

Don't Cry for Me, Valparaiso, The Truth Is *I Never Left You*

Each spring Christ College graduating seniors are honored at a banquet at which they receive Christ College medallions, designed to be worn on their commencement robes and later displayed in their homes or workplaces as mementos of their CC years. At the 1997 banquet Professor Richard Lee challenged the seniors to "the adventure of ... intellectual life lived in faith" as he shared a dream of the Christ College he once envisioned. Here, in full, is his unique perspective on the history of Christ College.

I suppose I always knew I would come to such a night as this—a bittersweet night when I would be celebrating my forthcoming retirement from Christ College with a senior class celebrating its forthcoming graduation from Christ College.

Let me say at once, I am very happy to join the distinguished Class of 1997 in our mutual commencements. I am very much honored to have been asked to honor you tonight for your distinguished academic achievements, and I only wish I too could receive a Christ College medallion as we graduate together. [Editor's note: Dean Schwehn in fact invested Mr. Lee with a medallion at the conclusion of his remarks.]

But if I partly imagined such a night as this some 30 years ago, when I joined the College, I surely imagined it in far different circumstances. Three decades ago I expected my role in the College would be the director of its residence halls and co-curriculum. My teaching in the College was then unsuspected and, I think, unimaginable.

As I recall, my first official contact with the College was a 1967 letter from founding Dean Baepler. We had become acquainted in relation to my work as an admissions counselor in charge of recruiting students for the University's Directed Studies Program, an honors program predicting Christ College. I was then studying at the College Student Personnel Institute in Claremont, California, and the Dean's letter pressed me for any information I could find at the Institute on building facilities for an honors college.

According to his letter, the University had recently received a generous gift of a million dollars to build a building for the young College. Dean Baepler hoped we might raise a complete residential College building, on the English model, for the University. I sent off what information I could find, and Dean Baepler asked me to join the College. The duties were not specified. In those days we did not market ourselves, nor was the University routinized by bureaucracy and dulled by professionalization. We walked by faith, not by sight.

I

Some of you may not know that when we planned the Christ College building, it included two beautifully designed residence halls, one east and one west, attached by cloisters to the refectory.

Let me walk you through our original dream—for that is where I am dreaming I am tonight. First, you should know that I am higher up in my dream than the College building presently stands. When we built the College, we selected a hilly site. We hoped the College would be situated like a beacon set upon a hill, a light to which the wise and the just might repair. Well, at least some of us hoped it would be higher than the Student Union.

You can imagine my chagrin on the day of excavation. The Caterpillar tractors skimmed off the top twenty feet of the hill and flattened the site. So tonight, as you enter my dream, please imagine the College where we intended it, 20 feet higher up in the air. That's about three Dean Meyers and four Dean Schwehns.

I remember taking that day of excavation as an omen, and ever since I have had at least one eye out on all the forces which would level our aspirations.

II

I am also dreaming tonight that we built those residence halls, and they are lovely. They are not very large. At that time, they would not have accommodated more than a quarter of the College. They were designated for seniors only, 48 students each, co-ed by floors, some Christ College students and some students from the University at large. Each floor accommodated 16 students, each of the three floors opening onto a central lounge, with separate sleeping and study rooms for every four students surrounding the core lounges.

There's plenty of wall space for student art, and floor space for student sculptures, bulletin boards for naughty cartoons, graffiti, and jokes, and while there were no pets, for reasons I no longer remember, I did imagine aquariums. In those days residence halls were not wired for computers, but we enjoyed meeting face to face, and had the leisure to do so. The academic year was fully a month longer, and there was time for both humanity and the humanities.

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We never got around to naming the residence halls, but I imagine, in keeping with the lively Lutheran heritage of the University in those days, now long ago, we might have called them Melanchthon Hall and Bonhoeffer Hall. The only requirement for the residents was that they take one evening meal and symposium in the refectory weekly, though I think our own very special cook, with the elaborate kitchen we did in fact build, would have made meals so excellent that students might have voluntarily taken many more meals there than one a week.

I remember advising Dean Baepler that an undergraduate college is built around a good cook. As you know, we in fact built the kitchen and dining hall for the two residence halls which, alas, vanished into an alternative universe. Thus, we ended up with the only lecture hall in American higher education called a "refectory"—and possibly the only lecture hall in American higher education attached to a high-tech kitchen sporting one of the finest deep-fat fryers in the western world.

Meanwhile, back in my dream tonight, the refectory really is the dining hall for the residence halls, students really *refect* in the refectory, and the stage you used for your memorable Freshman Production really was the place for the high table where the Dean dines once a week with the fellows of the College.

In my dream tonight, as your residence hall counselor, I am hosting the preprandials in the Commons before dinner. Imagine yourselves coming out of Melanchthon and Bonhoeffer Halls, some from the east, some from the west. You are joining other seniors, and I am moving among you as one who serves sherry, pouring out sweet or dry as you prefer. I like to think the sherry is pouring from crystal decanters, richly provided by one of the first wealthy Christ College alumni who has chosen to remain

anonymous. Please note you are all seniors of Indiana drinking age, and in those days the College was our home and *habitat*, and we could eat and drink in the Commons.

Furthermore, in my dream, as you enter the Commons, you move toward the conversation pit filled with cushions, warmed by the fire glowing in the hearth, and you are beginning to relax from your day's ardent and arduous intellectual work and seeking out the latest jokes and gossip. (You should know my recommendation of a conversation pit for the Commons was overruled, especially its provocative cushions. Perhaps it was *too* 1960s.)

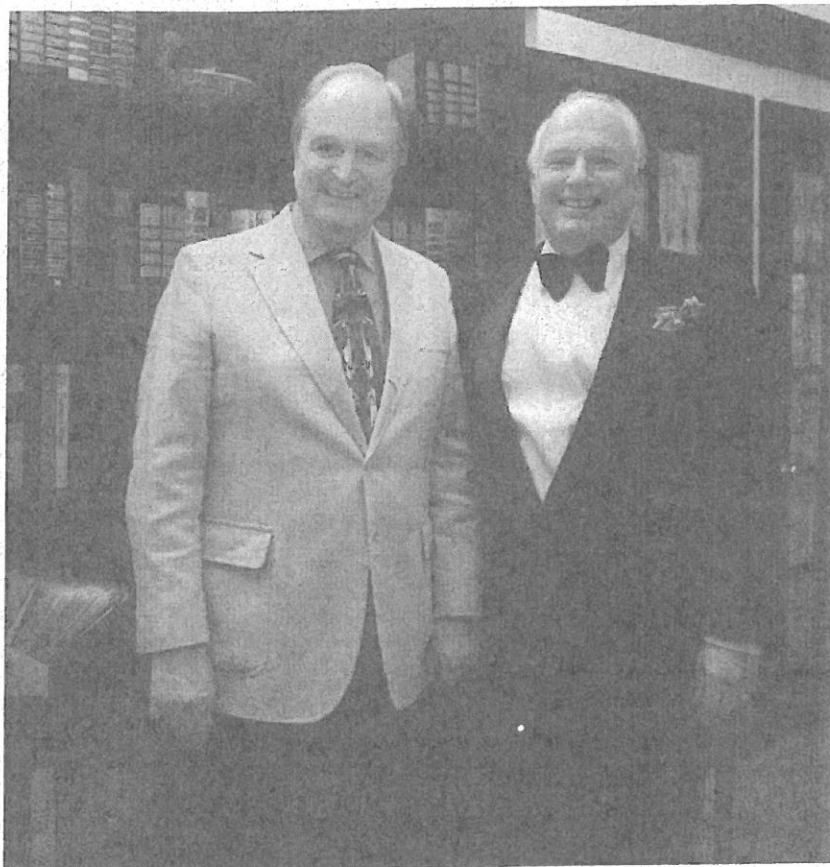
Now, in my dream, while we are enjoying our sherry in the Commons, and more importantly while we are enjoying *the on-going conversation upon which the whole life of the College depends*, the chimes ring from the bell tower, and we repair to the the refectory for dinner and the evening symposium.

Tonight the symposium is a vigorous questioning of a faculty member by her students on an off-hand remark she had made in class which the students found far more interesting than the subject matter of her course.

Sometimes the symposium focuses upon the work of a resident fellow of Christ College, a young scholar who

resides in the guest apartment in Bonhoeffer Hall. At other times it focuses on the work of a student, perhaps on her research with a faculty member. And sometimes it is simply the music of a string quartet. If you think the Freshman Production is something, you should see in my dreams the production the seniors perform! Indeed, the College annually sells the recordings of the Senior Production to raise the money needed for its annual masked ball.

At the conclusion of the dinner and the symposium, we sing the College song *Gaudeamus Igitur*, and as President O.P.



CC Founding Dean Richard Baepler and Richard Lee paused for a photo.
(Photo by Aran Kessler)

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Kretzmann, the creator spirit of the College, directed, the Dean of the Chapel prays for the College. Students of the College offer their special biddings to the prayers, and we all return to our residence halls refreshed for the intellectual pursuit of our callings as students and teachers.

III

Now [Editor's note: Mr. Lee snapped his fingers and we awakened from his dream.], very little of what I was dreaming tonight was achieved—for reasons I cannot rehearse at this time. The blueprints for Melancthon Hall and Bonhoeffer Hall have now turned yellow. The residences were not built—we got a windowless and airless basement under the College instead—and I never got my job as residence hall counselor. I had to fall back on a substitute life of teaching in the College instead.

Well, a substitute life is still a life, and teaching in the College certainly helped me achieve a much improved Bachelor of Arts education. I like to think that all I have taught these past thirty years has helped to repair what was lacking in my own undergraduate education at Valpo in the 1950s. Perhaps, at last, I am truly ready to graduate.

But, before I go, please indulge an old man one last dream, that I am among you, as your residence hall counselor, pouring each of you your last Christ College sherry, and bidding you farewell in the gleam of that crackling fire in the Commons. Like many old people, I live equally contemporaneously with all the times I have lived, now and then, then and now.

I will now tell you what we told honors seniors *then*, in those early days of the College. Draw close and listen.

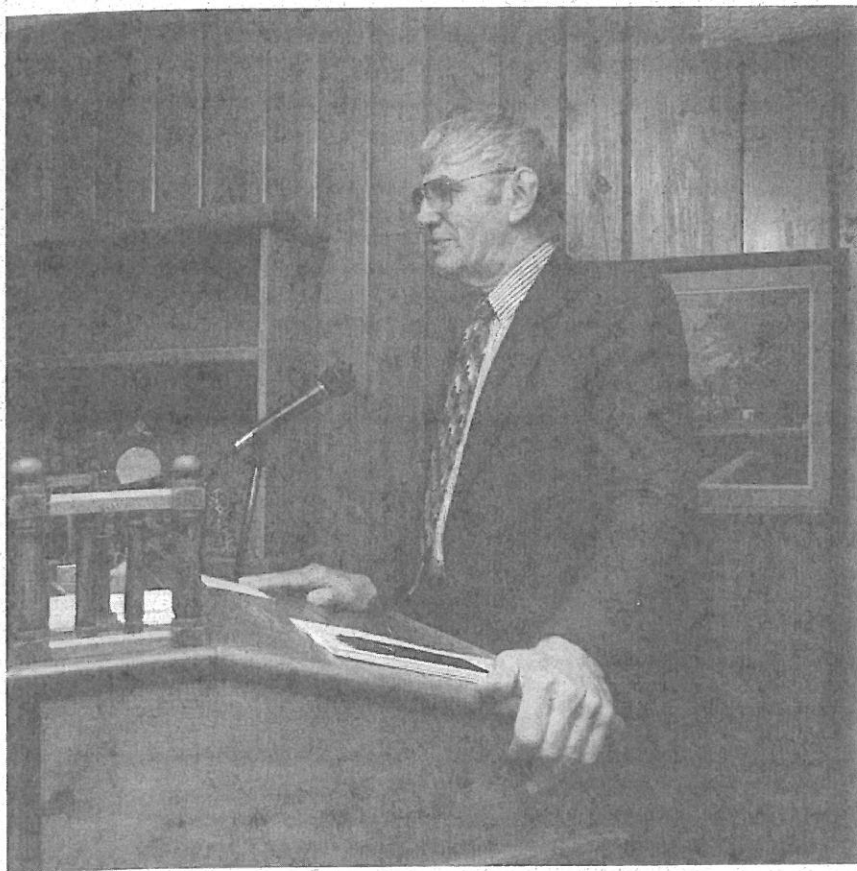
We reminded them, as I now remind you, that those to whom much has been given more will be required. We reminded them, as I now remind you, that all the intellectual achievements for which we honor you tonight, now make it possible for you to pursue an independent intellectual life. To be brief, distinguished seniors, there is no rest for the gifted. School's almost over. Your intellectual life is not.

An intellectual life is not necessarily a life of happiness, unless we understand that happiness is, as Aristotle tells us, activity according to virtue, or as Paul tells us, discipleship according to Christ. As intellectuals, you may now imagine more of life's alter-natives, be conscious of more choices to make, be more burdened with freedom, be called upon to take up more leadership roles, be aware of more gaps between the real and the ideal, and possibly be more aware of life's sadness than the rest of us who lack the intellectual gifts to know as much as you now know and, please God, will know.

Perhaps most fatefully at this honored point of your graduation, you will now hold yourself to very high standards of achievement the rest of your life. You

may even fail more often, *by your own standards*, than those of us less gifted who couldn't even try to achieve what you can achieve and, please God, will achieve.

Finally, over sherry at the Christ College fireside thirty years ago we would have told honors seniors that intellectual achievement entails, implies, indeed *requires* leadership. In those days we would have linked intellectual achievement and leadership with our Lutheran understanding of vocation and the priesthood of all believers.



Former CC Dean Arlin Meyer offered a champagne toast to honor Richard Lee.
(Photo by Aran Kessler)

Don't Cry for Me, Valparaiso *continued*

But good Lutheran theology aside, many of you will simply not be able to stand idly by while others bungle your affairs and those of your neighbors. Some of you will take up positions of leadership in exasperation and by default.

Your intellectual achievements will, of course, open many doors—fellowships, grants, career hints and handups, networks, mentorings, internships, yes, even jobs—but the price of your intellectual achievement will always be leadership. Whether you like it or not, you will have power over others, most less intellectually able than you are and whose lives will be affected by your leadership. Do not be cynical—not all power is money, or celebrity, or propaganda, or the privileges of your race and class and nation. Your intellectual power is also leadership power, and your task is to use it energetically and well.

IV

Well, that's something like what we would have told the honors students in Christ College thirty years ago. We would have alerted them, as I alert you tonight, to your next challenge, the challenge of leadership.

What would I add today for the Class of 1997? Probably this: yours will be the same burden and glory of the first graduates of the College, but you will likely have the additional challenge of leading your intellectual life in an increasingly post-intellectual society. Yours already is a world of overwhelming information, technologically delivered in convenient and omnipresent formats, though less and less of it is weighed or judged or even *thought* about very much at all.

You may have the *added* task of getting a fresh hearing for reasoning that considers ends more than means, that discerns more than it calculates, that more often questions "why?" rather than "how much?" A post-intellectual society is one where few think critically and the rest of us do not listen to the few that do. It is a fraying democracy where the majority do not vote, fewer read, fewer discuss, and fewer care as education dumbs down, culture stupefies, and all that entertains is true. You may be entering a society of so many pleasing fictions that your first intellectual task may need to be the fresh invention of reality.

A post-intellectual society is one where public relations substitutes for public policy, where one mass media image can wipe out many careful arguments, where sound moral character means feeling good about yourself, and the increase of freedom

means more consumer choices. It is, finally, a society where intellectuals are very comfortably kept thinking about what they are told to think about. I suppose the biggest difference in the past thirty years is that the intellectually gifted now have so many more places to sell out. Freshmen with any smarts at all now arrive at universities eager to become commodities.

You are, of course, now more than ready to criticize your teachers, or we have been remiss. But, if anything I've said is true about our society today, many of you will have a special challenge added to your intellectual lives. And so on this night of your honors, I especially wish you well in getting a hearing for the life of the mind in whatever is your walk of life.

Happily, to that weighty, yet delicate task, many of you will bring the ballast of the Christian intellectual tradition. Most of you can steady your intellectual life without wandering off into idols and ideologies, fads and fashions. To your intellectual life, you bring a special understanding of the human condition, a view of the self and history, and finally a Providence which transcends all that you may think and do, which can save you from both sentimentality and despair.

Still others of you may bring the gift of Christian faith to your intellectual life. You will likely have a special capacity for irony and humor, audacity and charity. Because you trust the ultimate truth is grace, you will be most able to put all your partial truths out for the service—and correction—of your fellow men and women. God knows, your lives especially will never be dull, and tonight I bless especially the adventure of every intellectual life lived in faith.

V

And so tonight, if I have dreamt of the College that never was for me, perhaps I can also dream the College that will never be for me. Thus, I invite you all back to campus for a splendid reunion symposium—say, thirty years from tonight, 2027. The topic of the symposium will simply be to teach each other what you will have learned in the rich variety of your intellectual lives.

I won't be here. My soul will be sporting in realms of ineffable bliss. So I must wish you *now* for that reunion *then*—perhaps in the new and corrected Christ College building?—my *highest congratulations for all you yet will achieve* and my warmest greetings welcoming you home. *