

**FROM MISSION TO MEANINGFUL LIVES:  
Student Success in Church-Related Higher Education  
Bobby Fong  
Xavier University of Louisiana  
25 September 2014**

I'm grateful to Joe Creech and the Lilly Fellows Program for this opportunity to address you on the topic of student success, a topic that is not only important and timely, but hotly contested. Higher education is under fire for not adequately preparing sufficient numbers of graduates for careers in an increasingly competitive world marketplace. The Department of Education is hard at work on a presidential scorecard for colleges and universities that would include a metric for how much an institution's graduates earn one year after commencement. Success in these instances seems defined by whether a graduate can get a job and how much she can get paid for doing it.

But such an attenuated definition of student success is shortsighted. It is unlikely that most of our graduates will work in one job for a lifetime. They may change jobs eleven times, change careers three to five times. A third of them will work at jobs that don't yet exist. Moreover, salary does not necessarily correlate to a job's social utility. School teachers and social workers and ministers don't earn the salaries of engineers and software programmers, but what they contribute to the welfare of others is no less significant. It is a travesty that other purposes of higher learning—the joy of mastering a subject for its own sake, the preparation of students for democratic citizenship—seem to carry less weight these days than career preparation.

More fundamentally, however, an exclusive emphasis on education as career preparation represents an error in logic and imaginative reach. Making a living is a necessary and laudable aspiration, but it is a means to the larger end of making a life of purpose. One works to live; one does not live to work. To make the means an end to itself suggests a confusion in values. I remember Harvard University President Drew Faust observing that in recent years 40% of Harvard College graduates went into the financial industry. While she had no objections to a career on Wall Street as such, she was concerned that the Harvard experience somehow was

narrowing students' perceptions of what was worthy and excellent, reducing questions of vocation to an economic calculation.

Faust's anxiety directs us to a deeper issue, a malady not of those who fail to get jobs after graduation but afflicting the motivations of those who do. This past January, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks opened a keynote address by recounting the final meeting of a senior seminar that he taught at Yale. On that day, he asked every student to cite what was the most transformative book each had encountered over four years in college. Unexpectedly, several students responded that they had kept so busy networking and participating in activities to burnish their resumes that they barely had time to do assigned readings for class, much less read a book through and reflect on it. One student said he was saving favorite texts to read after graduation.

Brooks went on to lament that discourse among his students was dominated by economic concerns, where what graduates might do to gain employment took precedence over what kind of people they aspired to be, where the emphasis on outcomes led them to value what they could measure rather than trying to measure what they should value. Privileged was a utilitarian culture of external validation. Lost was the sense that college was an opportunity for students to develop an internal landscape of the self, to cultivate their souls.

Today, we assemble as followers of Jesus Christ, Who declared, "You cannot serve God and mammon" and "What does it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" As important as it is to prepare students for the workplace, our definition of student success must encompass the cultivation of the soul and its relation to God.

It is here that the mission of a Christian college must distinguish itself. We rightly begin with first things, and the first thing undergirding the very existence of our colleges is that God calls us into relationship, relationship with God, with others, and with the world. Indeed, if we are faithful to our obligation to assist students in soul making and in ascertaining what love of God and neighbor means for them, our colleges would stand as counterpoints to narrowly utilitarian definitions of student success. Our colleges would be prophetic practitioners of what

William Deresiewicz in his recent book *Excellent Sheep* laments that elite higher education fails to do: to nurture students “pregnant in soul.”<sup>1</sup>

In my remarks to you today, I want to discuss three dimensions of student success at the Christian college: 1) what does it mean for students to know the world; 2) what does it mean for students to know themselves, and 3) what does it mean for students to know God.

At first blush, knowledge of the world seems to be familiar ground. We seek to foster in students wide-ranging knowledge of the natural world, society, and cultures through study of the sciences, humanities, and the arts. We want students to master different ways of apprehending the world: creating knowledge in the sciences is different from creating meaning in literature; there are different methodologies for verifying insights in physics as opposed to psychology. We encourage students to study in depth in one or more subjects and possibly to do some original research in order to know how arduous it is to garner evidence in support of a hypothesis or an argument. Such learning goals are not exceptional to the Christian college.

What is exceptional for us is that the world to be known has been created and sustained by God, and to fully explore the world we want our students to find a healthy and proper balance between knowing the Creator and knowing the Creation. In *To Know As We Are Known*, Parker Palmer observes: “Christians have too often spoken of “knowing Jesus” in a way that tends toward one of two extremes. Either the believer “knows” Jesus in a way that excuses him or her from knowing anything else (like physics or psychology or English literature), or the believer contains the “knowledge” of Jesus in a compartment labeled “religious” and engages in other forms of knowing as if there were no connection.”<sup>2</sup>

Mark Noll has dealt with the first issue in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. College is not the Church, and pietism cannot substitute for intellectual rigor. Some Christian students may enter college seeing the world as wholly metaphor, a window through which the Creator is seen, and where knowledge is simply tools for a trade, tent-making as an occupation while

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<sup>1</sup> William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: The Free Press, 2014), 174.

<sup>2</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 49.

one's calling is to proclaim Christ. This mindset betrays a contempt for Creation, a gnostic denigration of the material. In his more recent book *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, Noll writes, “. . . to confess the material reality of the incarnation is to perceive an unusual dignity in the material world itself . . . It is part of the deepest foundation of Christian reality . . . to study the world, the human structures found in the world, the human experiences of the world, and the humans who experience the world. . . . Much that is intrinsic in Jesus Christ should drive a person to that study.”<sup>3</sup>

In turn Parker Palmer eloquently warns against the other extreme, the objectification of knowledge, where the world is mere fact to be categorized, dissected, analyzed, manipulated, and mastered. Not only does the observer stand at a remove from the object studied, but objects are regarded in isolation from one another. Lost is the impetus toward connecting disparate phenomena. Knowledge becomes classification, a sorting of the world by disciplinary mode or hermeneutical theory. Even God is relegated to a slot in the epistemic universe. One can teach mathematics, government, literature, even spirituality without reference to God.

By counterpoint, Jesus, the incarnation of God, is both fact and metaphor, material and spirit. He declared, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” We see Jesus as God and see through Jesus to God. Writes Palmer, “In Christian tradition, truth is not a concept that “works” but an incarnation that lives. . . . [W]e come to know the world not simply as an objectified system of empirical objects in logical connection with each other, but as an organic body of personal relations and responses . . . Education of this sort means more than teaching the facts and learning the reasons so we can manipulate life toward our ends. It means being drawn into personal responsiveness and accountability to each other and the world of which we are a part.”<sup>4</sup>

One instance of what such a relational approach to knowing the world entails can be found in Martha Nussbaum's discussion of “cosmopolitanism” in *Cultivating Humanity*.<sup>5</sup> She

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<sup>3</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 35, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Palmer, 14-5.

<sup>5</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 50-67.

emphasizes how education should be about exposing students to the unfamiliar, to the variety of the world. Students generalize from experience, and too often they assume that their own experience is normative. Education is about confounding previous experience. This ranges from gaining a more nuanced understanding of the natural world to learning to live with human difference. In particular, while the Christian faith proclaims what binds us as a common humanity, we can't forget that we cannot be human in general: we express our humanity in culturally-mediated ways. Language is a quintessential human capacity, but no one speaks "language," one speaks English, or Chinese, or Swahili. Christians can both affirm the claims of universal humanity and uphold a commitment to cultural diversity. We must affirm equal opportunity and assess individuals according to their achievement, on the one hand, but we must also strive to give place and voice to different cultural practices, acknowledging that the very definitions of "success" and "happiness" are culturally mediated. For Nussbaum, engendering a cosmopolitan mindset means balancing how universal human capacities are expressed in culturally specific ways. For Christians, this does not nullify the declaration that all are in need of the redemptive grace of God, but it acknowledges that the Good News must be heard by each in his own language. It does not obviate the need for judgment, but it does call for sensitive, generous, and patient discernment of what constitutes truth and falsehood, right and wrong. We need to encourage our students to appreciate the occasions when they are uncomfortable with the strangeness of the world. Those very moments can be occasions for initiation into the variety of the world, where the intelligence is cultivated and circumstances enable the maturation of the heart.

All colleges seek to initiate students into knowledge of the world. At the Christian college, however, success is not simply mastery of the facts and methodology of a discipline, but the ability to place learning in a relational context of connections and obligations to others and to God. To truly know an aspect of the world is hard work. It calls for and inculcates intellectual virtues such as tenacity, patience, honesty, and judgment. It grows out of a respect for and love of the Creation, where curiosity manifests itself in precision of thought and action borne out of passion for the object studied. But learning is also communal, and knowing means not only mastering a subject but making connections to other subjects and other lives. It calls for and

inculcates moral virtues such as humility, tolerance, and civility. These are markers of student success in knowing the world, and as teachers what we are called to model.

Professors not only teach their subjects, they teach their students. Mastering the discipline, knowing an aspect of the world well, is only the beginning of pedagogy. In turn, the student is more than a receptacle for knowledge. There is a knower to be cultivated, and an integral part of mission at the Christian college is helping students to know and to love themselves. One of the formative experiences of my undergraduate years was working through three books from Inter-Varsity Christian Press known as the “Learning to Love” series: Learning to Love God, Learning to Love Yourself, Learning to Love Others. The series was founded, of course, on the two Great Commandments, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” I was accustomed to admonitions to love God and love my neighbor, but I had never confronted what it meant to love myself. Yet the second commandment makes love of self the touchstone to how to love my neighbor. Moreover, the first commandment, to love God, is premised on cultivating a heart, soul, and mind capable of inclining toward God. If one cannot truly love God or others without developing a sense of self, the Christian college has a stake in intentionally making space for soul-making, the cultivation of the inner landscape of our students’ lives.

What do I mean by soul-making? I offer a useful formulation not from a theologian but from a poet. In an 1819 letter, John Keats described the development of the soul as the interaction of three materials: “the *Intelligence*, the *human heart* (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind) and the *World* or *Elemental space* suited for the proper action of *Mind and Heart* on each other for the purpose of forming the *Soul*.” The world is the staging area, what Keats calls “the vale of Soul-making.” The intelligence refers to the mind, the capacity for apprehension and analysis with which humans are born. And the heart, the seat of affections and empathy, is the mediator between the mind and the world, the conduit to soul making. He writes:

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Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! [The heart] is the Minds Bible, it is the Minds experience, it is the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity. . . . what was [a] Soul before it came into the world and had these provings and alterations and perfectionings?--An intelligence--without Identity--and how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart? And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances?<sup>6</sup>

For Keats, the soul is not a “thing.” It is tantamount to the individual identity a person forges in the course of living. It is the self as formed by the narrative circumstances of one’s life. We begin as undifferentiated minds, intelligences without individual identities. But we are capable of learning, and in our ability to apprehend and create knowledge, our eyes are opened, and we can become as gods. We are schooled in the world, a world of circumstance and contingency that the mind struggles to apprehend. It is not the learnings of the mind that make the individual, however. The wisdom of the soul is knowledge of the world filtered through the medium of the heart. And it is a particular aspect of the world to which the heart must respond: the circumstances of a “World of Pains and troubles,” a “Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!”

For Keats, the cultivation of the mind alone is insufficient to create an individual identity or soul. Current tendencies to regard education as simply the accumulation of knowledge and skills for the workplace would have been greeted by him with dismay. Making a living is necessary for subsistence, but in what way does this differentiate humanity from ants in a colony or bees in a hive? Where is aspiration, where is creativity, where is beauty, where is love, where is personal meaning and purpose? Keats might ask, “How can schooling contribute to the process of individualization so that each student is afforded opportunity to develop a sense of self and its relation to the world?”

According to Keats, the provings of the heart are intimately tied to feeling and suffering the pains and troubles of the world. By contrast, for many of our students, pains and troubles,

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<sup>6</sup> John Keats, *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant F. Scott, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 290-1.

setbacks and failures, accidents and disease, discipline and sanctions are unexpected and even unwarranted deviations from the callow presumption that their lives should be a smooth progression from success to success. Suffering is regarded a consequence of injustice or pathology. If troubles come, then the world should be reformed or the individual medicated. But the Gospel of Prosperity is not the Christian Gospel. Let me be clear: we should be grateful for the philosophical, political, and social progress that has engendered a more capacious sense of common humanity and universal rights, progress engendered in part by Christians, and we have benefited in body and mind from advances in science and medicine. But there is a difference between a therapeutic outlook, one that regards pains and troubles as encumbrances to be resolved, and a more tragic and Christian view of the world that sees as part of being human the “heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks/ That flesh is heir to.”

In *Cultivating Humanity*, Martha Nussbaum posits the importance of students needing to develop empathy, the capacity to place themselves in the situation of others.<sup>7</sup> For Nussbaum, this can occur in study abroad, in a residential college, in any activity that rouses a sense of human connection. Above all, it can be rooted in the narrative imagination where works of literature enlarge our sense of life’s contingencies. James Baldwin famously observed, “You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me the most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive.”<sup>8</sup>

Whether through a text, an experience, or the model of a life we encounter, we learn to test alternative pathways to how we ourselves might live. Stories enable us to rehearse models for our own lives, and those stories include not only myth, history, and fiction, but the accounts of our ancestors and the narratives of our contemporaries. Indeed, as teachers, our lives are texts our students read. Our students seek ways in which others’ stories can constitute strands in their own narratives.

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<sup>7</sup> Nussbaum, 85-100.

<sup>8</sup> “James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket,” directed by Karen Thorsen, *American Masters* (Public Broadcasting Service, 1989), <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/james-baldwin/film-james-baldwin-the-price-of-the-ticket/2632>.

Our identities are expressed in our life narratives, and those narratives necessarily encompass the pains and troubles of our own lives and those of the world. As Christians, we acknowledge the reality and corruption of sin. It is through a heart pierced by pain and trouble that we open ourselves to mercy for our own frailties and to compassion for those of others. In pathos we cultivate pity. As teachers, we need to guide our students in accommodating themselves to the pains and troubles of the world so as to school their hearts and engender their souls without daunting their courage and hope. We need to help them construct narratives of the self that will stand them in good stead in times of trouble.

Robert Bolt, in the preface to his play *A Man for All Seasons*, anticipated the concerns of my remarks a half-century ago, writing, “. . . the individual who tries to plot his position by reference to our society finds no fixed points, but only the vaunted absence of them, “freedom” and “opportunity”; freedom for what, opportunity to do what, is nowhere indicated. The only positive he is given is ‘get and spend’ . . .” By contrast, what Bolt found in Thomas More, the protagonist of his play, was “a man with an adamant sense of his own self”:

He knew where he began and left off, what area of himself he could yield to the encroachments of his enemies, and what to the encroachments of those he loved. It was a substantial area in both cases, for he had a proper sense of fear and was a busy lover. . . . [B]ut at length he was asked to retreat from that final area where he located his self. And there this supple, humorous, unassuming, and sophisticated person set like metal, was overtaken by an absolutely primitive rigor, and could no more be budged than a cliff.<sup>9</sup>

In the play, More declares:

If we lived in a State where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us good, and greed would make us saintly. And we'd live like animals or angels in the happy land that *needs* no heroes. But since in fact we see that avarice, anger, envy, pride, sloth, lust and stupidity commonly profit far beyond humility, chastity, fortitude, justice, and

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons* (New York: Vintage, 1962), xi, xii.

thought, and have to choose, to be human at all . . . why then perhaps we *must* stand fast a little—even at the risk of being heroes.<sup>10</sup>

Bolt concludes that this is “my explanation and apology for treating Thomas More, a Christian saint, as a hero of selfhood.”<sup>11</sup> It is also why I have asserted today that soul-making at the Christian college entails helping our students know and love themselves.

So if successful Christian college students are equipped to know the world and to know themselves in the ways I’ve described, what does it mean for them to know God? Our faith teaches us that God knew us before we came to know God. As Parker Palmer put it in the title of his book, which carries the subtitle *A Spirituality of Education*, what we seek for our students, and ourselves, is *To Know As We Are Known*. Knowing God in this sense is not simply knowing things about God, God as a subject of study, but being in relationship with God, the God Who calls to each of us.

And what is the nature of this God Who calls? St. Peter exhorts Christians, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, ‘Be holy, as I am holy.’” This is more than an admonition to action; it is an invitation to being. As Moses discovered, approaching God as manifested in the burning bush meant treading on holy ground, ground sanctified by God’s presence, to encounter I AM WHO I AM. God is holy, that is, self-sufficient and complete in righteousness. We are called to wholeness and integrity, mirroring the holiness bequeathed us by grace through Jesus Christ. That grace arose from the love of God for the whole world. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Because the God Who is holy is also the God Who is love, because we are to be holy as God is holy and to love as God loves us, we are called to be God’s holiness and love in the world.

At the heart of our endeavors is to assist our students in understanding how each might live out this calling. One of the pleasures of being a college president is inviting speakers to

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<sup>10</sup> Bolt, 140-1.

<sup>11</sup> Bolt, xiv.

address students at commencement. One year Archbishop Desmond Tutu told this story at the end of his remarks:

A farmer stands at sunset looking out over fields of grain when a traveler comes along and joins him. The traveler observes, "It's wonderful what you and God have done with these fields!" The farmer answers, "You should have seen these fields when God had them to Himself!"

The Archbishop then declared, "God is in the world, but we are God's Hands." Proceeding to point at various ones of the graduates, Desmond asked, "So how are you going to be God's Hand? And you? And you? And you?"

It is natural for students to think that answering God's call for them entails deciding what their choice of vocation should be. Indeed, the word "vocation" descends from the Latin "vocatio," meaning a call or summons. Equating vocation with a job, however, is the narrowest construal of the word. There are universal vocations, such as God's call for all to come to salvation or the Catechism of the Catholic Church declaration, "Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being" (CCC 2392). There are special vocations, summons to some, such as the vocation of marriage or a call to the priesthood. In turn, Luther believed that calling to religious vocations should not be privileged, for cobblers are as much called to their work as are clergy. From this perspective, vocation is central to the belief that each person is imbued with specific gifts and talents to be exercised to the glory of God. Only with the desacralization of the word has "vocation" become synonymous with "career."

In times past, people were defined by their work, which was passed down from generation to generation, hence the origins of last names like Smith and Cooper. People called to the clergy were ordained for life. No wonder that vocations were equated with lifetime occupations. But as I've noted, lifetime employment in a single occupation is much more unlikely today. That's why for our students we need to unlink the equivalence of calling and career.

On the one hand, students are right to use college as a time to discern their gifts and talents to determine what they can do to earn a living. Over the years, my advice to students has been enunciated as three questions: 1) What are your gifts? 2) What gives you joy? 3) What is the intersection between your gifts and the needs of the world? College is the invaluable opportunity to answer these three questions, which also can serve as parameters by which students come to know and love themselves. For some of them, what they do for a living extends into what they come to regard as their life's purpose. Their work becomes their ministry to the world.

But not for all. Occupational aspirations can be daunted by lack of ability or passion, careers untracked by physical disability, market demand, obsolescence, and social circumstances. As teachers and administrators, you and I have encountered students who want to make lives in the academy as we have done. But even for the most intellectually promising, "many are called, but few are chosen." Fourteen of us in English at UCLA, one of the top dozen English literature programs in the country, went on the job market in 1977-78. Two of us got tenure-track jobs. Our students only see those on the faculty who survived such odds. And the current situation in higher education, with its increasing reliance on contingent part-time adjuncts, bids well to be even grimmer. So in what way has a philosopher, art historian, or teacher forfeited her calling if she can't get a job? Or do we err in presuming that a life of purpose can only be realized through one's occupation? Is a person any less called by God because circumstances prevent him from working in a particular field?

There are two senses in which we may be called. The first is transformative, where one finds life directed to a new purpose after encountering God. The second is a sense of being directed by God at a particular time and place to do something specific. For the Patriarch Abraham, the transformative call was to leave the city of Ur in response to God's promise to give him a new land from whence God would make a new nation. One instance of a specific call to Abraham was the directive to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him. For the Apostle Paul, the revelation on the Damascus road turned his understanding, his values, and his life upside down. The call to cross over to Macedonia to preach was a specific call.

Distinguishing between transformative and specific calls is crucial. The two types of calling meld into each other, but specific calls, each having to do with a given time, place, and circumstance, are nestled under the larger transformative call that determines the shape and heft of one's life. The confusion surrounding the word "vocation" stems from the fact that some people find a single lifelong work growing out of a transformative call, while others find that in different stages in their lives, they pursue different vocations that nonetheless have a common root in a transformative call that defines, at heart, who they are.

One of the people who deeply influenced my walk with God was my junior high youth group sponsor. Larry worked as a truck driver, a house painter, a laborer to support himself and his family, but his ministry was fostering the young people of our church into relationship with Jesus Christ. He was indefatigable in providing transportation in his station wagon, in leading Bible studies and devotions, and in encouraging generations of Chinese Bible Church teenagers in the arts of leading the youth group. I discovered I had the gift of administration because of him. Larry no doubt experienced many specific calls in his work life and marriage, but he divined that the essence of a transformative call was less about what he was called to do than the kind of person he was to be. He was God's man, and in living out that essential fealty he found specific ways to be God's Hand in the world.

In the end, knowing God means being transformed by our relationship with God. St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." And what are the characteristics of that transformed mind? St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think on these things."

The Christian college should serve as a place where students can affirm their transformational calls and discern the specific calls that take them as God's Hands into the world. Discernment of calling and vocation naturally occurs in a community of supporters and mentors. Such communities facilitate discernment, and they are well-nigh indispensable for the

daily living out of one's vocation. A circle of loving friends provides strength for living, the perseverance to pursue one's calling. Abraham was surrounded by family, Paul by a circle of companions. The consolation of calling is that we are not required to go it alone.

But the essence of calling is less about what one is called to do than the kind of person one is to be. Christians should be able to mirror the God Who knows them by growing in holiness and love, and the College should nurture such growth. At the faculty convocation marking the beginning of this academic year, Whitworth University Provost Caroline Simon exhorted her colleagues, "To fulfill our mission we will need to help our students grow in more than intellectual virtue. We will need to help them grow in moral and spiritual virtues. We will need to help them develop more compassion and more courage and more justice and more hope and more generosity, more joy and faith and love, than they have when they begin their . . . education."

Not all of our students, however, will come to know God in this way. Nor will all know the world and those who dwell in it as a generative web of connections and obligations. Nor will all come to know and love themselves. What does it mean to succeed with these students?

First, we worship a Savior Who drew others to Him by invitation, not coercion. As we invite students to drink at the fount of knowledge, Jesus invited the Samaritan woman to ask Him for living water. By the same token, both Jesus and the woman needed a drink from the water of Jacob's well. Both needed the water of this world. As we aspire to help our students grow in grace, let us not despise their ability to grow in knowledge, no matter how partial and incomplete. At the very least, they can learn about the world, they can learn about themselves, and they can learn about God. They can be equipped in knowledge and skill to make a living.

Second, student success is not simply a matter of what happens in college but what happens after. We encounter our students at one point in their lives. God may be waiting down the dusty Damascus road. Jonah evaded God's call to go to Nineveh, running away to Joppa and booking passage to Tarshish, but he encountered God on the stormy sea.

Our students seek a trajectory to their lives, a sense of destiny. In making sense of their lives, they inevitably tailor a life narrative in which overarching themes tease out the meaning of why and how they have lived. In that narrative, God may be lurking in the next chapter.

Third and finally, our students have our prayers, and prayers of a specific type. One of my favorite Gospel stories is that of the paralyzed man whose friends brought him on his mat to be healed by Jesus. Unable to enter the house because of the crowd, they climbed to the roof, broke open a hole, and let the man down. Then Scripture records, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven. . . . I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’” What’s noteworthy to me about the story, however, is that the faith prompting Jesus to forgive and heal is not the faith of the man but of his friends.

This is a recurrent pattern in the Gospels: Jairus’ daughter is not healed because of her faith—she’s dead—but because her father believes. The centurion’s servant is not healed because of his faith but because of his master’s faith. The Gentile woman’s daughter is not healed because of her faith but because her mother believes.

As teachers we help our students envision what lives they might lead. We believe in their possibilities, and not seldom we believe in them when they cannot believe in themselves. At a Christian college, it is no great leap in our prayers of petition to believe for our students as well as to believe in them, to have faith that they may know God as God knows them.

Parker Palmer writes:

We cannot settle for pious prayer as a preface to conventional education. Instead, we must allow the power of love to transform the very knowledge we teach, the very methods we use to teach and learn it. . . . I am calling for a mode of knowing and educating that is prayerful through and through. What do I mean by prayer? I mean the practice of relatedness.

On the one side, prayer is our capacity to enter into that vast community of life in which self and other, human and nonhuman, visible and invisible, are intricately intertwined. While my senses discriminate and my mind dissects, my prayer acknowledges and recreates the unity of life. . . . I reach for relationship, allow myself to feel the tuggings of mutuality and accountability, take my place in community by knowing the transcendent center that connects it all.

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On the other side, prayer means opening myself to the fact that as I reach out for that connecting center, the center is reaching for me. . . . In prayer, I not only address the love at the core of all things . . . I begin to realize that I not only know but am known.<sup>12</sup>

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable to you, O Lord our God. Thank you very much.

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<sup>12</sup> Palmer, 10-11.