

# The Mission of Christ College

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In this our thirtieth year, Christ College has reaffirmed its *raison d'être* in the form of a more direct, clear, and forceful mission statement.

*Christ College, the honors college of Valparaiso University, is a community of faculty and students that integrates fields of study, inspires love of learning, and enriches Christian moral and intellectual life through independent thought and collaborative inquiry.*

In formulating this statement, the faculty, staff, students, former deans, and many alumni who participated in the process sought to capture as accurately as they could the constitutive aims of the College's common life. It is therefore altogether fitting that we should publish this statement here and now on the occasion of the anniversary that marks the conclusion of the first generation of our history. We pray that it will serve us well for many years to come.

I was perhaps the only person present at all of the many conversations during which the statement was debated, revised, sharpened, shortened, and clarified. Again and again, all parties kept returning to the hallmarks of our charter and identity: Christianity, community, collaboration, learning, inquiry, integration, and love. From first-year students to the founding dean, from new faculty to the oldest among our alumni, there was remarkable consensus. Most of our work involved nuances of expression and euphony. The statement really is of the College, by the College, and for the College.

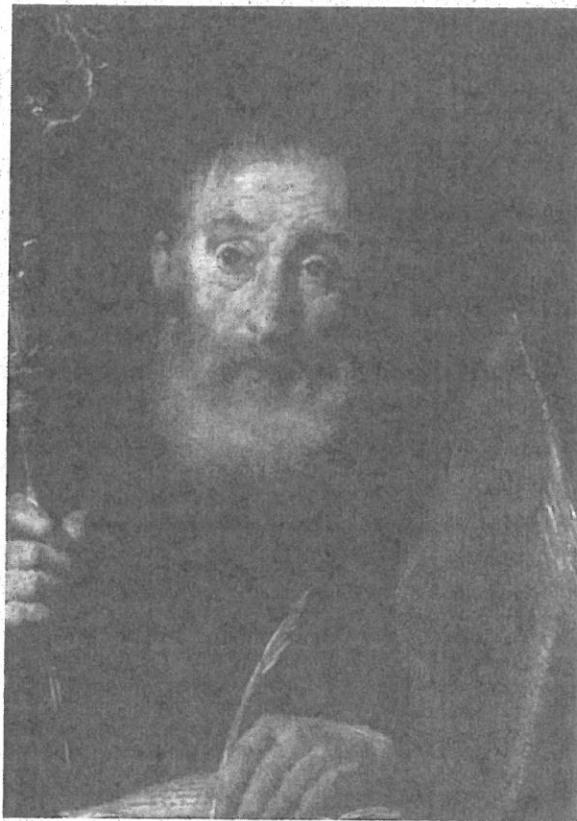
As I was preparing for my annual Dean's Address that opens each academic year in the life of the College, I wondered how best to envision the statement, how best to give it a more vivid presence and a more memorable articulation in the minds of our new and returning students. The solution to these problems was, in this case, literally right in front of my eyes.

During the first part of this semester, the VU campus has been festooned with great banners proclaiming the most impressive collection of paintings ever exhibited at the University. The exhibit, beautifully displayed in the Brauer Museum of Art and running from September 6 through October 26, features twenty-seven extraordinary works from the National Museum of Art of Romania. The "bannerpiece" that has been featured in all the publicity (and the one depicted here as well) is by the Italian artist Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1664). This small (13.5" x 10") oil on copper painting of St. Augustine visualizes the mission of Christ College in a magnificent and unforgettable way.

Augustine sits framed by the symbols of episcopal authority, the miter and the crozier, his left hand holding a quill poised over a manuscript, his right hand on the bishop's staff. So the first contrast captured by the painting is one that Augustine knew as an inner conflict between his longing for a life of contemplation and his calling to a life of action in the world. Christ College has always been concerned to advance in a more sharply and intensely focussed way VU's general concern with the integration of liberal and professional studies, with the arts once associated with lives free from the harsh necessities of life and their connection to fields of learning that are designed for the relief of human suffering and for service to neighbors in need.

If we take the manuscript to be a text by Cicero or some other great writer of Greek or Roman antiquity, we have depicted here another of the great tensions that has animated the life of Christ College at its best, the tension between Christianity and classical culture, or, more capaciously still,

the question of the relationship between Christ and culture. Augustine seems in this painting to have grasped all the more surely the life of action by virtue of his equally sure hold on the life of learning. But his relationship to classical culture may be somewhat ambivalent, as it certainly was in his own life. He grasps the staff of Christendom with his right hand, after all, suggesting that if he should ever lose his grip there, the left-



handed pursuit of classical studies might become "sinister," a word which, as all Christ College students know, means evil or injurious or "on the left side."

This reading of the right and the left should lead us to think of Luther's understanding of the two dimensions of God's rule, the kingdom of the left or the Gospel and the kingdom of the right or Law. Luther, himself an Augustinian, has left to this College a plethora of dynamic contrasts, distinctions, and paradoxes that have given some shape and vocabulary to much of our conversation over the past generation and have left open to perpetual debate and refinement the questions of the precise relationships between faith and reason, piety and intellect, and the realm of grace and forgiveness, mercy and salvation compared to the realm of law and justice, rule and judgment. These foci of intellectual energy have made Lutheranism particularly well suited to the life of a College, which must finally be shaped by the questions that it loves rather than by a set of answers agreed upon in advance. Indeed, two of the most highly regarded contemporary scholars in the field of American church history, Mark Noll and Richard Hughes, neither of whom are Lutheran, have made just this latter point very forcefully and elaborately against both those who would wholly secularize church-related colleges and universities and those who would seek to transform them into seminaries or churches.

However we might define these antinomies of our common life in Christ College, at their best, they provide illumination. Living through them together can lighten our darkness. We may then come to have that aura of brightness that surrounds the eyes of Augustine even as a faint halo

encircles his head. I asked the students to tell me what they saw in those eyes of Augustine. Some think he looks weary, rather like a Christ College student who has just completed the Freshman Program. Others see in him a sadness derived from a kind of worldly wisdom. Still others find a radiance shining forth from within, from what Augustine himself called the source of all Truth, the Christ who dwells within all of us. One sees what one brings to some extent, and I yesterday brought Yeats and **Lapis Lazuli**: "those ancient glittering eyes are gay."

What did this Augustine himself bring, this painted father of the early church who here has been made to embody a shining image of our own mission? Something less exalted and abstract and more personal and pastoral, I suppose. Let us imagine that the quill is poised, not to annotate but to write to all of us driven, fretful, restless, and busy individuals who recall the comparatively leisured life of our Christ College years. The staff is heavy to bear, and Augustine steadies it as he pauses to consider the next passage he will write from **The City of God**, speaking to us from across the centuries, inviting us, from the sometimes lonely and knowing eminence of his authority, to consider how we spend our years:

*It is the love of study that seeks a holy leisure; and only the compulsion of charity that shoulders necessary activity. If no such burden is placed on one's shoulders, time should be passed in study and contemplation. But, once the burden is on the back, it should be carried, since charity so demands. Even so, however, no one should give up entirely his delight in learning, for the sweetness he once knew may be lost and the burden he bears overwhelm him. \**

