Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts/Phi Beta Kappa, Religion and the Liberal Arts, March 20-22, 2003.

Participants: Stephen Ainlay, Michael Beaty, Michael Birkel, Paula Brownlee, John Churchill, Mauri Ditzler, Margeret Falls-Corbitt, Nathan Hatch, Lucinda Huffaker, Richard Hughes, Stanton Jones, Penny Marker, Esther Merves, Warren Nord, Julie Reuben, Mark Schwehn, James Hunter. [Hunter was present only for the keynote lecture, which he gave on March 20, 2003, and the first morning session on March 21.]

Center of Inquiry recorders: Anne Bost, Ed Chan.

Session 1 (7:30-8:30am, 03.21.03; recorder=Bost):

The morning’s discussion began with James Hunter’s brief summary of the main themes from his keynote address given on March 21, 2003:

1. Liberal arts education (LAE) should address moral philosophical questions such as “What is the good society?” and “What does it mean to live a good life?” In order to understand the role of religion in LAE’s quest to seek answers to these questions, it is fruitful to consider not only the history of religion’s role in LAE but also the arguments of moral philosophy that have contextualized religion’s role.

2. To do this, one needs to frame coherently the questions in a way that is accessible to the different individuals in the academic community, and/or in the community at large. Four obstacles hinder the building of such a framework: 1The lack of a common “language” that transcends disciplinary barriers to facilitate discussions about basic human questions, 2the challenge of a “disillusioned skepticism” that inhibits the forming of shared ideals among those in the liberal arts community, 3the commodification of knowledge, and 4the politicization of moral understanding in the liberal arts (which conflates moral questions with political position taking and obviates our need to take one another seriously and to ask difficult questions).

3. In light of these obstacles, we as educators should think about what kind of young people we want to see produced by higher education, and how educational institutions can understand their larger mission in relation to civil society issues. This will then enable us to have a more purposeful dialogue about the role of religion or religious studies in developing our students.

Using this summary as a springboard, the participants considered how to follow through with Hunter’s proposal, given that the answers to the moral philosophical questions, the definition of liberal arts education, and the specific traits desirable in liberal arts students are all contested. Hunter suggested that perhaps the starting point of unity on these issues is to recognize how various moral communities or traditions differ, and then to focus on what shared values those communities have in common. For example, people from different religions might come to the conclusion that they should be committed to benevolence and justice and be opposed to racism, even though the religions might use different theological logics to reach the shared conclusions. Drawing from the rationales of various faith traditions can therefore provide depth to society’s moral commitments,
by making available a larger set of resources that would be available in only one faith tradition. In the same sense, religious studies can be a “source” for sustaining a liberal arts education, by providing students with a rich awareness of the traditions and factors that shape us as human beings, as well as providing a context for students’ self conscious reflections on how their own views have been influenced by the world they have inherited.

Having briefly considered how religion might play a role in liberal arts education (and noting that religion is bound to become an issue when classroom discussions focus on moral differences), the conversation turned to whether today’s liberal arts educators are equipped adequately to talk about the particularities of different religious traditions. Hunter initiated the debate with a bold proclamation that many educators are “moral eunuchs” who don’t believe that “why” questions such as “Why is there evil?” or “Why should I be good?” are important; in his opinion, these educators do not seem to want to be equipped to use religious topics to help students answer such questions. Warren Nord responded that perhaps the lack of awareness of how to use religious studies to help liberal arts students ask “why” questions is due not to a “romantic individualism” of professors but more so to a shift toward looking to science rather than religion for meaning. Thus, if the reliance on modern science is the underlying problem, the “disillusioned skepticism” mentioned in Hunter’s keynote address could actually be useful to the extent that it deflates the scientism and allows other views to contribute to conversations about life’s largest philosophical questions. Yet, as Hunter rejoined, the balance of scientism and skepticism must be kept in check, since each has potential positive and negative impacts. Scientism, for all its conflict with the romanticist views of the Enlightenment, can be helpful in initiating debates about truth and meaning; but, its utility in this realm is limited by the larger political environment which stifles what could potentially be useful deliberations informed by both scientific and religious thought.

The session concluded with a short exchange on the importance of “complexifying” the views of faculty members on topics outside of their disciplines. If, as was suggested above, an understanding of the foundational principles of different religions can be an effective pedagogical tool even in classes outside the religion department, then liberal arts educators should work to make sure their knowledge of these principles is well grounded. In other words, although faculty need not subscribe to a particular religious belief or be experts in religion(s), they should not fall prey to the temptation to limit their comments about religious traditions to clichés or trite remarks. Rather, we as an academic community should aspire to apply the same intellectual rigor to conversations on topics outside our own disciplines as we would to topics within our areas of specialization. To do less is to give students the impression that intellectualism may be restricted to one’s declared area of interest and need not be applied when trying to approach questions of meaning from multi-disciplinary angles.
Following self-introductions by each of the participants, Stephen Ainlay emphasized that the issue of the role of religion in education is important for many different kinds of higher education institutions, and that the weekend’s conversation should not be marginalized only to church-affiliated schools. Richard Hughes built on this observation by presenting an opening question about liberal arts education in general: If religion is a source for sustaining the liberal arts (as indicated in Session #1), in what ways is this the case? Answers varied and were constrained by different perceptions of liberal arts education. For example, from the viewpoint that liberal arts education should introduce students to a variety of disciplines and views of the world, the study of religion(s) can be important for helping students understand how others think (or have historically thought) about the world—yielding a “broad” education. However, if the goal of liberal arts education is viewed not only as “breadth” but also as developing personal “depth,” then an existential dimension is introduced. In this case LAE has a “moral requirement” to encourage students to think critically across disciplinary boundaries so that they can “make sense of their lives existentially.” Such critical thinking includes understanding how others in the past have faced this challenge, and—since religion has historically been a common element in humanity’s search for purpose—liberal arts education should include religious studies in order to “root students in traditions existentially” so they can both make informed decisions about opportunities available to them, as well as reform traditions. On the other hand, the role of religion in LAE might differ considerably if LAE’s primary goal were to create teachers/preachers/societal servers or to cultivate citizens for a liberal democracy or to generate refined “sophisticated cosmopolitans.” The role would be even more different if LAE were perceived to aim at developing individuals who live according to certain world views of a “good society,” for instance, as developing Christians who abide by Christianity’s philosophy of justice, or Muslims who obey the societal laws of Islam, etc. In sum, the primary point was that one’s view of the goals of liberal arts education dramatically alters one’s view of the role that religion should (or could) play in such an education. Thus, there are two ways to ask the question that began the session: 1) Given a certain view of liberal arts education, what is the role of religion in that education; or, 2) What does the role of religion in different forms of liberal arts education tell us about the goals of liberal arts education in general?

The rephrasing of the original question naturally led to considering the effects of institutional pluralism in LAE. This, in turn, sparked reflections on how perceptions of liberal arts education’s goals historically have influenced the kinds of questions addressed by LAE. Julie Reuben noted that with the scientific revolution, LAE became dominated largely by a scientific model of investigation. This change “left some questions behind.” Specifically, there was a temptation to emphasize less the questions of moral or religious impact since these were not answerable by scientific methodologies. Herein lies another potential role of religious studies in liberal arts education: Identifying a poorly tapped reservoir of worthwhile questions. Thinking about how religious traditions have posed questions and accepted answers to those questions (and how they decided which questions and answers were of intellectual value) can expand students’ conceptions of what knowledge is reliable and why it is counted as reliable. In addition, as Lucinda Huffaker suggested, some of the procedures we often use to critique religious
frameworks may be useful ways of examining and critiquing scientific frameworks. It is therefore important for LAE educators to determine what resources or methods may reside in a religious rather than scientific perspective. Similarly, it is important that LAE students are equipped with analytical tools from scientific and religious traditions. In Mark Schwehn’s words, religion may be important for introducing students to “alternative epistemologies” that would not be evident in a purely scientific worldview.

Given these thoughts on the role of religion in liberal arts education, participants next spoke of practical ways in which this type of education could (or should) be implemented in the classroom. Again, proposals were wide ranging. From one side of the room came a suggestion that another role for religion in LAE was to allow students to actually experience the religion—not just to study different forms of religious traditions, but to try one on and become personally committed to a set of beliefs, to gain an understanding of a “transcendent experience.” From another side rose the assertion that religion (like other disciplines) should be taught conversationally, always in communication with other parts of the academy; that religion should be taught “as part of a liberal arts education and not doctrinally.” Another quoted Eva Brann’s idea that liberal arts education is to excite and thrill, and only topics that do this are appropriate for liberal arts education. Obviously, these proposals are not necessarily in conflict, but they do highlight a potential conflict present in all disciplines within the liberal arts: To what extent are disciplines taught with the (perhaps secret) hope that students will accept the worldview of the particular disciplinary field? Do scientists teach students about science only so they will understand the world, or do they hope to ignite passion in the students to become scientists? And is a Chemist with a certain favored hypothesis about a yet untested area able to teach about other possibilities without dogmatism? Such questions are relevant to all disciplines, including religion. The water is made even murkier by disagreement on key terms in the dialogue. What does “teaching dogmatically” mean? Even with general agreement on the benefit of conversations among those who believe fundamentally different things about meaning in the world, there is little agreement on how these conversations can be mediated in the context of liberal arts education. As Stanton Jones asked: Which is dogmatic, the assumption that there are right and wrong answers, or a certain unquestioning process by which religion is often taught? Can a devout Mennonite teach from his own perspective and thereby facilitate a deep conversation about others’ different views? Is that dogmatic? Can this type of teaching find a role in liberal arts education?

The session ended with encouragement to continue this conversation during the lunch break, as well as in the Session #3.
Stephen Ainlay began the session by dividing participants into three breakout groups.

Group 1: Julie Reuben, Margaret Falls-Corbett, Michael Beaty, Penny Marler, and Richard Hughes
Group 2: John Churchill, Mauri Ditzler, Paula Brownlee, Lucinda Huffaker, and Mark Schwen
Group 3: Michael Birkel, Warren Nord, Esther Merves, Stanton Jones, and Stephen Ainlay

Each group met for approximately one hour to discuss the following questions:

1. Are faith commitments and academic excellence at odds with one another?
2. What place, if any, does the cultivation of religious belief have in the academy?
3. Can such cultivation occur in “academic institutions of the first order?”
4. What is the appropriate relationship between faith and learning in the liberal arts?
5. What is the place of faith-based scholarship?

Upon returning, a representative from each group presented summaries of the group’s discussion. [Note: these summaries also include comments made by other group members and the other participants during the reporting.]

Group 1 report (Julie Reuben)
The group focused mainly on Christian/religious institutions and felt that certain religious traditions are able to integrate scientific work more easily than others. This ability is largely determined by an institution’s attitude toward the sacred and the secular. Why do we tend to assume a conflict between religion and science? The group identified dogmatism as an attitude toward other people, on the one hand, and subject matter, on the other, as well as toward a notion of fixed beliefs. Can dogmatic religions accommodate modern notions of openness to both others and the process of inquiry? Religious traditions do exemplify a certain notion of openness—namely, respect of transcendence and infinity. Nevertheless, do dogmatic religions have difficulty combining faith and learning? Religious traditions should be able to combine the two if they have an attitude of humility, willingness to engage (not attack), and a generosity toward non-believers (i.e., not seeking conversion and consensus). The group also discussed how an institution’s religious investments affect the hiring of faculty. In one sense, how an institution conducts its hiring represents how fixed that institution’s beliefs are.

The group decided that all liberal arts instruction should be characterized by openness. Yet, an open attitude takes confidence and courage. There is a legitimate concern
for not offending and being open, but this often translates into an excuse for an institution
[or a scholar?] not putting its convictions out in the open. Furthermore, there are differences in piety across traditions that need to be considered, as well as scholarly traditions, such as exegesis, particular to certain traditions. Judaism was held up as one example of a religious tradition able to balance a tradition of learning with orthodoxy. How a given religious tradition negotiates these two principles determines whether an institution can be open to other viewpoints. Nevertheless, the question remains, what makes one set of fixed beliefs unable and others able to be open?

The discussion then moved into a comparison between modern secular universities and religiously affiliated institutions. There are clear and fundamental differences in attitude between the two. As one example, modern universities do not hire with a litmus test and will defend intellectual freedom over religious tradition. One participant raised the question of whether a position against racism is parallel to religious dogma. Michael Beaty suggested that you “can’t distinguish between good guys and bad guys.” Religion is not the only dogmatic position; the modern university can also be dogmatic. For example, there are secular refusals to be open to religious beliefs like “intelligent design.” Secular institutions are fixed in a “constituent” sense rather than a religious sense [Note: participants seemed to use the term “constituent” in a technical way, which the recorder was not familiar with]. There are still significant differences between religious and constituent beliefs—one factor being method of inquiry. Yet, there is still a notion of “Truth” based on current evidence.

Richard Hughes questioned the phrase “fixity of beliefs,” which might be misleading. The issue is not maintaining a particular belief-system but rather how beliefs can be revised without abandoning them. Is the attitude toward beliefs flexible or only sacred?

Esther Merves pointed out that asking students to learn about “the Other” is part of what higher education does, on the basis that only by knowing and experiencing the Other can one learn about oneself. Stephen Ainlay continued the thought by pointing out that the Jesuit tradition has been successful in this area; in this tradition, inquiry begins with understanding others. Julie Reuben asked whether it is possible for institutions to advocate positions in a way that is critical, engaging, and generous to others. Moreover, are those activities sufficient in thinking about the requirements of liberal learning?

Michael Beaty posed the question, can Goshen (College) be Goshen if they call their own fundamental beliefs into question? In espousing pacifism as a Mennonite school, does Goshen want their students to be transformed by “just war” theory, for example? If not, does learning about a position that is fundamentally different from an institutional belief (and presumably that of its students) become merely an intellectual exercise? What kind of attitude toward engagement with other beliefs does a student need to have? In response to this, John Churchill noted that there is a specific historical context for the Mennonite position on pacifism at any given moment. It was different in the 1950s than it is now, having evolved in an open way to incorporate liberation theology and so forth. Richard Hughes questioned whether it was the pacifism or the intellectual humility that defined the Mennonite tradition at Goshen. Humility may be the more important value since it allows for self-reflection and self-interrogation.

Margaret Falls-Corbitt wondered what other value judgment is being made in the distinction between openness and fixity. Stephen Ainlay concurred, pointing out that when constituent beliefs coincide with the values of the academy, those beliefs become more
acceptable. Falls-Corbitt imagined trying to create a college devoted to pacifism that hired only pacifists, who could be Buddhist or Mennonite. What is it about having only one religious constituency that is offensive to those who champion value-neutral secular institutions over institutions that are religiously affiliated?

**Group 2 report (John Churchill)**

Group 2 worked primarily on the first discussion question: Are faith commitments and academic excellence at odds with one another? The group noted that the question presumes a tension that may not be appropriate. There are different models that reflect how institutions make faith commitments. Some examples include institutions that retain religious traditions in the co-curriculum, those that infuse religious traditions in the formal curriculum, and those that do neither (e.g., Notre Dame). There are many ways in which institutions with different traditions have negotiated these models. [Someone referred to Mark Schwehn’s typology of Christ from session 4.]

The group also discussed a question raised by Stanton Jones earlier in the colloquy: Most educational institutions do not assume that Truth, as one form of fixed belief, is integral to liberal education—is that a coherent posture for schools to take? On the other hand, is the notion of fixed belief, religious or secular, antithetical to liberal education? This tension between fixed belief and liberal education can, for example, manifest itself through teachers. Faculty members have the ability to disclose religious convictions in public (research or teaching). Faculty members can use personal religious commitments in justifying conclusions about an issue or making arguments in the presence of students. This ability raises questions about the place of teachers and scholars within an enterprise devoted to intellectual discovery. In addition, there is an issue of whether dogmatic faculty position their views out in the open or whether they hide it. Related to this is whether institutions seek faculty who are “out of the closet” with their beliefs or not. To a large degree, the dynamics of faculty disclosure depend upon the type of faculty (religious or secular) that predominates at an institution. Does critical thinking get diminished by either position faculty take?

The discussion then turned to what room exists for faith commitments with learning and scholarship. One question is whether faith commitments emerge through curriculum or through a discipline. There is the Newman model of a department of theology, which can be either assertive or exploratory. Whichever mode the department engages, the question is whether it is in line with the institution’s commitments. There are limits to openness within the Jesuit tradition when issues become more debatable. Someone asked whether there are specific models in existence to consider. One distinction occurs between religious studies departments and theology departments; the former is more exploratory and is under different constraints than the latter, which is more assertive. At a Jesuit institution like Holy Cross, there is nothing necessarily Jesuit about certain constituent beliefs. [Please see previous note on the term “constituent.”] The question remains how one distinguishes between liberal arts values and Jesuit or other values.

**Group 3 report (Esther Merves)**

Group 3 addressed the third question: What is the place of faith-based scholarship? Clearly, faith-based scholarship cannot happen at a public institution. One can approach religion as an object of study at public schools but can neither promote nor facilitate un-
derstanding a religious tradition from the inside. The faith backgrounds of faculty members can and do shape the directions of research; however, using religious categories to determine research or influence teaching would be more problematic. One can study and teach the history of theologians at a public institution but would tend to avoid contemporary theologies and theologians. At the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, different disciplines use different types of texts. The religious studies department tends to use primary texts written from within a religious tradition. Other departments tend to use secondary texts.

Margaret Falls-Corbin wondered whether there was hypocrisy at play in how secular institutions approach faith in relation to scholarship and teaching. Such an institution can hire a Buddhist to teach courses in Buddhism but not a Christian to teach courses in Christianity—this seems to be the case because of the fact that there is a majority of Christians in the U.S. not for intellectual reasons. Another participant responded by raising the issue of historical context: Christianity has traditionally been taught in the U.S. to the exclusion of other religions and there still exists an anxiety about getting away from that history. Falls-Corbin asked whether we are currently in a historical moment in which Christian intellectuals are a majority. If not, is the anxiety about Christian intellectuals obsolete? Warren Nord wondered whether the real question is about categorically separating personal from professional lives, and whether that is a good thing or not. Michael Beaty maintained that institutions are “required” to have other1 representatives to teach their viewpoints, but not Christians.

Stanton Jones called attention to the anxiety of having intellectual debate and inquiry closed off by citing biblical verse. In today’s academy, there is no universal agreement about justification and proof of an argument. Postmodern, feminist, and other forms of critique have called into question the traditional standards of evidence. Does this lead to a simple relativism? Can a discussion about rational standards occur without slipping into relativism in such a climate? Paula Brownlee noted the perception that, particularly with fundamentalist traditions, faith-based research and teaching might not go beyond using the bible to proselytize. She wondered whether this perception is an emotional underpinning to the secular rejection of religious beliefs in the academy and whether or not such a perception is rational.

Another participant raised the recent example of the Texas Tech professor who refused to write recommendations for students without their pledging allegiance to Darwinism. This action assumes that Creationist science is “bad science” and suggests that the Academy cannot accommodate all marginal positions. A professor who is an ideological enthusiast of any kind can be blinded to intellectual development in students. Professors need to recognize when intellectual growth is happening even when it is contrary to what they believe.

The session concluded on the point that the secular Academy is reluctant to talk about religion because it has an embarrassment about the past exclusion of religious faiths other than Christianity—a reluctance that is primarily emotional rather than intellectual.

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1 The word “identity” follows immediately in the original text, but the editor, Ethan Kuhn, couldn’t get his mind around the idea of an “identity representative,” so he omitted it. Perhaps he took too much; ergo, if it actually does make sense, correct it.
Religion and the Liberal Arts
Summary of day 1 review (3/21, 8-9pm)

Stephen Ainlay started off by asking, what were the big questions of the day that the group should discuss the following day?
John Churchill offered the following: How can an institution’s religious commitments help to sustain its liberal arts project (shape, definition, etc.)? He elaborated by saying that the worry was not one focused exclusively on religious commitments but was rather one that pertains to all disciplines: When should we be concerned about an institution’s commitments as inhibiting its commitments to the liberal arts?
Julie Reuben made the point that it was hard to look simultaneously at Christian colleges and secular institutions. The issue might be better stated as, how might each type of institution look at religious commitments? These are perhaps two separate but related projects. It was pointed out that there was only one representative from a public institution at the colloquy (UNC Chapel Hill).
Michael Beaty asked, “Do we know what liberal learning is? And, how does that question connect with the question James Hunter raised in his talk about what a good society is and what role religion plays in creating it? The traditional form of liberal learning was geared toward fostering good citizenship and creating productive members of society. So what is liberal learning for? What is its content?” Michael Birkel added, “If good citizenship is the goal, to what kind of citizenship are we referring (local, global, etc.)?” Once an understanding of liberal learning is established, it is then possible to go on to what role religion plays in liberal learning.

Beaty also asked, “Can the non-particularist definition of liberal learning be legitimately contested? If so, what comes next?” Stanton Jones added that there is a general perception that religion does not have a place in higher education. Can there be a legitimate basis to contest the judgment that religion is not part of higher education? If this contestation could be established, religious institutions would not have to feel like second-class citizens in the higher education landscape. Julie Reuben pointed to the feeling/notion of second-class citizenship as an issue in and of itself. There are stereotypes on either side of the religious divide: The religious are non-intellectual; the non-religious are immoral. How do these two constituencies have a dialogue while being able to bring these preconceptions out in the open? Reuben suggested that it is easier to have the conversation within a community rather than across communities.

Paula Brownlee moved to the issue of moral formation as well as moral education. Where are students in terms of their moral formation when they enter the higher education system? Institutions and faculty make certain assumptions about students’ moral progresses. Traditionally, the family’s role was to teach children what is right and what is wrong, which would then be accentuated in formal education. In addition, there is the further moral training that takes place in graduate school. Margaret Falls-Corbitt asked why there was not a Phi Beta Kappa colloquy explicitly dealing with the liberal arts and moral education. Moral education is not necessarily tied to religion. John Churchill observed that, indeed, moral education has been a consistent theme at the two previous colloquies sponsored by Phi Beta Kappa and the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts (“Essential content of the liberal arts,” and “Are the liberal arts essentially Western?”). This discussion led to the question of what the relationship between critical inquiry and moral
education is. Warren Nord referred back to James Hunter’s talk and the argument that religion has a necessary role to play in moral education and formation.

Mark Schwehn asked if there was a disconnection between religious literacy and academic credentials/training. If so, is this problematic? How should higher education deal with the disconnection? Schwehn noted that when participants at this colloquy allude to written works, the references are not theological sources. The readings provided before the colloquy began also did not contain theological works. Both sets of material are academic accounts rather than primary texts by believers. In general it is rare to draw on theological sources. Even though this group is committed to religious thinking, there still seems to be a reluctance. Stephen Ainlay asked how religious literacy would be defined, noting that students tend to be more interested in spirituality rather than theology and tend to be suspicious of theological sources. The session ended with the observation that the issue of religious literacy might very well go back to a discussion of the group’s understanding of liberal education.
Guiding question for Session #4: Can one be liberally educated without having religious literacy?

In light of Session #4’s guiding question, Mark Schwehn began by describing four ascending theories of the role of religion in the liberal arts:

1. A liberally educated person should have a basic (factual) understanding of different religious traditions.

2. Just as a liberally educated person should be able to “think historically,” he or she should be able to “think theologically” and bring at least one of the world’s theological traditions to bear when thinking about the world. That is, the liberally educated person should be able mentally to step into the shoes of someone from at least one religion and (even if he/she does not subscribe to the religion’s beliefs) consider how the person from that religion would view a question. The distinction between this theory and theory #1 is that this theory requires a student to have religious “tools to think with, not just about.” A student aware of facts about religions but unable to “think theologically” would therefore be lacking an important set of reasoning tools, just as a student who could not think from within one of the other academic disciplines would also not have the “full toolbox” of liberal arts skills.

3. A liberally educated person should be familiar with habits of religion such as prayer and the sense that texts within traditions have something to teach us because they have a claim on us.

4. A liberally educated person should have personally experienced a “transcendent horizon” through a theological perspective; the human project itself has a sense of purpose only if a larger purpose is recognized. [A correlation would be that the project of liberal learning makes sense completely only within the context of theology, since many of our habits of attention, understanding, and community formation originally came from religious communities. Therefore separating liberal arts education from its religious roots would be detrimental to the education.]

Schwehn proposed that most constituents in liberal arts higher education would agree with theory #1 but that many would be uncomfortable with theories #2, #3, or #4. In other words, as the suggestion of a greater extent of personal interaction with theology increases, the comfort level of educators (on average) decreases. Stanton Jones’s subsequent comments exemplified this expectation. Jones supported theory #1 and suggested that theory #2 might be one to aspire toward, although, in doing so one must address the dilemma of professors’ subjectivity in categorizing “good theological thinking” and “bad theological thinking.” With theory #4 came additional challenges. In particular, Jones recommended making a distinction between mandating that LAE students seek to have personal transcendent experiences and accepting such student experiences within a certain range on liberal arts campuses. Herein lay again the issue of what precisely the goals
of liberal arts education are. Is LAE intended to aid students’ journey toward transcen
dent experience; or, is it only to show them different paths so they can think from multi-
ple perspectives? Jones seemed to favor the latter, arguing that LAE should allow indi-
vidual scholars (teachers and students) to include a religious perspective in their teaching
and learning, but without making such inclusion normative.

In contrast, Mauri Ditzler’s view did not follow Schwehn’s expectation. Rather,
Ditzler suggested that at many liberal arts colleges, faculty might be most comfortable
with theory #4 and least with #1. For example, we might ask seniors during their com-
prehensive exams to be able to talk about transcendent horizons and how they have dealt
with life’s big questions on their own (theory #4). Similarly, we might expect them to be
able to think about how texts influence their lives (#3). With theory #2, however, (asking
how a theologian thinks differently than a historian) we would begin to be on thin ice,
since only a few of our students would likely be able to answer this question. Finally,
with theory #1 (asking the student to be able to talk about a religious tradition other than
his or her own) we might find that not many students would be able to do this.

Having heard from several of the faculty participants, the group subsequently asked
the students to respond to the four theories. Josh Tatum noted that directly nurturing a
student’s spiritual formation may be a goal of liberal arts education, and that an addi-
tional goal may be to encourage students to think critically about their own religious be-
liefs. Nick Myers added, “I feel I can’t understand the world I live in without having
some sort of religious foundation . . . Religion is part of the world I live in, and it directs
the choices we make regardless of whether one is personally religious or not.” These and
other comments that indicated the students supported theories #4 and #2, respectively,
and believed in the importance of being able to think theologically, if not also to inter-
nalize some sense of the transcendent.

Julie Reuben’s rationale differed from the Wabash students’. For her, the reason to
include religious studies as part of a liberal arts education is because theology grapples
with a set of questions students should have to face, not necessarily because students
need to be able to think theologically. Thus, there is an intellectual reason for including
discussions of religion in liberal arts education—a theory #1 view. She continued, ponders-
ing the implications and complexities of this view. Assuming that religion should be
included in the curriculum, which religion(s) should be taught? Should theology be
privileged over other topics in a liberal arts education? Should religious studies be insti-
tuted at all liberal arts schools? And to what extent do we want students to arrive at a
particular answer to certain theological questions (verging on theory #4)? To these ques-
tions, Michael Beaty responded that this may be the realm in which institutional plural-
ism is beneficial; i.e., it is probably to LAE’s benefit to have some institutions that agree
with theory #4 and others that do not. John Churchill replied that perhaps there can also
be diversity even within institutions that agree with theory #4, if the theory is understood
to describe students’ reaching individual transcendent horizons as opposed to all arriving
at the same horizon. In this sense, theory #4 mirrors Dwight Eisenhower’s declaration
that “our government makes no sense unless it’s founded on a deep religious faith, and I
don’t care what it is” (paraphrased).

Just when it seemed the group might be reaching some sort of consensus (albeit a
loose one), Warren Nord re-initiated conversation about the distinction between theories
#1 and #2, largely in response to Reuben’s statement that religions should be studied as
content rather than to build students’ theological thinking skills. He asserted that one cannot truly understand religions by any means other than thinking religiously about them. That is, it is important to move students from “a thin version of #1” to theory #2’s approach of teaching students to think religiously about religions. This is particularly important if the aim of liberal arts education is to introduce students to a variety of ways of making sense of the world, as one way of doing this is to make sense of the world religiously. Bridging the gap between Reuben and Nord, Beaty suggested “thinking imaginatively” as an alternative term for “thinking religiously.” In Beaty’s version, the intellectual challenge desired by Reuben (the challenge to face a set of new questions unique to theology) can be met by developing students’ abilities to imagine how someone from within a given religion might perceive a situation or question. Although this is essentially the same process as “thinking religiously,” the language of imagination does not have the connotation of eventually leading a student to a particular theological answer.

As time for the break drew near, Mark Schwehn nicely captured the value of the different perceptions of religion’s role(s) mentioned during this session: As members of the liberal arts educational community, we should agree that questions such as “What is the role of religion in liberal arts education?” are never ironed out. The pluralism of LAE institutions provides a laboratory to view the results of various experiments in which different schools have adopted theory #1, #2, #3, or #4. Continued communication among the different communities will be important for understanding the different conceptions of liberal learning and, secondarily, the role of religion prescribed in each conception.
Most of the early conversation in Session #5 dealt with whether liberal arts education’s primary aim is students’ intellectual, spiritual, or moral development, or a combination of the three. While almost everyone agreed that intellectual development was a central goal of LAE, there was debate about how such development relates to the other types. For some, intellectual development was always to be primary, even though it could exist in parallel with spiritual or moral development if those areas benefited as a side effect. For others, intellectual development was considered inseparable from religious or moral development. This view was especially voiced by representatives of religiously-affiliated colleges who maintained that if one’s primary goal is to serve God (especially God as conceived in the Christian sense) then spiritual growth by definition includes intellectual growth, as one’s faith requires one to think critically about matters of truth and to make decisions accordingly.

The discussion of intellectual development as an essential component of spiritual or moral development led to contemplating the inverse: Is it also true that moral development is an essential part of intellectual development? As Peg Falls-Corbitt phrased the question, does the well developed intellectual life have any moral components in and of itself? She cited examples of “intellectuals who are nasty and uneducated people with strong morals.” She asked if morality is not necessarily a component of the well developed intellectual life, is there any other part of LAE that should address the issue of helping students be more moral? Perhaps this is a role of religious studies or affiliation in LAE?

Warren Nord responded with a historical summary of how the ideas of morality and intellectualism began to be considered as separable, beginning with the scientific revolution. Before the revolution, society was largely understood in religious (or philosophical) categories; almost every culture shared the perception of an indistinguishable morality and intellectualism, believing that some sort of purpose was built into life and that humans as moral beings have the responsibility to live good lives. The scientific revolution brought questioning of the supposition that humans are fundamentally moral beings. Thus, intellectual virtues became distinct from moral virtues, as rationality was equated with science but no longer with faith traditions. In this way, education was unmoored from the religious/philosophical heritage that had once been integral to it. Yet, even though this separation had occurred, liberal arts education still harbored within it the effects of the linkage with religious and philosophical traditions, for the traits of spiritual or moral development (grappling with our existential situation, thinking critically and interacting with others about it) remained. As a consequence, as Julie Reuben pointed out, the intentional separation of intellectualism and religion (“fact and value”) has never been a comfortable solution for the higher education community. Faced with the challenge, the temptation for many modern educators has been to limit “intellectual” consideration to questions that can be addressed scientifically. However, this is an unsatisfactory solution for liberal arts education, which deals with inquiries that inevitably have moral implications. For LAE, then, “moral issues have to be part of how we evaluate our intellectual answers to life’s questions,” and LAE should continue coping with the issue of how moral/religious views interact with intellectual development. Agreeing, Lucinda Huffaker remarked that understanding the origin of one’s “moral center” is an important
self-examining piece of one’s own liberal arts education. Mark Schwehn added that the ultimate questions posed in LAE are the same regardless of whether the route to the answer is via “Socrates or Aristotle or Jerusalem.” For each route, the goal of LAE seems to be to bring students to realize that intellectual issues are intricately tied to issues of morality.

Still intent on identifying the aims of LAE, participants next shifted to debating whether or not liberal arts education intends to teach students how to be counter-cultural. The starting point for the debate was to define “counter-cultural.” This in itself turned into a mini-debate within the larger issue. Is it counter-cultural to encourage students to live according to a faith tradition (the position held by some religiously-affiliated liberal arts colleges), or rather is it counter-cultural to encourage students not to live according to a faith tradition (the position held by those who feel that theists far outnumber atheists)? Is the idea of learning for non-vocational purposes counter-cultural in today’s society? If so, is the very idea of liberal arts education counter-cultural? And what might this imply, or what actions might be warranted in response? Julie Reuben perhaps summarized the discussion best by saying, “I think there are lots of differences of opinion about this.” With that, the session officially ended, although the walk to the dining room downstairs was companioned by lively continuations of the ongoing debate.
Stephen Ainlay outlined two topics for this session: 1) Academic freedom; and 2) The key elements for taking religion seriously and whether there are costs. Reviewing previous sessions of the colloquy, he noted that discussion had covered the curriculum but not really the co-curriculum or strategic hiring practices utilized by religious institutions.

Michael Beaty discussed hiring practices at Baylor. Baylor advertises nationally with job listings containing a clear statement on the institution’s mission statement (faith-informed intellect, intellectually informed faith). As part of the formal application, applicants must respond to Baylor’s mission and vision statements. Applicants are expected to address how they would be able to help Baylor achieve its mission, which is driven by Christian principles. During on-campus interviews, candidates will give a job talk, teach a class, and interview with various administrators (provost, academic dean, department chair), in addition to interviews with the hiring department. The provost asks candidates to describe their journey in faith.

Beaty dubbed Baylor’s hiring practices as “hiring for mission.” While the school welcomes Christians from all sects, as well as those of the Jewish faith, Baylor will not hire agnostics or atheists or those who are Christians in name only. In Beaty’s words, “There is a gate at the end of the procedure.” He believes that Baylor is able to attract better applicants because its religious mission is transparent during the hiring process. Furthermore, there is no reduction in the intellectual rigor of the applicants. Some departments have complained that requiring candidates to affirm the specific religious mission of the College makes it difficult to attract good candidates. As one example, the Philosophy department has made such a complaint based on the particularities of its discipline and the historical tension between modern philosophical thinkers and religion (e.g., Nietzsche). However, the department has since changed its opinion on the matter. Baylor does not rely on advertising positions through The Chronicle of Higher Education, but, instead, proactively pursues outstanding applicants.

One participant asked if Baylor’s mission reduced the diversity of applicants within the pool, to which Beaty replied yes and no. For instance, Baylor will not hire a Buddhist to teach world religion. On the other hand, there is much diversity within the Christian population. Another participant asked, “What is it about the diversity that applicants would bring to Baylor that would conflict with its mission?” The reply was that Baylor has a specific intellectual and moral project. For an institution like Baylor, moral particularities matter. Baylor and other Christian institutions are engaged in a kind of research project involving views and perspectives (e.g., intelligent design) not condoned in secular institutions. Individual piety is not enough; the Baylor faculty has to support this particular intellectual project.

Stanton Jones suggested that the homogeneity of the religious academy is exaggerated, while at the same time the heterogeneity of the non-religious academy is also exaggerated. In contrast to this perception, there is actually substantial intellectual breadth within the religiously informed perspective. In the current situation, feminists and
Marxists are able to proselytize; however, religiously centered intellectuals do not have this ability. Indeed, some academics go to Christian institutions to obtain that freedom.

At this point, the discussion turned toward Phi Beta Kappa, which is a creature of the Enlightenment. During the early and middle parts of the twentieth century, there were characteristic ways of talking about liberal education. There was a content-first model, with disciplines providing content. There were also certain values linked to liberal education, including breadth of understanding and freedom of inquiry or expression. One question is, “What are the conditions that enable freedom of inquiry?” This freedom is something that is not up for argument within liberal education. Phi Beta Kappa does insist on religious diversity. There are, however, limitations on diversity that are more problematic than others. For example, no institution would seek to have a faculty member to represent the Nazi perspective. [Here, someone mentioned a range of representation in faculty models that I didn’t catch.]

One participant argued that there is such a thing as an intellectually sophisticated faith. Part of this includes rigorously encountering the Other, though not necessarily in all forms. Can Christian faculty do justice to Nietzsche or Islam? There will of course be limitations. However, a serious Christian institution that is committed to humility and charity to the Other will be able to do justice to non-Christian perspectives—perhaps even moreso than non-Christian faculty dealing with Christian texts, positions, and so forth.

Mark Schwehn discussed Valparaiso University’s religious commitments. The university is Lutheran on theological grounds, which include values like doing the best one can as an educator, a citizen, and so forth, as well as a horizontal (rather than a hierarchical) relationship between human beings. Valparaiso needs a critical mass of Lutherans in order to maintain its institutional identity. The hiring process resembles Baylor’s; however, they do hire non-Lutherans. In jest, someone mentioned the saying, “It’s better to be ruled by a smart Turk than a dumb Lutheran.” Valparaiso has benefited from the current “buyer’s market” situation in its hiring, a condition that allows them to select faculty who can support their mission. Nevertheless, there are some departments at Valparaiso that have a majority of non-Lutherans. The university works constantly to retain a critical balance of Lutheran and non-Lutheran faculty. At the same time, departmental autonomy does play a role in maintaining that balance.

Warren Nord quoted from the American Association of University Professor’s definition of academic freedom and called attention to its lineage to an Enlightenment-based notion of freedom of inquiry. Does this become an issue in the tenure process at religious institutions? Some replied that it depends on the individual case. Is it a “Don’t ask; don’t tell,” policy? The response was that is not a witch hunt, but rather a process of replacing positions with faculty who will be more sympathetic with an institution’s religious mission, the research project common to all religious colleges and universities referred to by Michael Beaty. Some specific examples were brought up. Someone who renounces her or his faith during the tenure process probably would not get tenure. In the case of someone who has tenure and occupies a position that goes against the institutions mission (e.g., being lesbian or gay), there was no clear sense of what would happen. A participant explained that these questions about the tenure process at religious institutions were part of an extended argument over time that must constantly be faced.
The group then discussed recent efforts by the Catholic Church to define the educational mission of its schools. An exchange on *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* followed. Lucinda Huffaker asked the group for clarification on the requirement of a *manda-tum*—specifically, how this requirement affects the teaching of religion in Catholic liberal arts colleges. Since only Catholic theologians are required to sign it, it does not have much of an effect at Catholic colleges and universities. One participant stated that *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* cannot interfere with the mission of the institution. Huffaker also asked how one’s personal sense of vocation as a scholar intersects with institutional mission. Stephen Ainlay raised the example of Marsden, the author of *The Soul of the American University*. Marsden teaches at Wheaton College and has voiced his view that academic freedom flourishes at Catholic universities. Ainlay also mentioned how Notre Dame conforms to the academy at large but is also allowed to pursue religion, which is not true at a place like Duke University. He continued by explaining that at the College of the Holy Cross applicants must respect the school’s religious tradition and also embrace the mission to ask the big questions; however, they need be neither Catholic nor, for that matter, Christian. He noted that one of the strongest proponents of Holy Cross’s Jesuit mission is not a Catholic but someone with an evangelical background. Holy Cross is completely open in the hiring practice and does not see its commitment to freedom of inquiry in conflict with its religious commitments.

Stanton Jones commented that discussions of academic freedom generally occur in terms of the Enlightenment and individualism. Yet, there is the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment, a critique that views knowledge as consensual and constructed within a community. There is something meaningful about the communal pursuit of knowledge and there is a legitimate role for a community of individuals to construct an intellectual ideal. When faculty members sign statements of identity that support an institutional mission, it is a voluntary act. At Wheaton College, faculty members periodically sign contracts reaffirming their commitment to Wheaton’s religious mission.

Richard Hughes asked whether there might be a conflict of allegiance at play, in terms of academic freedom being in tension with religious principles. It would seem there is a paradox of sorts – the university as a universal place versus the particularity of a religious institution. There are also paradoxical strains within Christianity itself: If God is supremely infinite, is the individual supremely finite? One way to see the Christian position on intellectual pursuit is as an act of searching, since, by definition individuals do not have access to the Truth.

Elaborating on the higher level of academic freedom he felt at a place like Wheaton, which he had mentioned earlier, Stanton Jones said that Christian reflection (its theology and ethics) does not add up to a complete psychology that cannot be questioned. As a psychologist at Wheaton, he is able to critique his previous training in cognitive behavioralism, which he would not be able to do at a public institution since cognitive behavioralism is taken as a complete psychology unto itself. In terms of the academic pub-

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2 “…the certificate that Catholic theologians in religious colleges and universities now must obtain from their bishop. It acknowledges that the recipient is accurately teaching church doctrine. And it is proving to be the most contentious element of Ex Corde Ecclesiae, in which John Paul II outlined the nature of Catholic higher education and its role in the church” (Dennis M. Mahoney, “New Rules Divide Catholic Professors,” *Columbus Dispatch*, Sept 7, 2001).
lishing market, university presses do not deem Christian evangelicalism as a valid perspective.

Warren Nord identified a fundamental tension between institutional and individual academic freedom. At public institutions, this manifests itself in the question of whether faculty members have the individual freedom to take religious positions. This is an issue that the Supreme Court has not addressed. Public elementary and secondary school teachers do not have this individual academic freedom. Moreover, faculty members at institutions of higher education are not agents of the state, so they do not need to be neutral in their views. One example of this tension occurred at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where a professor took the intellectual position that evolution is directed. According to the Dean of UAB this violated the establishment clause. A lower court ruled in favor of the faculty member’s freedom to take such a position. Subsequently, the appellate court overturned the lower court’s decision, favoring an institution’s academic freedom to deny the individual academic freedom of a faculty member to take religious positions.

Stephen Ainlay posed the following question to the group: At a major research university like Harvard or UNC Chapel Hill, starting from scratch, how would you build the faculty in light of the ideals of liberal learning? One participant suggested that a professor could not do as good a job teaching facets of the Catholic faith if that professor was not Catholic. One question that arose was whether, in terms of society as a whole, we need to allow restrictive hiring practices based on institutional commitments. In other words, do the liberal arts need to have institutions with particular identities (and a faculty that corresponds to each of those identities) in order to represent the full range of intellectual perspectives? One qualification on an institution only espousing intellectual positions based on its religious perspective is that essential to being Catholic is an incorporation of non-Catholic positions into one’s thinking and learning. At the same time, there can be too much otherness incorporated into institutional practice. Those who are aggressively against religion can undermine an institution’s mission. Again, there is the issue of maintaining a critical mass of those who fervently support the mission. Yet, the question remains, what crosses the line in terms of respect for one’s institution?

Julie Reuben raised the issue of who actually gets restricted in terms of academic freedom. Is political correctness exaggerated, especially in popular culture, in terms of who feels restricted or not? Then, returning to Ainlay’s question, Reuben hoped that a major research university could take the principle of humility to heart, especially necessary at a place like Harvard. In terms of academic freedom, she asked if a distinction needed to be made between liberal arts institutions and research institutions, the latter’s primary mission being to create new knowledge. Does the issue of academic freedom play out differently at these two kinds of places?

Warren Nord pointed to the legalities surrounding the relationship between academic freedom and one’s discipline. In the 1960s, faculty members were fired for their political activism. Arguing before the Supreme Court, they claimed their academic liberties on the civil liberties model. The Supreme Court upheld the protection of academic freedom for these faculty members on the basis that the actions fell outside of their academic disciplines. [Does this contradict another discussion in the final wrap-up session on this topic, where academic freedom only protects comments made within the context of one’s field?]
Richard Hughes ended the session with an example from Pepperdine University. Some students who were awarded scholarships subsequently turned away from the Church of Christ. The principles of academic freedom would seem to grant students the right to change their religious affiliation. However, this still poses a problem for a religious institution trying to maintain its particular identity.
Religion and the Liberal Arts
Summary of final wrap-up (3/22, 8-9pm)

During the previous session, Stephen Ainlay had asked for volunteers to try to synthesize the discussions that had taken place during the colloquy as a way to provide some closure for the final session. Mark Schwehn, Julie Reuben, Michael Beaty, and Margaret Falls-Corbin agreed to perform this task.

Mark Schwehn’s Synthesis
Schwehn posed four questions that drew various discussion points together:

1) Does any coherent and compelling account of liberal education depend upon both a teleological account of human nature and commitment to the close interdependence of moral and intellectual virtue?

2) To what extent does the sustenance of liberal education in the United States depend upon a diversity of communal articulations and practices of liberal education itself? And, is it possible to have a standard of excellence that is sufficiently flexible to assess and support such diversity?

3) Must a student be required to inhabit at least two religious positions, both cognitively and imaginatively, in order to be liberally educated in the fullest sense?

4) Can liberal education be defined in part by having a subject matter composed of fundamental questions that transcend disciplinary boundaries? If so, can the inclusion of religion in the liberal arts curriculum be seen as one of the ways, perhaps the best way, to ensure the engagement of this subject matter?

Julie Reuben’s Synthesis
Reuben began by establishing that there are different ways of practicing and conceiving liberal arts education. One commonality, however, is engaging students in serious intellectual inquiry. There were three positions on the relationship between religion and the liberal arts that stood out. One view represented at the colloquy held that knowledge and study of religion are both consistent with liberal arts education and should ideally be part of the curriculum and co-curriculum. In another view, knowledge of religion and theology is a necessary part of liberal arts education. From the third perspective, liberal arts education is meaningless if it is not put into the context of theological inquiry and if it does not affirm the existence of something transcendent that gives meaning to the enterprise as a whole. Following this, inquiry should be in the context of commitment to a particular tradition. Morality as a general concept is too thin and must be fixed in a particular tradition.

Reuben also identified a viewpoint in which diversity can encourage thinness. Is the problem of thinness the problem of diversity? How is the tension between diversity and a specific religious mission operationalized? For example, when using a principle of diversity in hiring faculty, can it undermine an institution’s mission? What does this tension
mean for students? Does an institution define success as students maintaining allegiance to its particular tradition?

Public institutions, on the other hand, need to be committed to not being religious, to being open and pluralistic. Their secularism derives from scientific thought. Nevertheless, public institutions should engage with religion and theology, though some do indeed exclude religion, even religious faculty. But how do secular institutions change this practice of exclusion? In general, public institutions do not seem to address morality in a satisfactory way—is this part of their nature?

There are also institutions that try to maintain a balance between having a particular religious mission and excluding religion altogether. Each type of institution needs to address religion in a different way. For example, the problems are not the same for private colleges and for public universities.

**Michael Beaty’s Synthesis**

Beaty established a general principle about liberal learning and then identified six questions that emerged from the discussions and provided responses to them. They are as follows:

1) Liberal learning is an essentially contested good.

2) An essentially contested good is:
   a. Something that is generally agreed to be good;
   b. Good because it is generally agreed to be vital and essential to human flourishing;
   c. Contested in terms of its exact nature;
   d. An essentially contested good because the nature of human flourishing is contested.

3) Is Christianity, as a particular religious tradition, or religion in general, a source for liberal learning? Yes, indeed. In the Christian view, religious identity is essential to human flourishing and so the process of liberal learning must reflect this. The intellectual must go hand in hand with the moral.

4) On the Christian view, should liberal learning be more than an intellectual project? Yes, indeed. Liberal learning cultivates the whole person, the humanity of every person, the *imago dei* in every person. Therefore, it must be not only intellectual but moral. In fact, each of these requires the other.

5) Will Christian liberal learning be utterly different from secular liberal learning? No. The two projects will be similar in important ways: broad, deep, and nurturing critical thinking. There will be some differences but similar content. Aims will differ and be contested.

6) Will, or should, religion be an object of study in Christian liberal learning? Yes, but it will be more than that. Religion is a way of life into which people are invited, and it will be a contestant in the agnostic tournament of narratives.
7) Can one be liberally educated without having religious literacy? No. From a Christian perspective, biblical and theological literacy is an essential characteristic of the ideal person. Moreover, it is a professional characteristic of the ideal faculty member at Christian colleges.

8) Can faith and academic freedom occupy the same space? Yes, indeed. Moreover, a Christian institution can be a university even if it restricts its learning to Christianity (Dewey’s notion is arbitrary and stipulative). [Not sure what notion is being referred to.]

Margaret Falls-Corbitt’s Synthesis
Falls-Corbitt noted the relationship between intellectual virtue and moral development. If there is a kind of community that supports each, are they the same or different? It is important for the conversation on ethics and religious belief to stay open. Referring back to Mark Schwehn’s four stations of the liberal arts, Falls-Corbitt remarked that not all communities can lead us through all four. There needs to be a flourishing of diverse kinds of institutions.

What is academic freedom? Why is it a virtue? Does it trump all other virtues?
Religion is often treated as a “dead body in the room.” Religious belief is often not considered as an academic matter. What role does this play in how we think about religion and liberal arts education?
It is important to remember the linkage between liberal arts and freedom. What arts are necessary for creating free subjects? Why has freedom been left out of the colloquy’s discussion of religion and the liberal arts, since it is fundamental to the latter?

Open Discussion
Warren Nord asked for clarification from Michael Beaty on the range of positions taken by Christian institutions. He suggested the following scale as a way to think about this:

1) An institution that provides liberal education by allowing students to study other traditions, but only in a thin way, merely paying lip service. This would not be a liberal education.
2) An institution that provides a thicker understanding of other traditions but still retains its commitments (in terms of hiring and goals) to show students that the truth is to be found in the institution’s particular tradition. This would be a good liberal education. Baylor would be an example of this type.
3) An institution that does not have any restrictions at all, even though it has its own conception of truth and its own particular tradition. Holy Cross would be an example of this type.

The ecology of American higher education needs the diversity of institutional type represented by numbers two and three. Wheaton is legitimately of the second type, though it is often caricatured as being of the first type.
One participant asked whether students get opportunities to hear an authentic religious perspective at secular institutions. A further question was whether a Christian institution should have faculty who represent other traditions (e.g., Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic). The Christian institution should have faculty that represent other sects within the Christian tradition; it should be ecumenically committed to Christianity. However, atheists and agnostics would be excluded because they might not be able to support the mission of a Christian institution. Biblical literacy is necessary. There should also be autonomy between faith and secular learning (science) at a Christian institution.

Julie Reuben asked whether there is a contradiction for an institution to espouse a religious mission, but hire faculty from institutions thought to be hostile to religious traditions? In response, Margaret Falls-Corbitt pointed out that in the current landscape religious intellectuals have struggled to be in the Academy; whereas, it used to be easier. There is a sort of defensiveness at play – being more secular than thou. [At this point, reference was made to a story about graduate school and defending a thesis in relation to Wheaton.]

The discussion then turned to categorizing what is possible in the various kinds of institutions. Where and how does conducted intellectualism occur? Is it misrepresented? The AAUP position on academic freedom resurfaced: It does not protect gratuitous comments by faculty; the comments must be within the context of one’s field. [See note on academic freedom in summary for Session 6, 3/22, 2:15-3:30pm.] Religious institutions can anticipate that their faculty will enter into religious conversations with students, which is not possible at secular institutions. At public institutions, faculty would not engage the student first. Julie Reuben said she feels that it is not her job to cause a religious crisis for a student, but at the same time it is not her job to espouse a particular identity. Does this view necessarily conflict with the religious mission of an institution?

A case at the University of San Francisco on the issue of academic freedom was offered as an example. An author of a textbook there was removed from teaching a biology course because he became sympathetic with “intelligent design.” The question lies in professional competence. Academic freedom does not protect incompetence. This example also exemplifies the secular perception that faith is antithetical to the intellectual enterprise. The epistemological assumptions of science contribute to the negative, secular perception of competence in relation to religion.

Mark Schwehn worried about the vocabulary having to do with belief. Faith is actually much more affiliated with trust than belief. There is the problem of a priori commitments in relation to intellectual inquiry. At a religious institution, is it the commitment to a priori beliefs that is the end or is inquiry framed within faith? The fear of religious creeds misrepresents what religious faith is. A creed does not provide a picture of someone’s psychology. Rather, a creed is a ritual affirmation of membership in a particular community; it is different than signing a faith statement. At Baylor, biblical and theological literacy is not tantamount to subscribing to a creed.

At the end of the session, a participant remarked that a conversation on religion and higher education such as this one needs to account for the variety within the Christian tradition.
Appendix A:
Reflections On The Wabash Colloquy On Religion And The Liberal Arts
Warren Nord, University of North Carolina

From my vantage point at a public university what was most striking about our discussion was the ready agreement about the relevance of religion to liberal education. While we disagreed about the extent to which one particular religious tradition should be privileged, we agreed that the study of religion (and I think we meant religions) is essential to a liberal education, not just as an object of study (from the outside, as it were), but as a way of making sense of the world and our lives (from the inside, imaginatively). This would certainly be a contested claim at most state and secular universities.

We discussed which comes first, religious commitment or liberal education: do we begin with an independent conception of liberal education in terms of which we justify the place of religion in the curriculum (as would seem to be necessary at public institutions), or does our religious tradition provide our conception of liberal education? In the end we may have agreed that an adequate account of liberal education requires some kind of normative, many would say religious, foundations. Indeed, we appeared to agree, quite effortlessly, on the identity (or at least the overlap) of intellectual and moral virtue. Again, I suspect that this would strike many scholars as quaintly old-fashioned.

Of course, most public universities don’t take religion seriously. The majority still do not have departments of religious studies; if they do, it is unheard of to require students to take a course in religious studies; and even if students do so, they are unlikely to encounter theology or contemporary religious ways of making sense of the world that are allowed to challenge the secular presuppositions of the various disciplines.

We differed regarding academic freedom—a subject that needed more time than we were able to give it. It seems to me that religious colleges can provide a tolerably liberal education to their students, one that takes seriously a variety of religious and secular ways of making sense of the world (using primary sources drawn from different traditions) all the while requiring a particular religious commitment on the part of their faculty. How that religious commitment is spelled out in practice (in terms of hiring decisions, tenure, and promotions) however, may well limit a thorough-going academic freedom that protects scholars in “following reason” as their scholarly competence leads them, both in terms of their research and their teaching. Of course doctrinal tests for hiring can effectively limit diversity within a faculty so that there is, in effect, only one permissible way (or family of ways) to follow reason.

While I agree (as I think everyone did) that it is important to nurture various kinds of higher education in America, I favor a more complete academic freedom than some religious colleges and universities allow. The irony, of course, is that many public and secular universities also limit academic freedom, albeit more subtly than via doctrinal tests. Not only is theology kept out of the curriculum, it is rare and difficult for scholars in any discipline to teach and write from within a religious tradition. We did not discuss
whether scholars in public universities have academic freedom to argue for religious positions in the classroom (an ignored and, I suspect, misunderstood domain of scholarly life).

A few parting thoughts.

1. I wonder how different the conversation would have been if there had been avowedly Jewish or Muslim voices in the mix.

2. As I not only live (professionally) in a public research university, but have taken public schools and public universities at the subject of my writing and research, it was both helpful and stimulating to be forced to think outside of the usual boxes. The differences between some of the religious institutions represented at the colloquy and secular or public institutions are very great indeed. I have no hope that must public (or secular) institutions of higher education will take religion seriously, as part of liberal education, anytime soon.

3. It would be interesting to devote a meeting to exploring religion and a particular “liberal art” or “subject” of the curriculum (economics? history? science?). That is, it is one thing to integrate some study of religion into a liberal education (via courses in theology or religious studies); it is something else to take religion seriously within (typically secular) subject-fields or disciplines, making them true “liberal arts.”

4. I wonder how often (if at all) religion came up at the other three colloquies on liberal education. Indeed, might there be an occasion for representatives of each of the four colloquies to meet for a “second-order” colloquy?
Appendix B:

Reflections on the Colloquy

Michael Birkel, Earlham College

Sorry for the delay in getting some reactions back to you about the colloquy. I had a stack of papers waiting for me, and getting them back to students in a timely way seemed important.

Rather than repeat what others have already said in their oral summaries, I'll try to imagine some possible directions for continuing the discussion. Here are some observations.

First of all, please let me say that these are not intended as a criticism of a successful event. The colloquy was well organized and very ably convened.

Our conversation was very theoretical -- and was planned as such. I was one of only two people there (I think) whose day job was chiefly to teach courses in religion. As a result, my comments were more classroom-oriented when I brought up matters of moral education, such as the challenge of cultivating a sympathetic imagination in our students, or my comment that for me teaching is a species of peacemaking. If the conversation were to continue, it might be interesting to bring in more people whose work in religion and the liberal arts is chiefly in the classroom. But maybe Wabash folks would think that this would be to tread on the turf of their other Lilly-supported center.

Of course, many people do not choose to teach religion with an explicit agenda of moral and spiritual formation, as we read in the articles you thoughtfully supplied. Yet the challenge to modernist aims at objectivity in teaching about religions may open the door to greater freedom on this. Others do teach with explicit goals of moral formation, but do so in a very doctrinally focused way, as was represented by some of our colleagues at the colloquy. Maybe future discussions could bring in voices on moral and spiritual formation, such as Sharon Daloz Parks.

The presence of representatives from Wheaton and Phi Bet Kappa certainly did sharpen the issues, but it may also have distorted them a bit, or dominated the agenda in a way less useful for some of us. Maybe the issue could be approached from the center and move out from there, rather than spend so much time on the exceptional (I'm trying not to say "extreme") cases.

But if you like going at the edges, why not bring St. John's of Annapolis? Their canon is pretty narrow for my tastes, but they certainly are very liberal arts, and it would interesting to hear their take on the moral dimension of liberal learning.
Again, these rather hasty thoughts are not meant as a critique but as possible future directions. Thanks again for a good colloquy, Steve!
Appendix C:

Reflections on the Colloquy on Religion and the Liberal Arts
Stanton L. Jones, Wheaton College

I am deeply thankful for the opportunity to spend these days with such a remark- able group of scholars discussing some of the most complex and divisive issues faced by the academy. Thanks in particular to Stephen Ainlay for his capable leadership of the colloquy (and for his kind invitation for me to participate), to John Churchill for his willingness to have Phi Beta Kappa discuss these matters so openly, and to the partners in the dialog. I should also note that I found the packet readings, most of which were new to me, to be very thought-provoking and informative.

In his e-mail, Stephen asked for us to “to jot down your reflections. Where did you find points of agreement and disagreement? What are the questions that remain?”

I found our greatest agreement around issues of the importance of religion as a human phenomenon, both intrinsically and in terms of its vital importance as a factor in understanding many other aspects of human life. We agreed broadly on the importance of religious literacy and on some role for religion in moral and intellectual formation. Very significantly, I am under the impression that we agreed broadly that the boundaries between religious thought and belief, on the one hand, and the “quest for knowledge” on the other, are not clear-cut or impermeable as imagined in an earlier age, but rather ill-defined and permeable. Religion was seen by all as a vital and pervasive influence in and aspect of the intellectual life.

Perhaps predictably, our clearest disagreements surfaced on the matter of the freedom of the individual scholar in pursuit of truth in relation to the freedom of an institution of higher learning to establish boundaries on its religious identity. I think we made some progress (at least over other conversation in which I have participated) in moving away from an overly simplistic framing of this question as whether or not one actually values the intellectual freedom of the scholar (over valuing, say, totalitarian repressivism and control), in favor of a recognition that this is a complex issue where the privileging of the individual scholar as the “sole owner” of academic freedom disempow- ers the religious institution, which is (in the ideal) really a community of voluntarily associated individuals of like mind, from retaining a clear and distinct religious identity. In other words, I was pleased by the recognition that the choice of an institution like mine to construe itself as a voluntary association of believers pursuing the work of higher education is not a choice to deny academic freedom to the individual scholar, but rather a choice to make the complete academic freedom of the individual scholar secondary (though a close second) to the clearly and publicly defined religious identity of the insti- tution. This nuancing of the issue did not prevent members of the colloquy of stating clearly that they could not condone any such constraints on individual freedom! But I at least felt that the issues were framed in a way conducive to expanded understanding of what we are pursuing.