

THE CRESSET

A review of literature, the arts, and public affairs

Michaelmas 2008

Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century

Mark R. Schwehn

DURING THE 2007–08 ACADEMIC YEAR, Christ College, the honors college of Valparaiso University, as part of its fortieth anniversary celebration, sponsored a university-wide faculty seminar on “Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century.” Mindful of Valparaiso’s own character as a Lutheran comprehensive university, the readings and ideas engaged within the seminar focused not only upon liberal education itself but also upon contemporary questions about the relationship between liberal education and professional studies and questions about the relationships between liberal learning and religion. In order to explore these matters at the highest and best level of the current conversation, the seminar invited six distinguished scholars and academic leaders to the Valparaiso University campus to discuss their own writing and thinking on these very complicated and timely questions.

The six scholars who met with the seminar were:

Andrew Delbanco, the Julian Clarence Levi Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University;

Bruce A. Kimball, Director of the School of Educational Policy and Leadership at Ohio State University;

Charles Foster, Senior Scholar, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching;

Carol Geary Schneider, President, Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U);

Leon Kass, former Chair of the President’s Council on Bioethics and the Addie Clark Harding Professor in the College and the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, along with **Amy Apfel Kass**, who has written about American higher education and who participated in the seminar during her husband’s visit; and

Francis Oakley, the Edward Dorr Griffin Professor of the History of Ideas Emeritus and President Emeritus, Williams College.

Seminar participants read various essays and portions of books written by the visiting scholars who then spent an afternoon discussing the issues and ideas in their writings. In addition, each of the six graciously agreed to be interviewed while on campus about the major concerns of the seminar and about some of the personal and cultural concerns that provided the background for their writings. The substance of what follows is taken directly from transcriptions of those interviews. In the case of Carol Geary Schneider, the comments were drawn from transcripts of the seminar discussion itself. †

Mark R. Schwehn is the W. C. Dickmeyer Professor of Christian Education in Christ College, Valparaiso University.