released us, not making them the ones who are now speaking the word of forgiveness to us. Otherwise, it becomes more of a show than an experience of modeling. The only authentic modeling is if we as leaders are enlisting that help for ourselves. If we're not doing that, then I think our modeling, or certainly our exhortation, to others is thin and powerless. There can be a tendency for leaders to attempt to create an inordinate public intimacy with their congregation through confession. I hear of pastors doing that sometimes, and I always have a check for that sort of behavior: Do you have any intermediaries in your life? I think if you don't, you are playing to the audience like a singer or an actor. Confession needs to be authenticated in the priest that we would engage as leader.

Rev. Kristin Frederich is the Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Cambria, Wisconsin. She is also the Dean of Student Formation at Eastern Seminary in Philadelphia. Rev. Frederich holds a B.A. from Wheaton and finished her seminary work at Fuller Theological Seminary in California. She has also engaged in post-graduate study in Historical Theology in Aberdeen, Scotland.

■ At Urbana '96 one of the speakers had been at Wheaton College during the revival they had earlier

in the year. He described how it started at Pierce Chapel with a World Christian Fellowship meeting on a Sunday night, where the leaders started to confess their real sins, and they began to pray and seek the Lord. And something tangible happened: The campus was transformed, some classes were cancelled, people were in all-night vigils, and everything changed. As I sat there listening, I thought, what makes that happen? What is it that's in the power of the Holy Spirit that moves us to become authentic?

Most who have experienced or studied revivals would agree that confession is critical to starting a revival. There is something about releasing the logjam of your spiritual dirt that allows the flow of the Holy Spirit to flood through your life. Like what happened at Pentecost, you become a conduit, and the Spirit keeps flowing to others. But when this kind of energy and excitement is released it easily can get twisted when you start confessing other people's sins. That's an abusive confession. Confession has to be personal; it has to be voluntary; it has to be the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. We cannot force confession or revival, because we don't always know how the Holy Spirit is working or for what purpose. But what I do know is that many students at Wheaton and elsewhere are thinking, "How do I become authentic, how do I become right with God and with the people that are around me?"

> "There is a joy in having somebody know your deepest, deepest secrets. There is an, 'Ah! I don't have to carry this alone anymore.'"

Confession is God's gift to us. If we didn't have confession then the sin would just build up inside us like a clogged pipe. If there is no way for water to flow, all the muck would simply build up inside you. Confession is where we can talk to somebody else and we can say, "Brother or sister, I am wrong here; I have this burden." You carry around this burden with you everywhere and you want to lay it down. That is confession, to lay your burden down at the foot of the Cross and say, "It is beneath the foot of the Cross, and it is gone." And that is the opportunity of confession, that is the gift of confession, and that's the invitation. One of the things I love about confession in the liturgy of the Church is that it's an *invitation* to confession; it's a *call* to confession.

But we then have to be careful for one another. We have to remember that confession means I am showing you my broken soul, and so you treat that with the gentleness of Jesus Christ. The pattern in Scripture is not one of power evangelism, which I was taught in seminary. It is not a pattern where you approach someone and say, "I know that you are in sin." Of course, you would be making a pretty good bet; there is a one hundred percent chance of being right. But, you ought not confess somebody else's sin; remember what Jesus said to the people who brought a woman forth to publicly shame her? "He who is without sin cast the first stone."

Jesus was specific, even when he was speaking to the woman at the well in John 4. He doesn't say, "Ok, lady. I know about you." He says, "I have a need." He invites her into the conversation. If you know somebody that is hurting and bearing a sin that they cannot hold anymore, and you know it, just invite them into that conversation and say, "You really seem burdened. I've been walking there, too. What's going on?" When the woman at the well hedges, Jesus says, "You go get your husband." So she says, "Oh, I don't have a husband," and he responds, "Truth is, you've had five husbands, and the guy you're living with now isn't your husband." That must have been empowering for her because she took it back to her village. "Come, hear a man who told me everything I've ever done." There is joy in having somebody know your deepest, deepest secrets. There is an, "Ah! I don't have to carry this alone anymore." Then the person prays with you and seeks God's face with you and walks with you.

We must remember God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins (I John 1:9). That's exciting for us, because it means we don't have to be in bondage; we can live the truth, we can live the life, we can be authentic, because there is One who is constantly renewing us into the image of His son Jesus Christ.

Continued from page 7

Loving, Mourning, Knowing

disinterest. Nor are its contours adequately captured by any post-Enlightenment paradigms, full as they are of voices, perspectives, and narratives.

One of the most intriguing windows into this biblically-shaped way of knowing is the parable called forth by the man who got all A's and flunked life, the parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke tells us of a man who has mastered the academic life; he knows its rhythms and its rules. His question is not one which grows out of his heart, but out of an academic expertise disconnected from his own loves. Jesus responds, and the conversation seems to conclude with the man one more time giving the right answer. He has learned how to do that. Inspired by the Spirit, Luke observes that the man wanted to justify himself. He wanted to be correct in his interpretation of the law to love, but not be implicated by its meaning. He did not want the law to touch his heart. What else does it mean to justify oneself, but to push back, to abstract the law's meaning, to take it out of its context of real responsibilities and relationships.

> "The first and last question for a Christian college is this: What are students learning to love?"

And so Jesus tells him a story. For historical, theological, and sociological reasons, two men see and hear, but do not respond. They know, but do not care. They see a man beaten and bruised, but do not see themselves as responsible. Scandal that it is, a Samaritan sees and hears, loving the man as if he were his neighbor. One more time, Jesus asks a question, and one more time, the teacher of the law gives the right answer. Pointedly, Jesus tells him to apprentice himself to the Samaritan, "Go and do likewise."

The biblical vision here is clear: to know is to love. Simply said.

Sparking a proper desire

Several centuries later we have this made plain in the rich tradition of Christian spirituality which grows out of the Augustinian vision. A Roman named Laurentius wrote Bishop Augustine a letter, wondering how to make sense of the disintegrating civilization of the 4th-century. What do we believe, he asked, that can help us understand what is going on all around? Augustine wrote him a long letter in response, setting forth the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.[3]

Toward the end, he notes that it is not possible to know whether someone is good by asking what they believe. Rather, he argues that it is only in knowing what someone loves. And so to have the truest window into one's heart we must ask, "What do you love?" Worship, worldview, and way of life are all bound up in our answer to that question, and the consequences for a college are profound.

The first and last question for a Christian college is this: What are students learning to love? It might be the first question to ask of an entering freshman, and the last to ask of a graduating senior. What do you love? What have you learned to love? In the push-and-pull of study, of athletics, of theater and the arts, of relationships in and out of class, of debates and discussions from dawn to dusk, there is one question that matters most: What are students learning to love?

Hear Simone Weil once again: "Every school exercise, thought of in this way, is like a sacrament." Sacraments point us to God. They are reminders of the deepest realities, the truest truths.

Woven into the very fabric of our responsibilities and relationships as students, as faculty, as administrators, we labor towards a vision of learning to love God and to love what God loves, seeing every aspect of our academic lives as a sacrament. That is what it is to know.

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[1] Simone Weil, *Waiting for God,* Trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 105, 112. Originally published in 1951.

[2] John Hellman, *Simone Weil: An Introduction to Her Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 88.

[3] Augustine, *Enchiridion,* chap. 117.

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CACE News & Notes

CACE Resources

The articles and discussions in this issue have been abstracted from public forums supported by CACE and held on Wheaton College's campus. Audiotapes of all CACE programs are available for minimal cost through Wheaton's Media Resources Office (630-752-5061).

A complete listing of CACE events, extending back to 1987, is available under "resources" at www.christianethics.org or www.wheaton.edu/CACE Back issues of *Discernment* also are available here.

Calendar

The CACE theme for 2004-2005 is "The Future of Humanity: Technology, Medicine, and Genetics." Our opening event was the annual David A. Penner Debate, September 16, 7:30 PM, in Edman Chapel on Wheaton's campus. For information about this event and other activities of the Center, see our Web site.

Reader Response

If you wish to comment on this issue of *Discernment,* or if you would like to contribute to a future issue of *Discernment* on the 2004-2005 theme, send us an email at discernment@wheaton.edu.

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