A LIFE OF LEARNING

Martin E. Marty

Charles Homer Haskins
Prize Lecture for 2006

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The Charles Homer Haskins Prize Lecture Series

Charles Homer Haskins (1870–1937), for whom the ACLS lecture series is named, was the first Chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies, from 1920 to 1926. He began his teaching career at the Johns Hopkins University, where he received the B.A. degree in 1887, and the Ph.D. in 1890. He later taught at the University of Wisconsin and at Harvard, where he was Henry Charles Lea Professor of Medieval History at the time of his retirement in 1931, and Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences from 1908 to 1924. He served as president of the American Historical Association in 1922, and was a founder and the second president of the Medieval Academy of America in 1926.

A great American teacher, Charles Homer Haskins also did much to establish the reputation of American scholarship abroad. His distinction was recognized in honorary degrees from Strasbourg, Padua, Manchester, Paris, Louvain, Caen, Harvard, Wisconsin, and Allegheny College, where in 1883 he had begun his higher education at the age of thirteen.

Haskins Prize Lecturers

2006	Martin E. Marty	1994	Robert K. Merton
2005	Gerda Lerner	1993	Annemarie Schimmel
2004	Peter Gay	1992	Donald W. Meinig
2003	Peter Brown	1991	Milton Babbit
2002	Henry A. Millon	1990	Paul Oskar Kristeller
2001	Helen Vendler	1989	Judith N. Shklar
2000	Geoffrey Hartman	1988	John Hope Franklin
1999	Clifford Geertz	1987	Carl E. Schorske
1998	Yi-Fu Tuan	1986	Milton V. Anastos
1997	Natalie Zemon Davis	1985	Lawrence Stone
1996	Robert William Fogel	1984	Mary Rosamond Haas
1995	Phyllis Pray Bober	1983	Maynard Mack

Brief Biography of Martin E. Marty

Martin E. Marty was born in West Point, Nebraska in 1928. He received his Ph.D. in 1956 from the University of Chicago, where he taught from 1963 to 1998 in the Divinity School, the History Department, and the Committee on the History of Culture.

Marty has served as president of the American Academy of Religion, the American Society of Church History, and the American Catholic Historical Association. He is a fellow or elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS), the American Antiquarian Society, and the Society of American Historians. He is also a member of the American Philosophical Association and the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences. Marty directed the six-year Fundamentalism Project for the AAAS (1988-1994) and the Public Religion Project at the University of Chicago. In 1998, upon Marty's retirement, the University of Chicago Divinity School rededicated its Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion, which he had founded and first directed. Now the Martin Marty Center, it is a research center for junior and senior fellows and the major conference and program arm of the Divinity School, with a focus on public religion.

Among the books Marty has written are *Righteous Empire* (1970), for which he won the National Book Award; the three-volume *Modern American Religion* (1986-1996); *The One and the Many: America's Search for the Common Good* (1997); *When Faiths Collide* (2005); and, with photographer Micah Marty, *Places Along the Way* (1994); *Our Hope for Years to Come* (1995); *The Promise of Winter* (1997); and *When True Simplicity Is Gained* (1998).

Marty's other honors include the National Humanities Medal, the Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the

Distinguished Service Medal of the Association of Theological Schools, the University of Chicago Alumni Medal, the Order of Lincoln Medallion, and over 70 honorary degrees. Marty was on the founding board of the National Humanities Center and the Illinois Humanities Commission and a member of the Rockefeller Foundation Commission on the Humanities from 1978-80.

The author of more than 50 books and an editor at *The Christian Century* for 50 years, Marty was ordained a Lutheran minister in 1952.

Introduction

On May 12, 2006, Martin E. Marty, pioneering scholar of American religion, delivered the twenty-fourth Charles Homer Haskins Prize Lecture to members and friends of the ACLS. When John William Ward became president of the ACLS in 1982, he sought to commemorate the ACLS tradition of active engagement in scholarship with an annual lecture. Each year since, we have asked the lecturer:

> . . . to reflect on a lifetime of work as a scholar and an institution builder, on the motives, the chance determinations, the satisfactions (and dissatisfactions) of the life of learning, to explore through one's own life the larger, institutional life of scholarship. We do not wish the speaker to present the products of one's own scholarly research, but rather to share with other scholars the personal process of a particular lifetime of learning.

The series, entitled "A Life of Learning," is named for Charles Homer Haskins, the first chairman of ACLS. The Executive Committee of the Delegates of ACLS is charged each year with the responsibility of naming the Haskins Prize lecturer.

Their choice is not easy. Any despair over the intellectual vitality of the humanities is easily cured if you behold the vista of erudition and accomplishment represented by the roster of each year's nominees. The committee seeks to honor not only a record of accomplishment—Professor Marty's prodigious publications burst through that criterion easily—but to celebrate careers—that is, lives of learning—that have transformed a field of study.

Professor Marty helped transform the study of religion in America. Even in today's thoroughly secularized academy, no one can seriously question the historical, cultural, and political importance of that topic, but it was Martin Marty's contribu-

tion that brought the subject into a new focus. He insisted on blending the particular study of distinct and rich religious traditions—their theologies, symbolic language, ethnic origins—with attention to the interaction of these traditions and their believers with the whole of a society populated in large part by other believers with equally distinct traditions. After Marty the study of religions in America became the study of American religions and, crucially, American religion. Martin Marty has framed our understanding of "public religion," what it is and what it could be. For Marty, religion has a centrally public character—it has enormous impact on public discussions of matters from education to abortion—and this is neither a burden nor a blessing in its own right, but simply an historically consistent fact about American society and religion.

The mission of the American university is usually put down in three words: research, teaching, and service. Professor Marty's exemplification of that mission shows him to be a true Trinitarian: with him, these three roles are inseparable dimensions of an integral whole. His zeal as a researcher and writer is equaled by his dedication to students training for both the academy and the ministry. In 34 years of teaching at the University of Chicago, he missed a total of 12 classes. He maintained that disciplined teaching schedule in tandem with an extraordinary commitment to public engagement through speaking, preaching, and writing.

Actively studying public religion, Martin Marty is the model of a public intellectual. Marty—the name serves both formally and informally—continues a life of learning that learns from life. ACLS was honored when Professor Marty accepted the invitation of our Executive Committee of the Delegates to deliver the 2006 Charles Homer Haskins Prize Lecture. We are very pleased to bring it to a wider audience.

—Pauline Yu, President
American Council of Learned Societies

A Life of Learning

by

Martin E. Marty

In her "Advice to the Old *(including myself)*," poet Kay Boyle writes:

> Do not speak of yourself (for God's sake) even when asked.
> Do not dwell on other times as different from the time
> Whose air we breathe; or recall books with broken spines
> Whose titles died with the old dreams . . .[1]

Whereupon, despite this inhibiting word, she spoke of herself. After quoting Boyle, I also spoke about myself, when asked to do so at my retirement event eight winters ago. This year the American Council of Learned Societies asked me to do the same, and I am once more violating Miss Boyle's counsel.

A second inhibiting word comes from historian James Olney, who cautions: "As readers we go to history, as to philosophy, to autobiography and poetry, to learn more not about other people and the past but about ourselves and the present."[2] He overstates the case, but his alert is both appropriate and bracing.

Gabriel Jackson's question in *Historian's Quest* is a third inhibitor for academic historians like me: "Who cares about the confessional outpourings of an academic historian whose horizon is bounded by grants-in-aid, tenure anxieties . . . and scholarly articles?"[3]

I will move beyond that bounding horizon quickly. As for grants-in-aid, I have never written a grant application, though I have forwarded some and learned from numerous granted projects. That's that. In regard to tenure anxieties, for reasons too complex to spell out, I entered academe with tenure. Finally, concerning scholarly articles, the Haskins Prize Lecture hosts do not encourage a review of the lecturer's writing.

While we may consult autobiographies to learn about ourselves and the present, we can also discern from reading past Haskins Lectures how anomalous and idiosyncratic most vocational trajectories turn out to be. In the present case, anyone who was sure she knew from childhood what she wanted to achieve as a scholar and then succeeded in it will find no match in my life of learning. At age 25 I had not yet been lured into taking up the subjects that have since consumed me. I was 35 before I pursued them professionally. Most of what happened along the way was unanticipated and unsought. As for idiosyncrasies in *curricula vitae*, at least one line in mine—"he is also an ordained minister"—has to be a rare identification for someone in the secular academy.

The Haskins Prize Lecture assignment reads: "We ask you to reflect on your lifetime of work as a scholar and an institution builder, on the motives, the *chance determinations*, the satisfactions (and dissatisfactions) of the life of learning." I will focus on "chance determinations." A classic Calvinist would have called them "providences." My historian brother Myron Marty, who has collected all the Haskins Lectures and in one of his own lectures pondered their treatments of "chance determinations," which he equated with "luck," handed me a definition by Garrison Keillor: "Luck is getting what you have instead of what you wanted, which is what you would have wanted all along if only you had known." Exactly. It would be utterly unoriginal for me to treat the theme of "chance determinations" as such as being something distinctively my own. The Lecture assignment itself assumes that we all experience them. What a person does with his

or her own luck, with good and bad chances, is where distinctiveness comes in.

In my case this doing meant being drawn into a life work that I did not seek or foresee, on a subject for which I had shown no explicit interest, through positions for which I never applied. Every one of my books or journal and magazine articles was written in response to solicitations by editors and publishers. Noting that fact about my writing is not to suggest that I have been in great demand or have lacked ideas of my own (at least I hope that is not the case), but is to propose that I used the assignments as learning devices, regarding them as stimuli to doing research and learning. Returning to James Olney's thesis about the uses of others' life stories, we may say that my past and your present can meet as we reflect on the main theme voiced in the cliché "you play the hand that was dealt you." You accept the cards of history as they turn up without regarding the hand you hold as a paralyzing fate, and all the while experiencing the "satisfactions" and "dissatisfactions" which the Haskins lecturers are supposed to chronicle.

Most of us in retrospect do divide our lives into episodes. Schopenhauer wrote that the first 40 years of life furnish the text, while the remaining 30 supply the commentary. I interpret three phases of my lifetime of learning as correlating with three elements in the history of learning in the West, as philosopher Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy once summarized them. The first model he discerned, a charter for the medieval faith-based university, was Anselm's goal of "faith seeking understanding" (*credo ut intelligam*). For Rosenstock-Huessy this meant "truth is divine and has been divinely revealed." Second, the modern university reflects Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*). From this phrase Rosenstock-Huessy drew the motif: "Truth is pure and can be scientifically stated." For our time Rosenstock-Huessy suggested a third: "I respond although I will be changed" (*respondeo etsi mutabor*). He wanted this to suggest that "[t]ruth is vital and must be socially represented."[4]

I was drawn especially to the third of these, the social and collegial approach as reflected in the quaint-sounding King Jamesian sentences of Rosenstock-Huessy himself, lines that I chose for an epigraph in a book titled *By Way of Response*:

> We are called into society by a mighty entreaty, "Who art thou, that I should care for thee?" And long before our intelligence can help us, the new-born individual survives this tremendous question by his naïve faith in the love of his elders. We grow into society on faith, listening to all kinds of human imperatives. Later we stammer and stutter, nations and individuals alike, in the effort to justify our existence by responding to this call. We . . . wish to follow the deepest questions, the central call which goes to the heart, and promises our soul the lasting certainty of being inscribed in the book of life.[5]

Rosenstock-Huessy had stressed that the *ut* in *credo ut intelligam* and the *ergo* in *cogito ergo sum* were very strong, almost aggressive, whereas the *etsi* in *respondeo etsi mutabor* was quieter, showing that the speaker or writer was to take signals from the call or assignment of "the other." He worked on the assumption, as do I, that many of these calls represent profound, time-honored approaches that evoke more than one item on an agenda that the speaker or writer sets. It was that theme which led me to a vocation, profession, and career in which I have tried to be, yes, responsive.

Back to beginnings: when I smell a particular kind of leather I recall the odor that emanated from the miniature leather-bound books that are my earliest remembered explicit and tangible stimuli to learning. Available to us children in a glass-enclosed bookcase in our home were two boxes of Little Leather Library classics. These served as literary lures to worlds that beckoned beyond the little school in our little Nebraska town in the years of the "big D's"—Drought, Dust Bowl, Depression, and for some, Despair. Those miniature books, marketed widely in the 1920s, included the then always-suspect Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of*

Reading Gaol and *Salome*, the worldly *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, and more. Our parents were therewith giving my sister, brother, and me free access to some offbeat, skeptical works. One that I remember was George Bernard Shaw's *On Going to Church*, with its message that questioned such going. We read it and then went to church anyhow after having experienced the trust our church-going parents had shown us by making such an essay so easily available. Had they withheld such critical writing from us, we might well have rebelled and turned our backs on their way of life.

Our world was parochial, as in "parochial school." Since funds for travel were nonexistent, literature opened imagined horizons to us. Until age 14 I had not yet been 90 miles from my birthplace. A friend's letterhead logo—*timor dei, amor peregrinationis* (fear of God and love of travel)—could be mine. Peregrinating then had to be always and only literary and imaginary.

As for *timor dei*, our childhood setting bred reverence but not constriction. We were surrounded by neighbors of Czech descent, some of them Catholic and some anti-clerical, and others of German lineage, some Catholic but more of them Lutheran. The two largest faith communities were more distant from than hostile to each other. That small-town world from which I still draw some sense of perspective seems so remote from my graduate students' experience that to them the ghetto and the shtetl, the gulag and the barrio, the Tibet of the Dalai Lama and the glaciers of Antarctica, are more familiar, more easily imagined and interpreted. But it was our town that contributed, as environments and events do, to our soulscapes. Lifelong we read of the landscapes of others for their intrinsic interest but also to compare and reflect on our own. José Ortega y Gasset was blunt: "Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are."[6]

Though they were living only two generations removed from the bare prairie world of dugouts and sod-houses of their grandparents, the townsfolk of my childhood prized learning and brought some culture to the place while generating their own. Within our family sphere the music of Bach chorales—my father

was an organist—and the catechism of Luther provided the *basso continuo* of our lives so vividly that we were free ever after to improvise melodies of learning as we wished. While many contemporaries brought up in circles of piety have found it necessary later to rebel against oppression and repression, we did not. Bach's musical house is so capacious and Luther's life and learning are so full of contradiction, paradox, and drama that one can remake worlds out of them in almost unlimited ways.

The university students I taught between 1963 and 2006 might never be able to imagine how our elementary education back in 1933 could have prepared us for lives of learning. Our two-room school left each grade enclosed with three others in the same hall with the same teacher. Overhearing each day the recited lessons of other grades in our shared classroom led to a discipline to learn in the midst of distractions. In this case, the teacher was our father, and he readied us for "chance determinations" that we could not have envisioned. In quiet times of the day, and there were such, for he commanded respect, he read reasonably demanding classics. My brother, who regularly reviews history books and biographies, and I agree that we could not write engrossing book-length memoirs because we were not at war, as many memoir authors had to be, with an abusive father. Sympathetic as I am when hearing from some of them their paralyzing stories of profound psychological or physical abuse, I am less empathic when I read the tortured accounts of how other adults forever after coped with recall of winces occasioned by knuckle-rapping nuns. Stories of how authors had to break free of constrictions imposed by parents and pastors are by now clichés in "Born Again" autobiographies. After listening to these sometimes stereotypical accounts, I want to say, "Get on with the story."

Discerning elders deemed that the learning in the local high school (pop. 132 students) was boring me. It was not. Fifty-five years later I was still receiving tender admonitions from my exemplary freshman English teacher. She would write, "Miss Rogers did not teach you to dangle a participle, as you did in your most recent article." Still, it did not occur to me back then not to

follow up on the chance offer to go to boarding school. Of my father, sister, brother, and myself, two attended Concordia colleges, three attended Concordia high schools, and I later attended a Concordia seminary. It all began when the offer for the boarding school came and I responded.

I. *Credo ut intelligam*

In September of 1942, I was launched on a more formal life of learning, packing a credo in search of intelligence and finding myself at a Lutheran equivalent of a Catholic minor seminary. It was technically a *gymnasium*—not a "gym," but a German-modeled high school with a junior college attached. The environment there was seedy, made up as it was of culturally inbred adolescent boys, many of them still friends. Some of those at such schools in our system became major scholars—for an outstanding example, think of the late historian Jaroslav Pelikan of Yale. I imagine that few hearers or readers of this lecture who hold up such a school as ours for comparison to theirs will find any kind of match.

While we were being given tools for later learning, the style in our place was drearily rote and fiercely scholastic. Preparatory to seminary, toward which we were drifting, we were taught vocabulary and grammar in English, German, Latin, and Greek, never in order to understand the classics but to prepare for rigidly scripted theological studies. My long-time roommate, Don Meyer, who was as philosophical as I was literary, encouraged some of us to moonlight. Each weekday we borrowed street car passes and spent afternoons in the Milwaukee public library, where I was trying to read through the Modern Poetry collection while he pursued William of Ockham and Plato. (Permit a jump ahead to a dramatic chance determination: Don died at age 28. Decades later his widow became this widower's second wife. Jumping back, now:) In high school during the early 1940s we were reading Virgil and Goethe and Homer, but only for exercises in translating. I cannot recall a minute spent on discussing the substance or relevance of their classic texts.

Hurried through *gymnasium* during World War II in order to help assure a supply of chaplains—I came of draft age the year World War II ended—most of us did go on to a seminary. One faction of the faculty there prolonged the dull scholasticism of our pre-seminary experience, but the larger element was breaking the mold and exciting us. Under their tutelage we read an account by Martin Luther, in some ways our mentor and model, of his *Turmerlebnis*, a reading experience in a monastery tower where he became aware of freedom and grace. These faculty members led us to texts and understandings that moved us toward a similar, though of course drastically less dramatic, recognition of possibilities. The occasion prompted a call; we responded and were changed.

Not that I made the most of the classroom. All along I guess I knew I would write—write what, beside weak poetry, was not yet on my mind—and perhaps I was finding my way to religious journalism, which has been a sideline for 60 years. I haunted the library room marked "Periodicals." Observing this practice, my Bible professor gave me a "B" on a course paper and added the note, "You could get an 'A.' However, you spend too much time reading those periodicals scripturally—but the scriptures only periodically." Jolted, I tried to catch up, and wrote my pretentious divinity thesis on a Greek New Testament pericope.

Did my classmates and I have a passion for ministry? Some may have, but for most our study was simply a course we were following to a prescribed vocational end. Exposure to practical learning alerted us to fresh possibilities. Field work—my own in a chaplaincy assignment among dying but spiritually generous African-American women confined to a tuberculosis sanitarium—quickened my interest in ministry and served as a call to which I responded. I moved expeditiously toward graduation and ordination.

Not *quite* expeditiously. In what was perhaps the most decisive "chance determination" in my professional life there occurred a decidedly *in*expeditious bump along the route. A Haskins lecturer should probably manifest gravitas and recall a life marked

only by seriousness. My life of learning story would be utterly different, however, had I not co-invented, publicized, and written about a German theologian we named Franz Bibfeldt. A satire of "the system," our venture was jejune and harmless enough, but some faculty had been taken in by the hoax and therefore became embarrassed and vengeful when this great scholar's nonexistence was exposed. (He *does* exist in cyberspace; at the time of this writing, my Google search turned up 1,560 references to him.)

Six months before graduation I was preparing to serve as a minister to displaced Baltic people in London. When the Bibfeldt hoax was discovered, the piqued half of the faculty—the other half delighted in the prank and began quoting Professor Bibfeldt—wanted me at most expelled or at least deprived of that British placement. A patient dean and then a generous seminary president, who left me with a hand on my shoulder and the words "the funniest damn thing that's happened in this seminary on my watch," made an executive decision. Their judgment was valid: I was too immature and irresponsible to represent our tradition in London. In need of seasoning, I was assigned to an apprenticeship to a senior minister.

One such was found, and I responded to the call from a suburban Chicago parish. Here was another chance determination: each curate or assistant pastor, it was stipulated, *must* work on a doctorate. The idea of doing graduate work beyond the divinity years had never occurred to me and I would never have pursued the doctorate had this mandate not come. Even so, I first detoured by doing a master's degree at a seminary near Chicago, writing on a topic of Luther that demanded more late medieval Latin and early modern German than I had patience, taste, or skill to acquire for a life of learning.

Two University of Chicago professors, Jerald C. Brauer, who later became my dean, and Sidney E. Mead, later to be my dissertation adviser, chanced to teach there one summer and they suggested that I could receive a full fellowship if I came to the university, to study—surprise!—American religious history with

them. I responded, although it again meant change. Until that summer the University of Chicago had only been a goal for some weekend hitchhikes with roommate Meyer. There we heard campus visitors like Jacques Maritain and T.S. Eliot. That autumn, finally in graduate school, after having coasted in previous educational encounters, I took delight in being put to the test in seminars and examinations, and with a dissertation combining religious and intellectual history.

To the point: if in the summer of 1953, when I was 25 years old and with 11 years of liberal arts and theological study behind me, you had asked me about my preparation for the next step, I would have had to admit that I never planned to become or dreamed *at all* of becoming a modern American religious historian in a secular university. Still, I detoured one last time. The Divinity School catalogue loftily advertised that the Ph.D. was a good minimum preparation for pastoral ministry, though few doctoral graduates had ever believed that or acted on it. I did, and to my teachers' and colleagues' astonishment, I responded to a call to start a congregation. During seven years there I learned pastoral arts that, though they may appear irrelevant to others in the academy, I have regarded as invaluable, in part for the way the setting offered me experiences of concrete religious life.

As founding pastor of this parish next to O'Hare Field near Chicago, I wrestled with texts and counseled members who faced, among other things that historians write about, threats of murder, incest, adultery, and imprisonment. All these occurred in a context that many university colleagues had predicted would be merely bourgeois, dulling, and utterly compromising. I have to note that I also found examples of generosity, devotion, self-sacrifice, community, and hope of sorts that make up much of the human story and that remain vivid in memory.

All the while I was reviewing books weekly and publishing a book yearly. Most of all—and this is crucial to another mode of learning—I had married well and with my creative and tireless late first wife was before long parenting our four sons and

two Mexican-American permanent foster children, antecedents of a houseful of international and multi-racial temporary family members. Together they taught me about historical subjects from a perspective that I would not have otherwise experienced. They also forced me to concentrate, as I had first learned to do back in the two-room elementary school, in order to overcome distraction. When a child had something to talk about, he could walk into my study and I was to drop everything. There was an especially lot of dropping one year when, with two Ugandan pre-teens as part of "the family," there were seven boys aged nine to fourteen about the house. If on any occasion I seemed distant from them—I think and hope I was not—extended summers at our private place on an undeveloped island restored our close practical and familial contact in the decisive years.

As for the specifics of learning among the family, I've often quoted what one of my dissertation advisers, Daniel J. Boorstin, paraphrased as a book dedication to his children: "Like Genius, simple—that is why they are the great teachers."[7] As ours grew up, the original family, all liberal arts college graduates, came to include offspring involved variously in printing, politics, the pastorate, photography, physical education, and performance. They married, and the new in-laws brought more results of liberal education to our gatherings, which one labeled not "family reunions" but "seminars." Scholars who live and work in isolation may compare and contemplate what part crowding or isolation plays in "themselves and the present." For us, company and crowding worked.

All through the parish years, as vacancies developed at the university, the deans and department heads beckoned with ever greater urgency. The congregation, having grown rapidly, was making increasingly heavy but still legitimate demands to the point that writing on the side was hard to accomplish. At 35, with—as reckoned then—one half of life expectancy used up, I walked into the classroom as a teacher for the first time. I would spend the subsequent years—sorry, Kay Boyle!—"recall[ing] books with broken spines whose titles died with the old dreams," seeking to make their pages live again.

II. *Cogito ergo sum*

The modern university, heir of the Enlightenment, making little of religious credo and more of reason, inspires attention to what Descartes expressed with "I think, therefore I am." Critical intelligence, skepticism of the sort historians need, and reason are the premiums. To sharpen and use these, I needed the focus that a specialty demands. The fellow historian and dean who attracted me to Chicago as a student and teacher, Jerald C. Brauer, was my closest colleague. An expert on Puritanism and revivalism, he camped in the archives and library stacks where resources on the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries of the American experience reposed. So I concentrated on the dust-laden documents of the late eighteenth and the twentieth centuries, on the latter of which I wrote a three-volume narrative, *Modern American Religion.*

The university permitted me to continue reviewing and writing for the ecumenical weekly *The Christian Century*, to whose editorial staff—another chance determination!—Brauer had commended me in my student days. At that time faculty members were allowed to contract out two ninths of their time. Provost Edward H. Levi agreed that such an arrangement was fine: give the magazine two ninths of my time and the University nine ninths. This I tried to do. José Ortega y Gasset, an intellectual model who combined the vocations of teaching and journalism, called himself a "partly-faithful professor" as he pursued "civic pedagogy." I hope I was fully-faithful. On average, a newly published book reached my desk at *The Christian Century* hourly, for the next 35 years. I saw to it that works relevant to the study of history received due notice, and a home in my library.

In the ethos of our university, with the encouragement of every dean under whom I have worked, we colleagues created informal circles for conversation, argument, and collaboration. Along came "social justice" causes symbolized by the Selma March, my needing to appear before draft boards to represent student Vietnam War dissenters, and one or two more such exceptions that represent the very rare times I ever missed class. I enjoyed teaching to such an

extent and learned so much from the seminar experience that I never took a sabbatical year. The teaching of gifted and motivated students, with a superb library and archives at hand, assured that this late-comer who had so much to learn could not have found a more stimulating context.

Sidney Mead pounded into us an image from Alfred North Whitehead's *The Aims of Education*: "It should be the chief aim of a university professor to exhibit himself in his own true character—that is, as an ignorant man thinking, actively utilizing [a] small share of knowledge."[8] My teaching record is an indication of my love for the University of Chicago as well as for teaching itself. As for the modes and manners of the historical work that preoccupied me, like the Frenchman who was surprised to learn that what he had spoken all along was called prose, I found that the way I had been inquiring about and looking at time and place had been nurtured with an instinctive historical perspective that required refinement and critical development. In other words, I moved from being an unreflective amateur historian to a professional in the discipline of history.

For 35 years I taught and guided dissertations in three faculties: divinity, as mentioned; humanities, on the Committee on the History of Culture; and in social sciences, where the University of Chicago locates the history department. Scholars at Chicago pursue disciplines rigorously, but formal boundaries among them are vague and barriers low, so my classes regularly welcomed regular students from the schools of law, medicine, social service administration and education as well as undergraduates. I learned more from this mix than I did when dealing only within my own specialty.

How to discipline these disciplines? A campus visitor once advocated that we all use "poly-methodological" approaches. While alert to these, I learned from my colleague Wendy Doniger not to "poly-methodoodle all the day." The historical approach I prefer teaches one to gain perspectives from various defined and focused methods, aware that much of what each represents will not last.

My generation of historians through the years has worked with, learned from, and in some measure outlasted the successive hegemonies of "positivism," "consensus" and then "conflict" history, "quantification," "cliometrics," "theory," "post-modernity" and other valid contributors to the discipline, each having been momentarily labeled "New History." It seemed to me that none of them were good bets for becoming permanent holders of monopoly status. Practical changes in the surrounding culture and the make-up of student bodies induced new perspectives that did more to effect change than did most of these theories.

Intellectually I had long before begun to prepare for a life of devotion to issues associated with the word "secular." My doctoral dissertation on "The Uses of Infidelity" dealt with "Freethought in American Religion." I had hypothesized that American history must have included a great but suppressed tradition of anti-religious figures. My research showed, however, that "infidelity" had often been an almost insignificant strain. It had usually been magnified by the religious polemicists who exploited fear of un- or non- or anti-belief in ways that were "useful" to advance their purposes.

Like other contemporary institutions, the modern university, ungrounded in specific theological or ecclesiastical traditions, as medieval universities had been, manifests a secular ethos. Yet I still never found it necessary to adopt what I call the "more-secular-than-thou" guise affected by some in religious studies. In my experience, indifference to religion is a larger presence on campuses than studied opposition to religion. When colleagues from faculties and disciplines that did not focus on religious inquiries visited the Divinity School, they regularly commented that they preferred conversing and working with "divines" who were quite open about their religious presuppositions to those who disguised them. Meanwhile, thanks to the energies of the American Academy of Religion and other agencies, religious studies came in to its own, even at a time when humanities budgets could not be generous. These departments grew in a half century from a few to almost 1,200, many of them at tax-supported "public" univer-

sities. Religion became a hot topic in national and world affairs and a warm one on campuses. I have also never seen a reason to join some religious cultural critics who kvetch about how secular the academy is, and complain that religion gets systematically slighted. After all, most of us academics in every field think that our concerns are being slighted. "No Whining" reads a motto on my study wall. So we get to work.

Along with social sciences, the humanities, which have suffered a variety of fates during the past half century, mark the natural larger zone for my efforts at learning. The late Father Walter Ong, S.J., and I were on a number of liberal arts and especially humanities commissions, where the ethos and choice of subjects did not lead most scholars to show favor to religion, and sometimes led them to ignore it completely. We often tested Father Ong's contention that you could disturb and thus enliven any seminar, cocktail hour, dinner conversation, or late-night chatter by bringing up anything to do with religion.

Our experiments occurred during the decades when the new Christian Right and its allies were gathering resources to attack "secular humanism," next simplified to "humanism," and finally reduced to "the humanities." "Humanism," as Father Ong and I would point out in turn, does not historically correspond to "anti-God," but instead emerged for linguistic, historical, and philosophical reasons reaching back to the times of Petrarch and Erasmus, when it first came into use. For me, humanism-with-adjectives has always been most interesting, as when feminist-, Marxist-, Jewish-, medieval, Christian-, and other descriptors enriched the concept of "humanities humanism."

Now, for history among the humanities. If one learns from graduate students, one is informed even more by the work of colleagues far and near. As for near, the company of senior colleagues at Chicago included some exemplary historians who worked on broad scales of inquiry. My dissertation co-adviser Daniel J. Boorstin insisted on clarity in writing; colleague William McNeill emboldened us to look at "the big picture";

and John Hope Franklin communicated conscience and social passion in the writing of history. Regarding religious history, the strongest influence was Sidney E. Mead, one of the faculty members who had invited me to Chicago with that fellowship back in 1954. A writer of elegant, reflective essays whose books were few but profound, he made much of the religious dimensions of the Enlightenment in America.

Historians tend to listen and glean in many fields, and senior influences in the Divinity School in disciplines other than history included figures like Paul Tillich, Mircea Eliade, and Paul Ricoeur. Tillich's philosophy was beyond me and his theology was not wholly congenial, but from him I learned some valuable approaches to history, a subject that drew his attention. Eliade, today under some cloud for his youthful quasi-fascist past in Romania (something that did not show up as residue in his Chicago maturity), was called an "historian of religion," which did not mean that he was an historian. His theories of religion provided some categories for inquiry. Paul Ricoeur was another philosopher who made profound contributions to historical inquiry by focusing on narrative.

As for far, I have long been creatively haunted by a word of Sir Stephen Runciman about historians. Since most readers will not have access to the archives and sources with which historians engage, he said, they work "under the watchful scrutiny of their colleagues." For 35 years I observed and learned from this while co-editing the professional journal *Church History*. Annually we received about 100 submissions of credible scholarly articles, each of which I evaluated before sending half to referees, and then reread much more closely the half that survived the review process. A second far-away scholar who contributed to my learning was the classic cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt, who specified:

> We . . . shall start out from the one point accessible to us, the one eternal center of all things—man, suffering, striving, doing, as he is and was and ever shall be. Hence

> our study will, in a certain sense, be pathological in kind.[9]

Such a focus commits one to narrative, which has come and gone as a fashion in professional academic history a half dozen times in my 50 years on the job. Sometimes it falls out of favor, as it was supposed to have done in the first of the schools of thought in my time that were labeled "The New History." I refer to the demanding approach first described as having originated with Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in the *Annales*, a journal which dates from 1928, as do I, who am hardly "New." Creatively informed by the non-narrative quantification essays in cliometrics, and somewhat embarrassed that I am not more at home in some schools of French theoretical derivation that downplay narrative but enrich historical inquiry, I was always instinctively drawn to narrative, believing it to be integral to the discipline of history, though supplemented by other approaches.

A now almost forgotten book that was influential in my student years, G.J. Renier's *History: Its Purpose and Methods* (1950), came from the school of Henri Pirenne. Renier's focus on story, which he carefully defined and limited, put him in the camp of the towering Leopold von Ranke, whom Hegel described with a sneer as "*nur ein gewöhnlicher Historiker*" or "just an ordinary historian."[10] My life of learning demanded reflection on what this meant. Hosts at a theological conference in Tübingen, Germany, some years ago were confused at registration, where they had to identify scholars. When they learned that I taught in social science, humanities, and divinity faculties, they found no matching description. Having prepared badges identifying other conferees as "Theologian" or "Historian of Theology" or "Historical Theologian," they labeled me "Historical Historian." That fit.

After I became an "ordinary historian" or a "historical historian," I was often asked to explain the appeal of historical inquiry and learning. In answer, I liked to paraphrase British economic historian R. H. Tawney, who said he found the world very odd—and wanted to know how it got that way. So did and do I. As for

the religious theme, I would draw on the lure described by George Santayana, who noted that "every living and healthy religion has a marked idiosyncrasy. Its power consists in its special and surprising message and in the bias which that revelation gives to life."[11] Words like "odd," "idiosyncratic," "surprising," and "bias" helped color the vocation that had taken the first third of my life to find and pursue.

The question of substance—voiced as "what was and what is your historical work about?"—receives a simple answer. It is telling a story of American religion, a story that has continued unfolding in new contexts and with new emphases through 50 years. Decades ago, during a long strenuous slog on a Manhattan avenue during a snowstorm, cabs that day having been unresponsive to hailing, my publisher-to-be asked about my plot: what did I think American religion was about? "Pluralism," I responded between a huff and a puff, while thinking of America's unmatched varieties of faiths and polities. He snorted: "You couldn't be more wrong! That is what social scientists think, but religious people themselves have other things beside abstractions on their minds." Those odd "other things" turned out to be the lure for my research, even if they have to be accounted for under the abstract blanket of "pluralism."

The University of Chicago Press chartered my three-volume *Modern American Religion*, an 18-year project, the first attempt to synthesize at some length the twentieth century story. In this series I showed that I found it very odd and ironical that in the era that gets called progressive, liberal, and modern (1893-1919), all the conservative religious forces that surged a century later were being born. So that story was called *The Irony of It All.* Next, I found it odd that during the interwar period, 1919-1941, often looked back to as a time of Norman Rockwell's iconic, united America, more groups than ever appeared to be in conflict with each other. The outcome of that work was volume two, *The Noise of Conflict.* It was less odd that in the years of the Cold War (1941-1960), Americans promoted consensus and civil rites, chronicled in a third history, *Under God, Indivisible.*

III. *Respondeo etsi mutabor*

The third accent in my life of learning builds on the other two, but with the stress on the social and communal aspects of learning, on conversation and interpersonal experience: *respondeo etsi mutabor* or "I respond although I will be changed," meaning, in part: "Truth is vital and must be socially represented." This mode of learning demands the presence of the "other" as an active agent. In my final decade of full-time teaching and the first decade after it, the settings and occasions where I was challenged and jarred into learning through change built on and complemented college, seminary, and university studies. Learning in this mode has had to be collaborative and communal, based on dialogue and argument, usually under the aegis of various associations and institutions.

Haskins lecturers are instructed to account for themselves as builders of institutions. Some of my constructions were no doubt Lego-block-sized, and some could be blown down by moderate winds, but they did provide opportunities for learning and service. One of these institutions, invented at my deans' request in 1973 and renamed the Martin Marty Center after my retirement, was originally the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion. Its programs and company of scholars, along with my involvement in the American Academy of Religion and interdisciplinary work in the Divinity School and the university at large, prompted me to rework my historical and other humanities experience, reaching into new zones that included ethics, philosophy, and theology. The Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics, my other invention, had a 20-year run and left a valued legacy. I had been invited to found it on the basis of work I had done on the history of those three subjects, and saw to it that experts in those fields did the intellectual heavy-lifting.

So with the other institutions identified in the foreword of this publication. It took no intellectual gerrymandering for me to preside over the two historical societies (the American Catholic Historical Association and the American Society of Church History), nor did I have to go through intellectual contortions to deal with

"religious studies" in service of the American Academy of Religion. As for being a president or director of such associations or agencies, I have noted that when scholars in humanities and social sciences are chartered to lead focused projects, they tend to grow and serve, as I hope I did, by addressing these through their own specialties and special interests. Literary scholars, philosophers, and sociologists do this literarily, philosophically, and sociologically, so I simply had to direct my familiarity with the history of various phenomena to the project topics. These included, in sequence, religious fundamentalisms, public religion, civil discourse, ethnicity, religious studies, the child in religion, law and society, and "tribal" or international conflict.

Another chance determination, one that led me not to institution-building but institution-advancing, was my stint as chair of the Board of Regents of St. Olaf College. This experience was my chance to learn from a synoptic vision of a liberal arts college. All of our children had graduated from liberal arts colleges and I have visited many. I could not complete this testimony without also recalling my several elections to the Council of the Senate of the University of Chicago faculty and two elections to the Committee of the Council, where participants are able to gain close-up views of administrative life as it affects scholarship. Those of us who were on that Council between the tumultuous years of 1968 and 1970 perhaps got to see from closer-up than we might have wanted, but once again, we learned from those contingencies and surprises.

Dialogue with people in the arts, both musical and visual, has added color to my historical work. At one time I designed liturgical materials and consulted on religious architectural design. Later, collaboration on four books with my photographer son Micah, as well as interest in my wife's professional place in music and our daughter's in drama, all contributed to a life enhanced by the arts. Outside the classroom, travel offered learning opportunities. Our family trudged over battlefields on camping trips in 47 states and climbed cathedral towers in 13 nations. Brief but typical overseas

experiences as a visiting teacher in Japan, South Africa, and Australia supplied me with fresh perspectives.

"Truth is vital and is socially represented": I could have anticipated this social mode whenever change came to the university. New constituencies brought new questions for research and storytelling. Women had been rare in the classrooms when I studied and first taught, but now they often predominate, as do many questions that they raise. Racial and ethnic minorities and religious groups earlier conceived of as "marginal" moved to the center of inquiry during these years. Popular religion took its place alongside the more established forms. We were responding and being changed. Seeing newer questions replace older ones was a reminder of the role of contingency in historical work. As for transience, a large share of historians, except when doing research on particular subjects, as well as the public at large do not read or remember the work of most historians of even two or three generations ago, and my generation will soon join the others as it also fades. Not for a moment does that understanding of the ephemeral character of our venture lead me to cynicism or a sense of futility. It is a sign that we belong to what we write about: the temporal and the accidental, the "chance determinations" that are quickly replaced by others.

Some themes in my work receive consistent notice by commentators, critics, and reviewers. Back in the 1950s Americans conventionally said, "Religion is a private affair." Today it is public, and if I am not the originator of the themes—as some chroniclers suggest I am—I was at least "present at the creation" and stressed the concepts of "the public church," "public theology," and "public religion."[12] We do have to acknowledge Benjamin Franklin as inventor of what he called "publick religion." In America, with its diversity, using the adjective "public" immediately leads one to inquire about "pluralism," and my reflective work, as noted above, focuses on that. In all this work we differentiated between "public" and "political" concerns. I picture others in many disciplines using such an accounting to learn more about themselves and the present, since we are all part of this pluralist setting.

My focus is usually on religion in culture, Christianity in society, or faith in the context of interactive and often hostile communities that call for response—and change. That interest first impelled me into the Christian ecumenical zone—time spent at the Second Vatican Council in 1964 offered a surprising opportunity among many on that front. Many interfaith explorations since have furthered the commitment. I have been less interested in the ceremonial and more in the substantive and diplomatic versions of them. The questions that turned out to be unsatisfying were: "How do the religions converge?" and "Aren't we nice when we get together?" and "Aren't we simply different boats heading for the same shore?" Instead I find promise in questions such as: "What are the resources and intentions of faith-communities for dealing with conflict?" Being "tolerant" unfortunately has come to mean: "As long as I can get you to believe as little as I do, we can get along fairly well," which is a weak, unpromising complex. I have chosen in recent years to speak of "risking hospitality" in the face of the stranger, hospitality being a translation of the Greek *xenophilia* just as its opposite, *xenophobia*, is fear of and usually hatred of the stranger. Dealing with the *xenos*, with strangers, as we research their records in the past, helps locate one's self with their counterparts in the present.

This interest connects with the concerns of public religion, especially on topics relating to health, faith, and ethics, as it did when I chaired "Matters of Faith: Religion in American Public Life" for the American Assembly and the Park Ridge Center's study on civility. The focus of one of my books, *The Public Church*,[13] at that time was condensed in the thesis: "The problem is that the highly civil are not committed and the highly committed are not civil." In follow-ups to these endeavors the hosts would stock the room with several dozen activists and scholars who found the organizations, institutions, and interest groups of the others *de trop*. We were chartered to find ways in which participants could remain convinced people but at the same time be citizens who could become open to learning from each other. Sometimes participants in such moderating ventures get typed as

weak and wishy-washy compromisers, while aggressive individuals at the polar opposites receive credit for holding to firm conviction. In my experience and observation, however, those who weather the lobbed missiles from those passionate opposing sides exemplify more courage and staying power than do those who are sheltered by ideological bulwarks. I wonder whether others also find it so, or whether they think it is true that hard-line commitments are harder to hold.

A life of learning from sources beyond the classroom, study, and library, and devotion to the ideal of *respondeo etsi mutabor*, did not lead me, I don't think, to Protean diffusion or Promethian confusion. While for the historian the library, the archives, the collections, the manuscripts, the printed page, and the books provide access to most learning, the approach informed by Rosenstock-Huessy leads me to conclude that a life of learning is enriched elsewhere as well. As Rosenstock-Huessy himself declared, "The presence of one living soul among the three million volumes of a great library offers sufficient proof against the notion that the secret of this soul is to be found by reading those three million books."[14] I have already noted but paid too little attention to the parish or, certainly, to the family, my main school, and not noted at all one of the most important influences: friendship as embodied by friends of 60 years standing alongside new ones who have much to teach.

Let me look ahead. For three years I have codirected a project on The Child in Religion, Law, and Society at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University. Nineteen faculty members there have helped me look to the future, represented by the child. As they have dealt with problems of the child, I have been writing *The Mystery of the Child*, finding that doing so opens me to the world of the receptive, the vulnerable, and the responsive. Setting this inquiry in the context of the humanities has been a rich new learning experience.

In some periods during the past half century it was fashionable to see the humanities, including history and religious studies, as

postmodern games which have no anchor in reality beyond the text. I am not philosophically equipped to refute advocates of this view, but the perspective of history helps one outlast such contentions and see a return to the "human" in human learning, in the humanities. We have seen that the stories we tell and the ways they are told do bring about change, whether through negation or affirmation and action. The Commission on the Humanities was modest in its claims, but still positive:

> The humanities do not necessarily mean humaneness, nor do they always inspire the individual with what Cicero called "incentives to noble action." But by awakening a sense of what it might be like to be someone else or to live in another time or culture, they tell us about ourselves, stretch our imagination, and enrich our experience. They increase our distinctively human potential.[15]

"Reinvigorated" humanities, including history and religious studies, can help account for how the world got to be as it is, and how when responding to calls we might be changed and might help change it, and thus "increase our distinctively human potential." At least, I have a measured faith in that prospect. How odd.

Notes

1. Quoted in Wayne Booth, *The Art of Growing Older: Writers on Living and Aging* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 169.

2. Quoted in Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, and Autobiography* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005) 3.

3. Quoted in Popkin 64.

4. "Farewell to Descartes" in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *I am an Impure Thinker* (Norwich, VT: Argo, 1970) 2.

5. Rosenstock-Huessy 2.

6. Ortega is quoted in Julián Marías, *José Ortega y Gasset: Circumstance and Vocation* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1970) 362.

7. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1943) dedication page.

8. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (New York: Mentor, 1949) 48.

9. Jacob Burckhardt, *Force and Freedom: An Interpretation of History* (New York: Pantheon, 1943) 72-73.

10. Comment on "Story" is in Gustaaf Johannes Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method* (Boston: Beacon, 1950), Chapter I: "The Story That Must Be Told" and Chapter II, "Nothing but a Story," 15-78. The quotation from Hegel is on p. 8.

11. Quoted in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 87.

12. See Martin E. Marty, *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston: Beacon, 1987) 53-76. The chapter "Public Religion: The Republican Banquet" elaborates on the "public religion" and "public theology" themes. Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, OFM, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1993) 1-27 is a chapter length comment on these themes, "The Public Church and Public Theology."

13. Martin E. Marty, *The Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) is a full-length discussion of the ecclesiastical implications of "public."

14. Rosenstock-Huessy 4.

15. Report of the Commission on the Humanities, *The Humanities in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1980) 1.

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62. *A Life of Learning* (2006 Charles Homer Haskins Prize Lecture) by Martin E. Marty