

Affirmation and Adaptation: Values and the Elite Residential College

SHAPING THE SPACE IN WHICH WE LIVE

SINCE SO MANY OF THE AMERICAN elite residential liberal arts colleges have their origins in the religious imaginations of their founders, to observe such a fact is simply to state a commonplace. In most of the institutions founded before 1900, the most prominent architectural feature of the campus is the college chapel, declaiming in wood or stone the central place accorded the public expression of religion in the life of the school. In many such institutions the geography of the principal quadrangle reflects complementary sitings of the chapel and the library, temples to the twin values of faith and reason by which Christian education in the West has for so long been guided. This shaping of space is most vividly demonstrated in the “New Yard” of Harvard University, since 1936 known as the Tercentenary Theatre. On the northern perimeter of this quadrangle stands The Memorial Church on the site of its predecessor, Appleton Chapel, which had been there from 1855; opposite, on the southern side, is the massive Widener Library on the site of its predecessor, Gore Hall, the old college library that had been built in imitation of King’s College Chapel at Cambridge University. Libraries that look like chapels were an architectural conceit, with perhaps the most famous being the Sterling Memorial Library of Yale University. It is said that the donor wished to contribute to a splendid Gothic chapel at Yale,

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while the University wished a splendid new library: the library was built in the best collegiate Gothic style, the by-then quite aged donor was driven by, she pronounced herself pleased with the splendid new chapel, and everybody was happy.

At Bates College, my alma mater, the college chapel, also inspired by King's College Chapel, Cambridge, was built on the main quadrangle opposite the college library, with residential and academic buildings forming the eastern and western perimeters of the space. When James Buchanan Duke handsomely endowed Trinity College in Durham, North Carolina, and presided over the construction in the 1920s of a magnificent new campus in the collegiate Gothic style, he stated his desire that the whole new space be dominated by a towering church. His wish was followed, and Duke Chapel to this day is the most central and conspicuous landmark of that sprawling campus.

If, in the felicitous phrase with which the president of Harvard confers the several degrees in design, architecture helps to "shape the space in which we live," then simply by looking at so many of our older elite residential liberal arts colleges we are able to imagine both what the founders intended to say about their schools and what is now, for so many of them, the "problem" of that legacy. When in 1974, as the new Preacher to the University at Harvard, I called upon the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, he showed me the view from his desk, an uninterrupted and splendid view of the tower of The Memorial Church. "A beautiful thing," he said; then, only half in jest, he added, "But if we were starting over again, I don't think we'd put it there."

It may seem odd for a discussion on ethics and the liberal arts in the elite residential colleges to begin with an excursus on chapel architecture and siting, but that perceived oddity is simply an example of the problem we face in discussing the nature and destiny of these remarkable and threatened institutions. In the formative days of the institutions it would have been virtually impossible to conceive of ethics apart from the religious dimension of the institution's life, of which, of course, the chapel was the outward and visible sign. Today the chapel is increasingly a symbol not of unity but of division, an all too visible reminder of the parochial and particular sectarian ori-

gins of the school, a cultural liability in the school's necessary positioning of itself to gain market share in an increasingly diverse, multicultural, and secular world. Compulsory courses in the Christian Bible, required attendance at daily and/or Sunday services, and the scholar/preacher/president are all part of a distant past except in those institutions with which most elite liberal arts colleges choose not to compare themselves. All that remains of that inheritance from which most of these schools are descended are the artifactual remains of the chapel, both prominent and forlorn in the center of the campus.

A BROKEN CONSENSUS

This is not an argument for turning back the clock to the religious hegemony of an earlier day; indeed, many colleges define their institutional maturity in terms of their movement away from the often destructive influences of just such a hegemony. The purpose of this essay is to acknowledge that the formative consensus of these institutions and the ethical dimension that flowed from it has been broken, and that for some time there has not been anything to take its place. For what it is worth, the modern American research university has very much defined itself on its own terms in the aftermath of the post-World War II scientific and cultural revolutions, and its culture and the ethical issues associated with it are the subject of studies elsewhere. The elite residential liberal arts colleges have responded to rapid social changes by distancing themselves from their more particular pasts, most noticeably in the role that religion is seen to play in the total mission of the institution, and by fashioning themselves as best they can in the image of the larger secular research institutions. Usually in the name of "raising standards" and "broadening the base," these colleges have largely succeeded in adapting to their own purposes the methods and styles of the larger institutions. A casualty of this wholesale adaptation is often the loss of an institutional character or personality that would justify its existence in comparison with the very places it imitates, and with which it competes.

Increasingly, the elite residential find distasteful the old, and admittedly woolly, distinction between teaching and research. With some notable exceptions, it was widely accepted a generation ago that colleges taught and universities did research. This distinction of function, alas, implied a distinction in quality. The old bromide “Those who can, do; and those who cannot, teach” increasingly became “Those who cannot do research, teach.” Since the flagships of the educational enterprise were the great research universities, colleges where mere teaching was done saw themselves at a disadvantage. “Faculty building” therefore meant supplanting the teaching teachers, products of an earlier and less competitive era, with the best products of the Ph.D. marketplace. Faculty credentials and publication rates increased markedly but at a cost, for the teaching posts were often filled with freshly minted Ph.D.’s who, though exposed to teaching during their graduate student days, were nevertheless the products of a research model of scholarship, and were trained or inclined to do very little else. Many were courted by ambitious liberal arts colleges to fatten up their ranks; many would have preferred to make their careers in the institutions that had trained them, or in institutions very similar to them. Few saw the liberal arts college as a distinct alternative to what they had experienced and endured, and often with the connivance of their new employers they were encouraged to reshape their new college experience in light of their graduate models and ambitions.

Thus, despite the claims of the research-college model so fashionable in the 1970s, many of our liberal arts colleges became small versions of graduate departments often inhabited by people who would rather be in the research university, who saw it as their mission to replicate that environment as closely as possible. The argument was that “good research makes good teaching,” and the teacher who is in the forefront of the field, as demonstrated by grants, frequent publication, and professional awards, would in fact be the best teaching model for undergraduates. The trouble was that in order to adapt the residential college to these new expectations certain changes in the culture were sustained. Some, such as the gradual removal of academic deadwood and the stiffening of intellectual stan-

dards, were a clear gain. Others, however, such as the transference of professorial loyalty from the college to the guild, meant that college culture was more frequently defined and maintained by professional administrators hired for the purpose and often at a remove from the central academic mission of the school. Residential colleges as self-defining and self-perpetuating communities of shared but differentiated endeavor became more and more compartmentalized, thus in effect replicating the worst aspects of the research university model. Among the casualties of this process were the leisure and will necessary to contemplate the social, moral, and spiritual values that would help to shape a shared life.

This transition in the composition and ideology of the elite college professoriate occurred at the very same time that American culture began to recognize profound shifts in its systems of values. By the 1970s, the secularization process of the culture, which had been so vividly documented in the early 1960s by Harvey Cox, was well under way, and few institutions of higher education were immune to those forces. The “culture wars” of the period allowed little time for dispassionate reflection, and most institutions lurched to and fro as they improvised reactions to the latest internal or external crisis. The small residential colleges, which depended for their successful operation upon a genteel consensus and the faithful transmission of tradition from one generation to another, were especially vulnerable to the breakdown of the institutional and individual trust that was characteristic of the period from 1963 to 1973. Notions of civility, deference, and a treasured sense of continuity fell victim to cries for relevance, engagement, and transformation. The natural intensities of closed communities, such as small residential colleges, turned in upon themselves. Old standards of conduct were suspect, and it was difficult in the state of constant crisis for new ones to achieve the necessary consensus to evolve to take their place.

These college troubles all took place within a national and international climate of cultural anxiety, and institutional self-assessment became the order of the day, with significant examination of constituencies, priorities, and identities. It was within this context that educationalists began to ask how both institu-

tions and individuals might learn to be good. Such virtuous questions had been at the heart of the residential college of an earlier day, but they had been anchored in the moral culture that those institutions had derived from their religious identities. Ironically, as those identities became less and less clear, the questions they once were designed to address became more and more urgent.

THOSE WISE RESTRAINTS

I remember vividly the telephone call from Derek Bok. It came on the Monday morning following the “Saturday Night Massacre” in which President Nixon had fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, and Attorney General Elliott Richardson had resigned in protest. The country was on the brink of a constitutional crisis, and the president telephoned me to ask if he might speak to this matter from the pulpit of Appleton Chapel at our daily service of Morning Prayers. He wanted to say a few words about the civic example of his old teacher and colleague, Professor Cox, and he wished to do so in a setting where the moral import of his concern would have resonance; hence, he wished to speak in chapel rather than issue a statement or give a press conference. The arrangements were quickly made, and the president delivered himself of an excellent and edifying moral discourse, which was all the more remarkable in that it was decidedly not the custom of the president to do so in this context. When later I told him that he had acted in the best traditions of his preacher/president predecessors, he was mildly embarrassed.

His concerns, however, did not end with that one performance. He continued to reflect often upon the quality of moral education in American colleges and universities, whereby those whom David Halberstam once called “the brightest and the best” seemed increasingly devoid of a moral or ethical center. If in our secular age religion could no longer be relied upon to perform that function automatically, providing “those wise restraints that set men free,” which many now saw as the function of the law, how could we provide systematic instruction for the young to take up reasoned moral responsibility?

When it came time to review Harvard's creaky "General Education" requirements, President Bok and Henry Rosovsky were determined to address what they regarded as a profound gap in the undergraduate educational experience: instruction in moral education. Certainly there were ethics courses available in the faculties of divinity and philosophy, and religion courses aplenty, widening as the new honors concentration in the comparative study of religion won faculty approval; but there had not been a requirement in ethics or in moral philosophy since before the days of President Charles William Eliot (1869–1909), when such a course was taught over a four-year period by the president himself. It was thus no small thing to propose that what eventually came to be called "Moral Reasoning" be required of all Harvard undergraduates in their first two years of residence.

MORAL REASONING

The case for moral reasoning in college coincided with the development of theories of moral development advocated by such thinkers as Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler, and by educational practitioners such as TheodoreSizer, formerly of Harvard and by the early 1970s headmaster of Phillips Andover Academy. The context of those theories and initiatives was as much shaped by the decline of religious values in the educational experience both of high schools and colleges as it was by the perceived sense of moral ambiguity in the Watergate crisis. Within the environment of an avowed and aggressive secular culture in schools and colleges, particularly in those elite institutions that had moved markedly away from their religious origins, how was it now possible to teach people to be good? The secular values of civility, tolerance, and rationality, long the hallmark of liberal education, seemed on their own incapable of addressing the question of values and the acceleration of the coarsening of both public and academic culture.

Furthermore, a paradox might be observed in the elite colleges' response to this sense of moral disarray. The cultural revolutions of the 1960s and early 1970s, it is said, precipitated

the end of the old residential college principle of *in loco parentis*, the quaint doctrine in which colleges acted in the place of parents with regard to the care and discipline of students. Both parental and institutional authority in this period were subject to ever-increasing assaults, and few residential colleges by the early 1970s would maintain that they had a parental relationship to their students. As the consumer/client model became the controlling metaphor, even the notion of mutual citizenship—also a once-favored model for the relationship between students and their colleges—was eclipsed. Colleges saw themselves as dispensing a product, a liberal education and a marketable degree, and students were no longer older children but young adults, with the assumption that treating them as such meant leaving them alone, imposing upon them minimal institutional restraints, and hoping that by the rigor of the intellectual experience and the tolerance of the social experience they would grow up into reasonable facsimiles not of their parents but of their teachers.

In this context religion ceased to be a public or institutional value and became more a part of the private service industry to which the colleges committed themselves. Thus, chaplains no longer represented the professed values of the institution but became providers of services and counseling on an as-needed basis to students; often, they no longer served at the center of the administration as the president's vicar or alter ego but as one of many professional helpers on the staff of the dean of students. This therapeutic model addressed well the individual and group needs of students in the schools and colleges, but, rather than affirming any institutional commitment to values that transcended the plethora of particularism and individualism, the model served in many ways to emphasize in the name of a much-valued pluralism the cultural divisions that seemed to make impossible, even if desirable, any sense of shared mission and purpose. So, while many institutions could boast of a marked increase in religious activity on their campuses, the institutions themselves would be perceived as having lost their own moral voice and sense of mission, thus making the transition from mission to market, as Richard Hawley of the University School in Cleveland puts it, complete.

The paradox, however, is this: in this very period it was the students who called for their schools to take the moral lead and to provide exemplary institutional leadership for the moral life. Instances of this occurred in the mid-1960s, when students in privileged institutions asked for a public commitment to the civil rights movement, for example, insisting upon student and faculty exchanges with black colleges and arguing for increased minority enrollments in predominantly white schools. The initiative in nearly all of these instances came from the students, who invariably provoked their institutions to action. The cause of civil rights was supplanted by the antiwar movement, in which students defined as the moral issue of the day the case of the war in southeast Asia, stimulated no doubt by their own combined sense of moral outrage, social guilt, and personal anxiety. The colleges—and particularly the elite residential colleges, with their liberal values, their sense of rational and open discourse, and their humanistic hospitality to ambiguity—became the social laboratories for a form of public moral discourse that in many ways they were ill-suited to manage. As institutions withdrew from the preaching of values, students seemed to demand that very thing from them.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In more recent times we have witnessed student demands for institutions to take more forthright positions on such things as campus drinking, smoking, and sexual conduct, provoking many a seasoned administrator to wonder if this represents a move to reinstate some of the once-discredited social legislation by colleges that was jettisoned a generation ago in favor of what was thought to be institutional and individual social liberty. More and more, presidents, deans, and governing boards are being asked not only to define the moral mission of the institution but to define and manage the moral climate of the campus. Students appear to want to retain all of their hard-won autonomy, while at the same time insisting that institutions assume a moral responsibility for protecting them from the consequences of that autonomy. In this respect, perhaps, the institutional crisis

in the relationship between private rights and public responsibilities may well reflect that of the larger culture.

Part of the difficulty is, of course, the climate of expectation created by the elite residential liberal arts colleges. In order to differentiate themselves from the larger and more anonymous research institutions, such colleges have cultivated their idyllic images as small and intensely caring communities where individuals both count and flourish, and where all of the institutional resources are brought to bear for the benefit of the individual student. In expensive imitation of the old fast-food slogan, such institutions seem to be saying, "We Do It All for You." Parents are promised it, students expect it, and institutions commit themselves to it. Such expectations suggest that the elite residential liberal arts college may create expectations that cannot possibly be met: stress-free, hurt-free, self-actualizing, and affirming communities of achievable ambition that are maximally secure, noninterfering, and nonjudgmental just may not be possible, no matter how efficiently run or handsomely endowed.

It has also become impossible because the elite residential college is "a house divided," as Ernest L. Boyer put it in *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*;¹ and a house divided against itself, as Jesus pointed out and Lincoln famously quoted in his Cooper Union speech, cannot stand. Archibald MacLeish in 1920 observed, "There can be no educational postulates so long as there are no generally accepted postulates of life itself."² Colleges appear to be searching for meaning in a world where diversity, not commonality, is the guiding vision.

DIVERSITY AND PURPOSE

If elite residential colleges have a consensus on anything in addition to the rationale for their own survival, it has been on the values and virtues of diversity as an institutional goal. It would be an interesting study to trace when this concept first emerged as an educational mantra, but by the mid-1970s in those institutions with which I was most familiar it was a goal so frequently and fervently espoused as to take on the nature of a sacred cow, immune to criticism or examination. Those who

did risk a challenge to the concept were consigned to the ranks of the sentimental or self-interested old guard, who refused to recognize the new demographics of America and longed for the old boy network of the past. The great conundrum of diversity, however, was not in its variety but in its purpose.

For what end was this new and diverse student population created? What purpose, other than statistical, was to be achieved by the new diversity? Would the new diversity render any such shared purpose impossible? Another of our educational paradoxes was that diversity became the ambitious goal of the residential elites at the very point where those institutions seemed less and less secure about their meaning and destiny. Thus, communities of diversity came either to confront or replace any sense of shared communal purpose that was defined not by those admitted but by that into which they were admitted. This dilemma perhaps accounts for the fact that the two most typical institutional self-defining statements, the matriculation address and the baccalaureate sermon, have become such bland parodies of their former selves. The typical welcome address to new students can be summarized in the pious hope of Rodney King that “we all just get along”; and the baccalaureate sermon, when given by an insider rather than by an outsider to the institution, wishes the candidates luck despite their college experience. In most schools these are the only two occasions in which the class is assembled in some semblance of academic convocation, the first occurring when the students are too inexperienced to know what they are getting into, and the second when it is manifestly too late to do anything about it. No wonder presidents and deans are at a loss as to what to say or to do on those occasions.

This was not always the case, as any old collection of “College Talks,” “University Sermons,” or “Presidential Addresses” will testify. It would be no waste of time to consult some of these, now consigned to the archives and libraries of teachers’ colleges and education schools, to see how visions and tasks were once articulated; and it would not be so much an exercise in institutional nostalgia as it may seem, for by such a project one might begin to ask how we would articulate our goals and ambitions under these modern and difficult circumstances in the

way our predecessors addressed their moments and opportunities. To do so with a particular attention to the relationship between private opportunity, public responsibility, and liberal values in a material and secular world might prove an instructive lesson.

As early as in 1910, William Jewett Tucker, president of Dartmouth College, recognized the gathering burden upon the residential liberal arts college to “assume the responsibility for the very considerable amount of intelligent but unquickened life in a prosperous democracy,” if schools were only concerned with the pure stuff of scholarship. According to Tucker, though, the age demanded a larger duty, a “social duty,” as he called it. “The method of discharging this social obligation, of quickening, that is, the sense of personal power in the average college student, is,” he noted, “one of the most perplexing questions of college administration.”

Difficult as it is to provide the means and facilities for instruction, it is still more difficult to insure the moral supports of instruction. The intellectual impulse is seldom sufficient for the proper demands of the intellectual life. The rightly adjusted will, and the motive, are essential elements in the intellectual growth of the college man. Furthermore, it must be considered that the process of moral education in our colleges is very largely that of the education of the individual through the mass, a slow, hard, and often unsatisfying process, but one for which this is no equivalent, for which there can be no substitute. The average student will not be made better except by the use of such motives and influences as are able to lift the whole body of which he is a part.³

Having defined the problem, Tucker notes, “The Sunday Vesper service in Rollins Chapel at Dartmouth gave me while president of the college the unusual opportunity of attempting to supply to some degree what I have called the moral supports of instruction.” Mere sermons, the secular age responds; and what modern college president in the age of the shrinking college presidency has either the time or the inclination to submit himself and his thoughts to a weekly or even quarterly hearing of the community? These concerns notwithstanding, perhaps the luxuries of an earlier age might provide some stimulation for the necessities of the present. Tucker took on a

four-year series, addressing a different topic to each entering class, “designed to emphasize the distinctive objects of college training.” In his first talk he spoke of the obligation of the college to “train men to become gentlemen.” In the second year he asked, “Are the colleges of today sufficiently honoring the claims of pure scholarship?” In the third year he spoke of “the relation of the American college to citizenship”; and in the final year he proposed to consider the question “Are our colleges now producing under other forms the equivalent of that altruism which, at the origin of the older colleges, found its immediate and most vivid expression in religious consecration?”⁴

It is instructive to note that Tucker made these addresses at the beginning of each college year rather than at the end; and while their conclusions did not substitute for institutional policy, they did communicate the institution’s public musings and consideration of its work in the face of those young and formative students who had come to share life as temporary members of an ancient community.

MORAL EDUCATION AND WISHFUL THINKING

Forty years ago, in his baccalaureate sermon to the class of 1959, Harvard’s president, Nathan Marsh Pusey, preached on the subject of “College Education and Moral Character.” A historian of his own college and of his predecessors in office, Pusey spoke of the early goals of Harvard and its sister institutions, which included the advancement of religion, the training of the mind, and the development of moral character. This emphasis on moral training and the cultivation of character, while central to the earlier enterprise, would by 1959 seem strange and unfamiliar. Pusey observed, “We tend almost instinctively to shy away from the subject, or at least to pass by it in silence.”⁵ Pusey, it should be remembered, was speaking not simply from his experience as president of a university that since 1886 had been known as “godless Harvard,” but out of an earlier and distinguished tenure as president of Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, a small elite residential liberal arts college. In his sermon Pusey gave a brief account of the history of instruction in moral philosophy, a task that usually

fell to the president, and he noted the work of Francis Wayland of Brown University, who “devoted three weeks of his course to the subject of slavery, speaking sharply in favor of emancipation in 1849, at a time when a fourth of his class were southerners.” Pusey then put the question:

For several generations this course was taught in many colleges by men of conviction whose conviction was itself contagious. The question I would set before you today is this: “Where in our college has this course gone?” Clearly the president does not teach it—certainly not in a baccalaureate! Nor does anyone else, by himself.⁶

Somewhat wistfully Pusey answered his own question, at least in part, by suggesting that “. . . students, teachers, all of us, with those who have been here before us—together perhaps do. From the beginning this course set for itself aims which cannot be taught, but they can be learned, and it is my belief that, as in an earlier day, so they continue to be learned here now.”

Was the collective “we,” however, even at Harvard, capable of the ambitious goals of the old course in moral philosophy, which was intended to “instill into the minds of youth . . . the principles of morality and rectitude which will give them a true and happy direction in the pursuit of all public and private virtues, and by the exercise of which they may become useful to themselves, good members of society, and ornaments to their country”?⁷ It was Pusey’s hope that this was the case. In his baccalaureate sermon to the class of 1962, entitled “The Quality of Life,” he would return to this theme in an expression of the college’s expectations of its graduates:

What Harvard wants more than anything now to give to our country and the world is educated men and women of character. It is her hope that there will develop here generation after generation, now as in the past, thoughtful men who through their beliefs and actions will go on to renew and strengthen true quality in the world’s life; men and women of knowledge and faith who, ready to learn from others, will make an effort at honest appraisal of their culture, will recognize both its strength and its weakness, will try to see these aspects separately and fairly, and who then, not complaining, or criticizing unreasonably, or turning away in su-

percilious indifference, will steadfastly set about working where they can—first of all perhaps with themselves—to improve that culture and to make not its shabbiness but its goodness available to others.⁸

The sentiment is noble and honorable, splendidly put, but doomed. First, such instruction and inspiration, difficult to sustain under the best of circumstances, is almost impossible to sustain by self-generation and osmosis. People do not teach themselves to be good. Secondly, the sentiment seems like a final appeal to a reasonable hope in the face of an impending apocalypse, “a little cloud like a man’s hand rising out of the sea.”⁹ Within a very few years the notion that colleges had a common set of values beyond teaching, research, and survival, and an institutional moral responsibility to shape the character of their students, would be regarded as antique.

MORAL EDUCATION AND A NEW OPPORTUNITY

It would be reassuring to believe that what was less and less possible in such great research institutions as Harvard and the state universities was still a viable and cherished ideal in the small elite liberal arts colleges. As we have seen throughout the course of the last century, however, such colleges have often chosen to define themselves in imitation of the research model, taking their conduct of scholarship, appointments and promotions, and institutional identity from the larger model. The result has been a general blurring of distinctions between the function of these residential elite schools and the larger institutions from which they receive their instructors and to which they would send their best graduates. With regard to the particular role of moral education, of which ethics is a part, while it is both regrettable and understandable that the modern secular research university—with some notable exceptions in graduate and professional education—generally does not pretend to instruct in this area of responsibility and is perhaps not well suited to do so, it is unfortunate and self-defeating for the residential elites not to claim a particular responsibility in this area of education, which often is consistent with both the

historic mission of such institutions and a felt need of society. In other words, taking up once again the cause of moral education in the undergraduate experience might be a key strategic move in establishing for the residential elites a unique and marketable identity in contemporary American higher education.

CONCLUSION

From this examination of values and the elite college model, several points emerge as particularly salient. Most importantly, if the residential liberal arts college wishes to see itself as “the conscience of American undergraduate education,” it will have to embrace as central to its distinct mission the formation of conscience in all of those committed to its care. It will have to adapt the historic function of moral education to the contemporary needs of the residential liberal arts college. Contrary to certain libertarian views of the college as a value-free arboretum for private individual development, the liberal arts college must be prepared to reassume its responsibility for helping to shape values, recognizing that while moral education has as its objective the development of morally responsible citizens and individuals, moral education is too important an institutional and societal value to be left in its entirety to individual and private cultivation.

Diversity can no longer be seen as an institutional or societal goal in itself, but must be regarded as a means to include a diversified population in shaping shared goals to enhance the quality of our common life both in college and in the wider world. Schools with a distinct religious heritage should not be embarrassed by that heritage or seek to distance themselves from it in a misguided attempt at pluralism. While welcoming a variety of religious experiences to the college, the college’s own religious inheritance ought to be affirmed as a way of reclaiming the moral dimension of undergraduate education. The issue of religion as an element in institutional moral discourse should at the very least be discussable.

The promise of “community” as a distinguishing feature of the residential elite colleges must be understood as more than

institutional neutrality in the face of self-defined communities. Proximity in itself is not a virtue, and the institution must be prepared to define and defend its own value system while seeking quite explicitly to influence and enhance the value systems of its members. Codes of conduct are less important than the climate of instruction and living. In other words, institutional expectations must be articulated early, regularly, indeed frequently, in ways that promote discussion and reflection across the constituencies of the college. Thus occasions for public assembly should be cultivated apart from the opening assembly for new students and the commencement exercises. These need not be “chapel” in the old compulsory sense of religious exercises, but if community is to be more than a marketing device or a collection of semi-autonomous affinity groups, then the community must be gathered and seen to be gathered on some regular basis. The small residential colleges still can achieve some version of the assembly with a far greater chance of success than the universities. If the colleges are “too busy” to orchestrate such gatherings, or have other priorities, then what the college is spending its time doing should be reevaluated and a new scale of priorities identified. In such areas the president perhaps more than any other single individual must be prepared to give leadership, although the responsibility for setting the climate must not be left to the president alone. Chaplains, deans, and professors, together with professional staff, must share in the shaping and maintenance of a climate in which moral education can take place at many levels. The “quality of life” issues in the residential elite colleges are too important to be left alone to the administration or the professionals, and hence some way must be found to reintegrate a system of faculty citizen-teachers at the core of the life of the institution.

While curricular revision is second only to calendar reform in assuring institutional inertia and illustrating the intractability of conflicting interests in the residential elite liberal arts college, the present market and identity crisis may provoke these schools to consider their unique contributions to higher education. Moral education may be that ingredient that will help give a renewed definition of purpose to such institutions. The intel-

lectual challenge will be to develop a course of instruction that is not exclusively curricular, that addresses the college's commitment to moral education in the new century as the old combination of chapel, presidential discourse, and instruction in moral education served in the last century. Given the complexity of the residential college community in both faculty and student body, the demands of such a task cannot be underestimated; and given the fact that the very existence of the residential liberal arts college is likely to be less and less secure, no effort, including this one, should be regarded as beyond the institution's competence.

Questions of values, virtue, and morality have become of greater importance to the national discourse in the past quarter century. Leadership is required to help shape the conversation on these topics, and a natural place to turn for leadership and guidance in these areas is to the places where the discussions first took place: the elite residential liberal arts colleges. Their institutional heritage, their size, their relative wealth, the humanistic traditions that still guide their teaching and research, and the surprising degree of confidence that the general public still reposes in such institutions make liberal arts colleges an essential ingredient in making better citizens and better lives.

Perhaps after the fashion of much of postmodern architecture, the elite residential liberal arts college may well find that its best move forward requires a step or two backward in an adaptive reuse of certain of its historic assumptions and responsibilities. The inspiration for such institutional renovations will no longer come from the elite research institutions in whose shadow the liberal arts college has for so long lived in pale imitation. The way of the future for such institutions may well come from a reappropriation of aspects of their past. If older models of moral education no longer work as they once did, the problem is not that this shaping is no longer desirable or even possible, for an ear to contemporary culture will demonstrate that it is very much desired indeed. The ambition of the residential elite college, then, ought to be the reaffirmation of this formative aspect of its mission, and its still-considerable resources—intellectual, moral, and capital—should be devoted to a contemporary adaptation of the goal as cited by President

Pusey, to “instill into the minds of youth . . . the principles of morality and rectitude which will give them a true and happy direction in the pursuit of all public and private virtues, and by the exercise of which they may become useful to themselves, good members of society, and ornaments of their country.”¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹Ernest L. Boyer, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1986).

²*Ibid.*, 3 and note 3 on p. 301.

³William Jewett Tucker, *Personal Power: Counsels to College Men* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), preface, vi, viii.

⁴*Ibid.*, 242.

⁵Nathan Marsh Pusey, *The Age of the Scholar: Observations on Education in a Troubled Decade* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 139.

⁶*Ibid.*, 142.

⁷*Ibid.*, 144.

⁸*Ibid.*, 204.

⁹I Kings 18:44.

¹⁰Pusey, *The Age of the Scholar*, 144.

There is a rusting irony in the reversed fortunes of art and science, already visible in the mid-nineteenth-century writings of scientists. Alexander von Humboldt sadly reflected in 1844 on the contrast between ephemeral science and enduring literature, saying, “It has often been a discouraging consideration, that while purely literary products of the mind are rooted in the depth of feelings and creative imagination, all that is connected with empiricism and with fathoming of phenomena and physical law takes on a new aspect in a few decades, . . . so that, as one commonly says, outdated scientific writings fall into oblivion as [no longer] readable.” By 1917 Max Weber could regard the opposition of transitory science to stable art to be a platitude, one that made it difficult to understand what sense it made to pursue science as a career. Near the end of World War I, addressing an audience of Munich students who desperately wanted him to explain how science illuminated the meaning of life, Weber flatly asserted that science provided no such answers; science could hardly answer the question of what the meaning of a scientific career was. Why should one devote a lifetime of labor to producing a result that “in 10, 20, 50 years is outdated”? Subjective art endured, but objective science evaporated. Weber’s own answer crowned this irony with yet one more. The spiritual motivation and reward for a lifetime devoted to science was exactly the same as for a lifetime devoted to art: science for science’s sake, art for art’s sake, the immolation of the personality in the service of “the pure object alone.” Having disavowed the artistic imagination and having lost the permanence of artistic achievement, science nonetheless aspired to the ascetic single-mindedness of art.

—Lorraine Daston
“Fear and Loathing of the
Imagination in Science”

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