Introduction to the Sub-Committee on Berea’s Christian Identity’s Report

Throughout the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition, believers have reinterpreted and re-appropriated their sacred texts and traditions for their time and place. This constant reinterpretation describes the very task of theology that has given rise to scriptural texts and secondary interpretations of those texts. Such interpretation and adaptation is responsible for the appearance of the various books of the Bible, and is a consequence of the development of faith represented in those books. For example, the faith of Paul, which sets aside the necessity of circumcision and Jewish dietary restrictions, might be barely recognizable to Moses; and the faith of the medieval church with its emphasis on purgatory and indulgences might seem strange to Paul. Yet there persists throughout the Jewish and Christian (and all world religion’s) traditions a constant thread of openness to divine revelation and new applications of faith even as core texts and traditions provide a foundation for these changes.

In a similar fashion, an institution like Berea College with its much shorter history, but with its consistent claim to a Christian identity has also constantly reinterpreted and re-appropriated that claim. Berea’s schools were founded in 1855 by men and women possessed of strong Christian convictions that gave rise to the radical claims of “impartial love” that shaped institutional policies and practices. However, the college founders often engaged in lively debates and contentious discussions about what constituted Berea’s Christian norms and practices. Furthermore, Berea’s founders lived in times radically different times from our own. Their specifically Christian response to the problems that characterized the ante-bellum south was to oppose slavery in the strongest possible terms, and to reject sectarianism. It was also to oppose strong drink and Roman Catholicism.

All of that was before the Emancipation Proclamation, the advent of the “Global Village” and the attendant Ecumenical Movement. Berea’s founding antedated as well the significant changes in hiring practices that have characterized the school over the last fifty years and more. Those practices have opened the institution’s doors to people of all faiths including Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and people of no religious faith at all. It has led college policy to long since abandon official attempts at “converting” non-Christians and requiring all employees, including teaching faculty, to profess the Christian faith. Berea’s founder, John G. Fee might have a hard time accepting such changes and yet they have emerged from campus discussions and debates not unlike those in Fee’s day.

Nonetheless, in the midst of all these changes throughout Berea’s history, there have always been core texts and traditional interpretations of those texts that have stood the test of time and that reflect to a great degree the intentions of the earliest Berea community. The research presented in this booklet shows that the college founders did most emphatically accept and apply the Biblical principle that “God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth.” They attempted to establish a radically utopian “beloved community” with special openness to the “least of the brethren.” They were convinced that people of “every nation and clime” should be welcomed with warm hospitality. Most importantly, at this institution of higher learning, the founders believed that Berea College should be a site where the great questions of the day should be studied, debated and acted upon in the light of faith. These are the texts and traditions that the documents contained in this booklet attempt to appropriate for our community in our day.
More immediately, the contents of this booklet represent a documentary response to Being and Becoming, Berea’s strategic plan that mandated reconsideration of Berea’s Christian vocation. The specific mandate reads:

Members of the Berea College community should initiate conversations that focus on these questions: Can we articulate our institutional vocation in a way that clarifies the relationship between our contemporary educational mission and our Christian roots? That is, how can we, in all our diversity, become an educational community in which our promotion of the “Cause of Christ” encourages respect for theological/religious differences and in which belief and service mutually support each other?

With these words in mind, the Strategic Planning Committee appointed a Sub-Committee on Berea’s Christian Identity that determined to fulfill its charge over a period of four years in well-defined stages. To begin with, an entire year (1997-'98) was spent setting the Sub-Committee’s agenda. During the second year (1998-'99), a faculty workshop, presentations and guidance of guest speakers and consultants, along with written reflections solicited from faculty and staff, all helped establish a framework for exploring Berea’s Christian Commitment. A third year (1999-2000) was devoted to researching and reading sermons and addresses of Berea’s founders and presidents, and selecting passages from the Bible related to Berea’s Christian identity. The research was to inform the documents which were written subsequently, and which are found in this booklet under the heading of “Major Texts.” During the fourth year of its project (2000-'01), the Sub-Committee on Berea’s Christian Identity organized and conducted small group discussions across the campus. These were based on the “Major Texts,” but most prominently on the one entitled “Berea College’s Christian Vocation and Self-Understanding: A Tradition of Inclusion and Spirited Debate.” Based on these discussions of its previous work, the sub-committee then formulated a list of “Basic Points” about Berea’s Christian Identity. In the fall of the fifth year of the project (2001-'02), these points were presented to the faculty of Berea College for discussion.

Throughout this process, the General Faculty and other campus constituencies have been kept informed of the Sub-Committee’s activities. These constituencies have been invited to join in all of the public lectures and events and have received by email or paper communications draft documents as they have emerged (see Appendix, p. 47 for a timeline of these activities and events). Several times in the past two years, the Sub-Committee has brought elements of its work to the General Faculty for discussion (e.g., conversations about the third Great Commitment and a later discussion of the “Basic Points”). Now in the fifth year, the Sub-Committee is presenting to the SPC and to the General Faculty this final report of its work and a recommendation for a statement on Berea’s Christian Identity.

The culmination of the Sub-Committee’s work has been the development of a statement that the Sub-Committee feels best represents an application of Berea’s core Christian texts’ and traditions for this moment in history and for this community of Bereans as we have heard them speak. The approved statement will be used to review and to revise all official documents and statement of Berea’s Christian Identity and to provide a consistent public articulation to internal and external audiences of this central characteristic of Berea College.

[NOTE: One of the “Major Texts” in this presentation, “Berea College: People, Texts, & Themes,” was authored by a Berea College student, Gina Fugate, as an independent study directed by Berea’s President, Larry Shinn. It appears here beginning on page (57). Thereafter it retains its original form complete with table of contents and independent pagination.]
BEREA COLLEGE'S CHRISTIAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING: READINGS OF OUR PAST

The Subcommittee on Christian Identity (formerly called the Subcommittee on the Christian Commitment) has been charged by the Strategic Planning Committee to explore the following aspect of Berea’s Christian self-understanding:

Members of the Berea College community should initiate conversations that focus upon these questions: Can we articulate our institutional vocation in a way that clarifies the relationship between our contemporary educational mission and our Christian roots? That is, how can we, in all our diversity, became an educational community in which our promotion of the "Cause of Christ" encourages respect for theological/religious differences and in which belief and service mutually support each other?

In this paper we begin the process of articulating our institutional vocation by clarifying our Christian roots. We shall see how John Gregg Fee articulated the College’s mission to key biblical concepts that guided him and his contemporaries and inspired them to found Berea College. Then we survey how four of Berea College’s presidents, William G. Frost, William J. Hutchins, Francis S. Hutchins, and Willis D. Weatherford, interpreted and articulated this Christian self-understanding for their own times. Our purpose is not to suggest that Berea College return to the times and expressions of any era, Fee’s or any other's. We live in different times and different circumstances. Yet, we suggest that we can find principles of Christian self-understanding that remain valid for our time, however we may interpret and apply them.

Berea’s founder and presidents have been guided by certain biblical texts in their articulation of Christian principles for this College. When we refer to them, we are not gathering proof texts or assuming that the way our predecessors interpreted these texts is the way we must interpret them. Rather, we see these as living texts which invite us to bring our own cultural, social, and intellectual contexts into conversation with them, just as the founders did. How our predecessors interpreted these texts, then, needs to be given our attention and respect, for their interpretations animated and shaped this College. Their hermeneutic challenges us to enter into a similar conversation. We begin to do that with this paper. *

* This summary is based primarily on research by student member Regina Ann Fugate of the Christian College Subcommittee, which is encapsulated in her Independent Study paper, "Berea college: People, Texts, & Themes" (1999). Copies will be found on Reserve in the Hutchins Library: see folders 219, 567-570. See also the address by Larry D. Shinn, “Berea’s Utopian Experience,” folder 98.

I. THE VIEWS OF FORMER LEADERS OF BEREA COLLEGE

In this first part we summarize key ideas of the five leaders just mentioned.

John Gregg Fee

John G. Fee founded Berea College out of convictions about education and about humanity that were rooted deeply in the Gospel of the New Testament. The heart of that Gospel for Fee was summed up in the two great commandments that summarized the law and the prophets in the Jewish tradition and were enunciated by Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind... and you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-40; cf Deut. 6:5, Lev. 19:18). The phrase by which
Fee summed up this core teaching is “the gospel of impartial love.” Closely related to this summary are two other notions. One was the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12), and the other the statement from Paul’s speech to the Athenian Areopagus (17:33): “God hath made of one blood all the nations of men.” In those words Paul (and Luke) expressed a truth enunciated both in Hebrew tradition and in gentile (e.g., Stoic) philosophy. We think it safe to say that by reading these fundamental texts about the relationship between God and humanity in the way they did, Fee and his colleagues could radically confront and challenge their own society by proclaiming that the Berea community would live out these Christian principles in their own way. Against the ethos of their own culture, Fee’s Berea would educate man and women together; Berea would educate blacks and whites together; Berea would admit as students peoples from “every nation and clime,” whatever their culture and ethnicity.

Moreover, Fee and his colleagues saw that their mission at Berea College was to animate the gospel of impartial love in the lives of those who came to teach and to learn. Its praxis was to be based on this gospel. That praxis would succeed in the face of a society that rejected it because of the “power of love” that moved it. Its educational program was to be based upon it. Young men and women were not only to be educated intellectually, they also were to be educated morally and spiritually; and one of the major goals of education was for the Berea graduate to adopt for himself or herself the gospel of impartial love and to be imbued with the social principles of radical equality of races and sexes, and their implications for a political society based on liberty and justice, so that they might be inspired and empowered to transform their own society. Focusing on Eastern Kentucky and the mountain territory of adjoining states, Fee and his followers also squarely focused upon a needy class of people not usually given such attention, particularly freed blacks and poor whites.

The community of Berea College in its early days was a “distinctly Christian” community, and while one may distinguish the church community, i.e., Union Church, from the College, it is clear that they were intertwined and that the principles that enlivened both were the same. Chiefly, Berea College, like Union Church, was to be clearly, even aggressively, anti-sectarian: not merely “non-sectarian” but anti-sectarian. The various doctrines of the denominations and sects divided Christians, even within denominations. Fee had experienced the consequences of this divisiveness in his own life and ministry and observed it among denominations divided by the Civil War. Determined to bring that to an end, Fee espoused a biblical creed that was, however, not a church creed. What can unite all Christians, he asserted, was the person of Christ, not any teaching about him. Under the aegis of a common loyalty to the person of Christ, Berean Christians were free to hold diverse forms of Christian doctrine and exercise the right of private interpretation; and they could freely express their views, so long as these expressions did not hinder fellowship. This spirit of free expression in a community of impartial love was to be encouraged in the religious assembly and in the relations of all on the Berea campus.

William G. Frost

After Henry E. Fairchild’s presidency and the brief tenure of W. Stewart, William Goodell Frost assumed the leadership of Berea College. An Oberlin professor who was also a professed Christian, in fact Professor of Greek at Oberlin Seminary, Frost combined his understanding of the Christian gospel with a commitment to the ideals of American democracy and sought to combine them in his version of the Berea Way. Frost fully supported the non-sectarian ethos of the College, and articulated what he saw as the essence of Christianity: to live in the spirit of Christ. This spirit he understood as one “of universal sympathy and unselfish love.” The purpose of a Christian institution, understood as the manifestation of a Christian cause, was to unite souls in an unselfish mission of serving, like Christ,
those of lowly estate—especially in Southern Appalachia. He noted that Berea’s founders “sought out the poor and oppressed... They undertook not to gather sheaves where grain was thickest but to cultivate the soil that was repellent and cold; they endeavored to make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before.” Frost was one with Fee in seeing the Golden Rule and the great commandments as “the soul and center of true religion.” He identified these teachings as “the foundation of our Berea church, town and college.” And he viewed “God has made of one blood...” as “perhaps the most revolutionary sentence in the world.” Frost’s Christianity was simpler and less doctrinal than Fee’s came to be; but like Fee’s it was a Christianity of praxis, a Christianity lived out in action, particularly in the education of the young.

Like Fee, Frost connected his understanding of the Christian as one who lives “the spirit of Christ” to the ideals of American democracy, beginning with the statement from the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal,” reiterated by Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address. Berea College should live out this ideal and thus become an example to the nation, and indeed to the entire world, of patriotism, citizenship, and morality, just as Christ is “the great Exemplar” to the Christian believer and in particular to the Berea community of Christians.

There is much disagreement among our own historians in judging Frost’s commitment to equality of the races in education at Berea. Without taking sides on this question we do note that Frost was committed to educating Berea students, especially the mountain whites, to overcome racial prejudice in the Southern society most of them would live in.

William J. Hutchins

When Frost retired in 1920, despite the major changes in the College’s educational mission forced by the Day Law, which forbade Berea to educate blacks and whites together, Berea College had maintained its original commitment to educate those in need, though now the needy consisted largely of young women and men from the southern highlands, the territory for which Frost had coined the term "Appalachia." Berea’s new President, a former Greek student of Frost’s at Oberlin, was the son of a pastor, a graduate of Yale, and had spent time in China. William J. Hutchins recognized that Berea College had strived to continue its mission under the different circumstances that the Day Law and other social and economic changes had brought about. Yet he declared that “Berea’s essential task is changeless”: to provide an education of high quality to “...each of those mountain boys and girls who need it most.” Hutchins came to identify the task of meeting this need as “the Cause” of Berea College.

With all the resources of a seminary training, William Hutchins often preached on a variety of texts; but he did not favor any single text or set of them in articulating his Christian understanding of Berea, nor did he express it in within a particular theological framework. But one theme that recurs in his speeches is “the Cause.” In “Caring for the Good Cause,” delivered in the ninth year of his presidency, he explicated Isa. 51:7: “Listen, all ye who care for the good cause, O people who lay my laws to heart” (KJV). “There is a Good Cause,” he said, “however the Good Cause may be defined.” And he went on to assert that the Good Cause refers to the “world-wide society of those who are bound to each other in fraternal love and to God in filial trust.” In another speech near the end of his presidency he declared that the task of Berea College was to inspire its students, by its own example, to become examples of the Cause to the world:
Our students must learn to look, without contempt, without condescension, and without embarrassment, into the faces of all God’s workmen everywhere throughout the world; not merely students from this or that country, brothers of the common life. Above the mountains, America. Above all nationals, humanity “God hath made of one blood all nations of men.” These are the slogans which must sing themselves to the very souls of our students.

Hutchins drew the phrase “the Cause” from the preamble to the College’s Constitution promote the Cause of Christ,” yet his referring to it in this general way suggests that he recognized that not all who committed themselves to “the Cause” as Berea might understand it in his time would necessarily be Christians. Nevertheless, he believed that “the [Good] Cause” all Bereans could embrace was the cause of being examples and ministers to the world-wide human family, and that such a cause was consonant with Berea’s tradition, even if William Hutchins understood “the Cause” in somewhat different ways than Fee and his contemporaries.

Francis S. Hutchins

Francis S. Hutchins succeeded his father in 1939 after a lengthy period of educational service in China. Educated like his father at Oberlin and Yale, he did his graduate work in political science rather than theology. William Hutchins had directed the vision of the College beyond the borders of this country to the world at large, and Francis Hutchins confirmed and promoted Berea’s outreach beyond the mountains to the nations of the world. He recognized that “the cause of Christ” was fundamental to Berea College, which would never have come into being had not this Cause moved its founders to create it. He saw a commitment to that Cause as the ultimate test of the College: “If the life of our campus does not promote ‘the Cause of Christ’ we are not fulfilling our obligation.”

In an address to students entitled “Berea Characteristics,” Francis Hutchins recognized that the community’s understanding of “the Cause” may change as circumstances change. He wrote,

Berea requires that you seek among all the causes of our society, casting aside those that are petty, until you find the cause, the ideal that demands of you full devotion. Berea was founded by men and women who believed, with a burning belief, that slavery was wrong.... That belief, the devotion of those men and women, the sacrifice required in the support of an unpopular cause--these are part of your heritage as Berea students. They demand that you, too, seek and find the ideals and purposes to which you will give your lives.

Francis Hutchins understood that Cause in much the same way as his father: if one serves humanity then one is fulfilling the Cause. Berea College, its faculty, staff, and students--all were to be examples of service to others. If the faculty and staff would successfully model how one follows the example of Christ, and create the environment to make that possible here, then they would influence their students to promote this cause in their lives as they ventured back into their own communities and out into the world. “One result of the Berea College experience,” Francis Hutchins wrote, “should be the emancipation of the human spirit. You can no longer be parochial, no longer isolated. You are henceforth a citizen of the world and all men are your brothers.”

In another address Francis Hutchins connected, as Christians often do, the foundational biblical texts of the Christian New Testament with the well-known saying of the Hebrew prophet Micah (6:8). He had
come to see that text as a demand, a positive affirmation of a requirement: one must “do justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with [one’s] God.” In the light of these prophetic words, one must recognize that promoting the cause of Christ is not an easy or superficial task. It requires a commitment to “some work which will permit true brotherhood among men.”

Francis Hutchins also affirmed the non-sectarian nature of Berea College’s self-understanding. In his pamphlet, “The Berea Idea,” he alludes to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (4:3) to reaffirm the need for all persons at Berea College to work together regardless of their differences: “respecting each one’s conscience; working by love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

Francis Hutchins shared the views of his predecessors that Berea College was to promote the cause of Christ by being an example to its students and by inspiring its students to be examples to others wherever in the world they may live. They were to be inspired to embrace the egalitarian spirit of Berea’s founders and also the motive of service to others by carrying these ideals beyond the boundaries of their own communities, recognizing themselves as citizens of the world animated by the Cause each has identified to serve.

Willis D. Weatherford

Willis D. Weatherford came to Berea after a distinguished career as professor of economics at Swarthmore College and academic dean at Carleton College. Like his predecessor, he also had served abroad, with the American Friends Service Committee in European relief and with a rural development project in India. Possessed of degrees from Vanderbilt, Yale Divinity School, and Harvard (Ph.D.), he brought to his office an active Christian faith oriented toward service to others as well as considerable experience in liberal arts education.

Perhaps more than any other Berea president in the twentieth century Weatherford committed himself to articulating for the College community a Christian self-understanding. This was done in symbolic ways, as when he instructed that the College seal be made the letterhead on official College stationary; and in structural ways, as when he secured a substantial gift from the Lilly Endowment to establish the Campus Christian Center and create the Eli Lilly Visiting Professorship in Religion. And while the general faculty voted to abolish required chapel for students early in his presidency, a decision he accepted with reluctance, Weatherford worked tirelessly to sustain a Christian ethos in the college community during a time when American society and higher education was becoming increasingly secularized, and he urged workers and students alike to personally commit themselves to a religious approach to life.

In putting the College seal on the letterhead, Weatherford made the motto “God has made of one blood” a constant reminder to the community of its Christian commitment. He also promoted the two great commandments as a primary biblical text, and in a 1977 chapel address connected these foundational texts to the exhortation to love in I John 4:7-8. “Love of God and of other men and women,” he said, “was the central attitude of Jesus’ life, and should be central in our lives.” He then connected love and service: “If we love others we will expend our time and energy to serve them.” The ideal of service “is a symbol of our love” and a “witness to our service to the cause of Christ.” Weatherford believed, as did his predecessors, that Berea College, through its educational program and the examples of its workers’ dedication, should encourage its graduates to use what they learn here to
help others. This was not merely the task of the College as an institution, however; it required for success the commitment of individuals.

Weatherford agreed that “the college is not a church,” yet, he insisted, “it is a college with a Christian emphasis and as such this challenge or invitation is a legitimate part of our role. Our impact here should be through example, challenge and invitation--choice remains with the student.” The statement reflects a constant concern throughout his presidency, as he sought to lead Berea College to overcome the secularizing movement of higher education that had affected so many church-related colleges and universities. He feared that the Christian commitment, Berea’s central commitment, was the most likely to be diluted and forgotten because of indifference, or positive antagonism or the secular pressures of society or the feeling that Christ’s message is irrelevant to our educational task, or simply the feeling that his concern is out of style in so many colleges. The very fact that service to Christ is out of style at many colleges is all the more reason why it should be in style at some colleges including Berea.

And while he accepted that Berea’s faculty and staff would not be composed entirely of practicing Christians he did want all workers at Berea College to have a spiritual focus that would contribute to the mood and tone of the environment of Berea’s students. And he was committed to hiring staff and faculty who were Christians, as he desired that they should remain in the majority.

As a college with a Christian commitment Weatherford was also concerned that the academic curriculum reflect the commitment “to stimulate understanding of the Christian faith,” and “confront students with at least some of the issues of faith, ethics and Christian thought.” He also saw to it, with the abolition of compulsory chapel, that Berea College continue to sponsor regular voluntary chapel services at which students, faculty, and staff might come together for worship.

Willis Weatherford worked tirelessly to keep the Christian ethos of Berea College central to the College’s self-understanding. While he was committed to maintaining the distinction between church and college, and the educational integrity of Berea – he often remarked that he didn’t want to see Berea “become another Bob Jones” – he was also concerned that Berea not lose the distinctiveness that its commitment to “the cause of Christ” gave it. He saw that commitment in much the way his predecessors did: the Berea College community both as an institution and as individuals must promote a Christian ethos characterized by faith active in love and love active in service.

II. IMPLICATIONS AND QUERIES

Commonalities to Consider

As we review the writings of our five leaders on how they understand Berea to be a Christian College, we note certain common themes, all of which are connected to one another:

1. Berea College is committed to promote “the cause of Christ,” but how “the cause” is understood and defined has varied over time. In all times it seems to have been defined in spiritual and practical rather than theological or (for most of this period, excepting the age of the founders) evangelical terms. For Fee and the founders one could argue that the central articulation of the cause was the promotion in American society of a radical egalitarianism as the fruits of a gospel of impartial love. Frost saw the
cause to be lived out in the opposition to racial prejudice but primarily through service to mountain youth. The Hutchinses extended the notion of “the Cause” to impartial love for and service to the human family throughout the world, and recognized that while not everyone’s cause would be a Christian’s commitment to the cause of Christ, all needed to be urged to find and live out a cause. Weatherford, while agreeing with the Hutchinses on this point, re-emphasized the need for the Christians in the community to be truly committed to the cause of Christ.

2. While the early Berea community was composed of people who were members both of Berea College and Union Church, it was recognized from the beginning that the College and the church were separate entities. This distinction became clearly demarcated in time. Yet because the founders began with a church community out of which the College grew, they promoted as the Christian ethos of the College the same aggressively non-sectarian concept of community as they created in Union Church. All of Berea’s presidents have supported this non-sectarian ethos as central to Berea College’s Christian self-understanding.

3. Fee and the presidents emphasized throughout their tenures an understanding of the Christian Gospel not as a set of beliefs (an "orthodoxy") but as commitment to live lives of service to others after the example of Christ (an "orthopraxy"). The Berea concept of service to others was entirely inclusive: station in life, class, race, ethnic or religious identity were to be of no concern or consequence. Those within the Berea community who were not Christians were asked to find their own cause by which they might commit themselves in service to others.

4. From the beginning Fee and his contemporaries desired for Berea College to be a place that would educate persons “of every nation and clime.” In the early part of the twentieth century Berea was regularly admitting international students. Inevitably these students, like some new faculty and staff, have brought with them their commitments to other faiths and philosophies. Given the fact that most of Berea’s presidents have been responsible for bringing international students to Berea, this is a theme that needs to be emphasized. This practice is consonant with Berea’s motto and is implied in it.

5. The words and deeds of our five leaders also suggest that despite these obvious common threads, Berea College has never had a single and simple understanding of what its Christian ethos or self-understanding is or should be. This is a fact that the College community has struggled with throughout its history.

Implications

What implications do we draw from all these historical facts and commonalities for our own time? What Christian principles derived from this history might we suggest to the College community as appropriate to our own time?

First, we suggest that the basic texts which John G. Fee and his colleagues chose to articulate a Christian self-understanding remain just as significant and challenging today as they were 145 years ago. We commonly understand the two great commandments to lie at the heart of the gospel of Christ; and the sentence the founders chose as their motto, “God has made of one blood, etc.” is a central theological expression of our common humanity. If today’s Berea community undertakes to interpret these texts for our own time, its members will remain connected to their Christian roots and in harmony with the hermeneutic of the founders, who also used those same texts to speak to their own social and historical situation.
Second, certain elements of Berea’s Christian self-understanding which developed in its early years we also see as valid for our own time. We suggest that the Christian members of the campus community assertively promote a non-sectarian understanding of Christianity as true to Berea’s history and practice. Berea College is not a church; it does not assert or espouse any doctrinal positions about Jesus Christ or expect assent to any statement of beliefs or to a specific set of moral practices or to a specific understanding of Christian servanthood. Nor should it ever adopt such an ecclesial model. The College as an institution needs to make this ideal of Fee and his successors clear to everyone inside and outside the College community, including Christians who may desire Berea to conform to their sectarian understandings of Christian belief and practice and who fault the College because it does not, and also those who are committed to other faiths or philosophies and desire those commitments to be accepted and respected.

Third, while the language of “the cause of Christ” is problematical for many in the community today, we assert that the concept of committing one’s self to a “cause” remains at the heart of Berea’s educational ideal and mission, and we take to heart President Francis Hutchins’ admonition that every member of the community find a cause that speaks to him or her, whether that cause be identified explicitly with "the cause of Christ" or not. We agree with the former presidents that a cause that is in keeping with Berea’s mission is one that promotes the unqualified personal equality and dignity of all human beings, that commits one to a vocation of service to the members of the human family, especially those most in need; and, in the light of new directions our educational program has been taking, one that inspires Bereans to work for the good of our planet. A commitment to such causes as these by faculty and staff should be deemed as consonant with "the cause of Christ,” as Berean Christians have historically understood it, even when it does not arise out of a personal commitment to Christian faith.

Fourth, in deliberately rejecting orthodoxy for orthopraxis, Berea College has traditionally placed the motive of service at the heart of its Christian self-understanding. We commend this tradition as central to Berea’s mission and suggest that the integral relationship between “the cause of Christ” and a commitment to serve others without distinction, whatever their needs, be reasserted and stressed anew.

Fifth, given the commitment of the founders to educate persons “of every nation and clime,” and the reality of that commitment lived out in the persons from so many cultures, lands, and ethnic groups who have come to work and study at Berea, we assert that a spirit of hospitality should be an integral part of Berea’s Christian self-understanding: persons of other religious faiths or philosophical convictions should continue to be invited here, and every effort should be made to ensure that all who come are welcomed. Moreover, we commend an understanding of Christianity that respects the faiths and philosophical commitments of others and encourages respectful dialogue and relations among them. Bereans should promote a Christian ethos that is experienced as enriching and not as oppressive, that emphasizes hospitality and vigorously opposes divisions, hostilities, and expressions of prejudice against members of the community because of their religious or philosophical commitments.

Sixth, because we see an ongoing need for it, we encourage those within the Christian family at Berea College to continue the historical conversation about Berea’s Christian ethos and self-understanding and to draw into these conversations all members of the Berea community, whatever their faiths or philosophies. Such a conversation invites each new generation of Bereans – students and staff – to re-appropriate the core elements of Berea’s spiritual self-understanding for themselves.