

AT THIS TIME AND IN THIS PLACE

Vocation and Higher Education



Edited By
DAVID S. CUNNINGHAM

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*Dedicated, with gratitude,
to the memory of*

William C. Placher

*who, throughout his life,
responded faithfully to his own calling, which was:
to enable and encourage his students and colleagues
to respond to theirs*

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Foreword

THE PUBLICATION OF this book marks an important milestone in a new effort within American higher education to use the intellectual and theological exploration of vocation as a pedagogical approach in college-level education. In several ways that are noted by the authors in this work, the resurgence of vocational exploration is a reclaiming of the basic purposes upon which American higher education was founded. These include an education that addresses big questions: the meaning and purpose of life, the role and place of oneself in the world, and the responsibility to contribute to the common good. The language of *vocation* has been extricated from its nearly-invisible recent existence among Reformation-era theological concepts and brought back into the common vocabulary. This book makes a valuable contribution to understanding the uses of vocation in higher education today, both as a theological construct and as an approach to teaching and learning.

It was the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment Inc. that gave birth to the resurgence of vocational exploration as an animating force in American higher education. In 1999, the Endowment launched its Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV) to support independent colleges and universities in establishing or strengthening programs that would help students examine the relationship between their faith and vocational choices; provide opportunities for young people to explore Christian ministry leadership; and enhance the capacity of an institution's faculty and staff to teach and mentor students in this regard. The objective was to identify and nurture a new generation of highly talented and committed leaders for religious communities and for society. Over the subsequent years, Lilly generously supported the PTEV programs of 88 colleges and universities and a series of national conferences for representatives of participating institutions.

The Lilly Endowment also supported preparation of books and articles on vocation. William Placher's edited anthology, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, has enjoyed wide use on campuses. Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass, two excellent scholars, prepared another robust collection, *Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*. The Lilly Endowment insisted that a focus on teaching be built on the highest standards of scholarship and on students' engagement with significant—and demanding—texts. Indeed, texts from both these collections make regular appearances in the present volume.

The early success of the PTEV programs prompted a related request from college and university presidents. They were concerned about rapid change in the leadership of independent higher education that results when presidents and institutions are not well matched. In 2004 Lilly turned to the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) to develop a program on Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission. The program's premise is that better alignment between the "calling" of the president and the mission of the institution would result in a longer, happier, and more successful presidency. CIC established year-long seminar-based programs—one for presidents and a similar one for those aspiring to the presidency—that joined the reading of texts with periods of reflection and facilitated conversation. That initiative continues to this day with the Lilly Endowment's generous support. An extraordinary number of the "prospective" presidents who participated in the program have become college and university presidents.

By 2008, the majority of the 88 PTEV institutions that Lilly had funded were developing post-grant strategies to sustain their vocational exploration efforts. As the Lilly Endowment's active support concluded, college and university presidents were pleased with the positive results of these programs; but they also recognized the benefit of inter-institutional collaboration. Presidents pondered how this knowledge about the reframing of undergraduate education could expand and flourish beyond the PTEV grant years, and they asked CIC to help them develop a nationwide campus-supported network for the exploration of vocation. In early 2008, CIC laid the groundwork at a March 2009 conference. By fall 2009, the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE) was launched as a collaboration among colleges and universities. Within three months, 125 institutions had joined as dues-paying members of NetVUE; more than half of these institutions had not been a part of

PTEV. With vital support from the Lilly Endowment, a successor to PTEV had emerged.

Today NetVUE provides opportunities for a diverse group of 180 independent colleges and universities to strengthen institutional capacity for vocation, and the number continues to increase. NetVUE members include a majority of the former PTEV institutions plus a diverse mix of more than 120 additional colleges and universities that did not participate in PTEV. Members include smaller liberal-arts colleges such as Hendrix and Allegheny, as well as larger universities such as Baylor and Seton Hall. NetVUE institutions are located in rural, suburban, and urban settings in 38 states. Some member colleges and universities engage a variety of intellectual and theological traditions; others have a close affiliation with a particular one; and some have no religious affiliation. But all share NetVUE's goal to support vocational exploration among their students. NetVUE provides national and regional conferences, campus visit and consulting programs, program development grants, support for campus chaplaincies, and online resources.

The phenomenal growth of NetVUE in just a few years is due in large measure to the excellent leadership and tireless efforts of Shirley Roels, CIC senior advisor for NetVUE, who works out of a small office at Calvin College. Shirley has worked closely with David Cunningham, CIC's director of the NetVUE Scholarly Resources Project and a professor of religion at Hope College, to develop this book as the first in a projected series of three volumes. I want to express my appreciation to both of them for their significant contributions to this enterprise. I also want to thank my CIC colleagues, Hal Hartley and Barbara Hetrick, who oversee and support the NetVUE project. Finally, I want to convey gratitude to the Lilly Endowment for its generous support of the exploration of vocation on college and university campuses. In particular I am grateful to Craig Dykstra, former senior vice president for religion at the endowment, and Chris Coble, the program officer for NetVUE who has now succeeded Craig as head of the religion division at Lilly, for their vision to seize on vocational exploration as a means to revitalize higher education, and for their generous counsel and support.

This book, produced by twelve NetVUE Scholars with the editorial leadership of David Cunningham, is the first of three works to contribute to the body of scholarship that undergirds vocational initiatives. Not only does this effort mine the history of vocation and calling efforts; it also addresses the nature of current challenges to and opportunities for

vocational exploration in independent higher education. I hope you will find this splendid volume to be a source of knowledge, reflection, and guidance for the path we all are following, on campuses today, of educating for vocation.

Richard Ekman
President
Council of Independent Colleges

Preface

THIS IS THE first of three projected volumes to be published under the aegis of the Scholarly Resources Project of the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE). The goal of all three volumes is to deepen and broaden the current scholarly engagement with the themes of *calling* and *vocation*, understood in the broadest sense—including not only matters of employment and career, but also larger questions about meaning and purpose, and about the future direction of all facets of a person's life. These books are designed with a particular focus on the role that vocational reflection and discernment can play in undergraduate education. As will be made clear in the Introduction and at several points throughout this volume, a broader discussion of vocation and calling is particularly timely, given the current conversation on the state of higher education today. The contributors to this volume—all of them seasoned educators who care deeply about undergraduate life—are convinced that academic institutions have much to gain by attending to the scholarship on vocation and calling, and by expanding the role of vocational reflection on their campuses through a variety of educational practices.

This first volume of essays focuses on vocation in a general way, and particularly on matters of pedagogy. Can one “teach” vocation, or at least “teach about” it? If so, what exactly would this mean? Can educators cultivate conversations around vocation in ways that are productive for undergraduate students—conversations that lead to thoughtful discernment and, ultimately, to greater flourishing? What kinds of tools are needed to accomplish these goals? How are vocation and calling related to other important categories of moral and intellectual development, such as community, identity, relationship, narrative, and virtue? To what extent is the language of vocation tied to the theological assumptions with which it is often associated? How is it related to other academic pursuits, such

as history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology? What educational practices are best able to support undergraduate students in their processes of vocational reflection and discernment? Should these activities take place within the classroom, beyond the classroom, or both?

This is, admittedly, a very long list of complex questions, and this volume will not answer all of them—at least not in any definitive way. Still, the collective goal of these essays is to make a significant contribution to the emerging scholarship on the topic and, in particular, to stimulate conversation about the pedagogical role of vocational reflection and discernment in the undergraduate context. We expect to follow this collection with two more volumes, to be published over the next two to three years, focusing on integrating vocation across diverse fields of study, and on the role of vocation in an inter-faith context.

I want to express my thanks to NetVUE, and especially to Shirley Roels, who has achieved a degree of balance that every editor hopes for: she has supported this project at every stage, yet has also managed to step back to allow the scholars the creative freedom needed to do their work. In the same balanced way, the Council of Independent Colleges has provided the budgetary, logistical, and organizational oversight that a project like this requires; my special thanks to Richard Ekman and Hal Hartley, with whom I have worked most closely. Thanks to Lynne Spoelhof at NetVUE and Shelly Arnold here at Hope College for administrative support, and to the administrators at Hope College who have allowed me the time and space to develop these three volumes and bring them to completion: President John Knapp, Provost Rich Ray, and Associate Dean Steve Bouma-Prediger have been unfailingly supportive at every turn. Thanks to Cynthia Read, Marcela Maxfield, and all their associates at Oxford University Press for their eager embrace of this project and their wise counsel. And many thanks to my wife Marlies, and to my (now adult!) children Nick and Lee; they have allowed me the time needed to complete this project, while also keeping me happily occupied during the times between.

My greatest debt of thanks is owed to this volume's brilliant contributors. As will be noted elsewhere, the process for assembling this book was not simply a matter of writing chapters and sending them to the editor. The contributors met on three different occasions for four to five days at a time; they engaged in deep and fruitful conversations about the topic in general and about one another's essays in particular; and they shared meals, walks, stories, and many, many laughs. Throughout this process, knowledge was generated, the ongoing scholarly conversation

about vocation was enriched, and friendships were formed and strengthened. I hope that readers will not skip too quickly over these scholars' biographies, which we have titled "Vocations of the Contributors"; these pages provide some good illustrations of the twists and turns that a person's vocational journey can take, as well as offering a small taste of why this was such an enjoyable group of people with whom to gather, to break bread, and to write a book.

This volume is dedicated to the memory of William C. Placher. Bill was a mentor to many of the contributors over the years, and he played a major role in helping a number of us to discover, explore, and live into our various vocations. He was "present at the creation" of NetVUE and he helped to give it the depth, breadth, and scholarly character that it continues to exhibit today. We think he would have loved reading this volume; we hope you will as well.

David S. Cunningham
Professor of Religion and Director,
The CrossRoads Project
Hope College, Holland, Michigan

Vocations of the Contributors

Quincy D. Brown has been fascinated with Marvel comic books since he was six years old. His enthusiasm first manifested itself when he began drawing the characters from the pulp pages, but it quickly blossomed into an imaginative journey, in which he filled in the stories “between the panels.” Having often noticed the phrase “continued on next page” printed at the bottom of a page, he would reread the whole story, hoping that the adventure would never end. This early passion called him to a never-ending quest for imagination and meaning that led him into and among the worlds of engineering, theology, college administration (as Vice President for Spiritual Life and Church Relations at LaGrange College), and now church-planting. Ever the modern superhero, Dr. Brown’s superpower is the ability to sort through the whole range of human emotions and to determine what makes people tick, which he uses to help them give shape and meaning to the stories of their lives.

William T. Cavanaugh grew up in a devoutly Catholic home, where faith was so important that no one ever talked about it. He went to the University of Notre Dame with the intention of being a chemical engineer, but took a required Introduction to Theology course and got hooked. After declaring a theology major, he intended to be practical and go to law school after graduation, but one of his theology professors told him that “lawyers are a dime a dozen” and that he should go to graduate school in theology. Cavanaugh completed a master’s degree at the University of Cambridge, then went to Latin America to look for the church that the books he studied were talking about. After a few years in Chile, he finished a Ph.D. at Duke, and has taught theology at the University of St. Thomas and DePaul University. He doesn’t mind if a few of his students go to law school.

David S. Cunningham's parents bought him an electric typewriter when he was very young, mainly to distract him from tapping on his mother's Underwood while she was trying to write her master's thesis. He was soon recording for posterity his every waking thought, editing newsletters for the Boy Scouts, and typing up a (largely plagiarized) children's magazine. After a brief brush with the authorities for publishing an underground newspaper at his high school, he settled into more scholarly pursuits in the fields of communication studies (at Northwestern University) and Christian theology (at Cambridge and Duke). His ecumenical vocation has led him to positions at a Catholic university, an Episcopal seminary, and a Reformed college (Hope College), where he serves as professor of religion and founding director of the CrossRoads Project. He still has a few sheets of paper from a notepad that his parents bought him when he was ten years old; they are headed with the phrase, "From the desk of David S. Cunningham, Editor."

Douglas V. Henry grew up in Rogers County, Oklahoma, learning the lore of Oklahoma's favorite son—the cowboy/actor/political wit/newspaper columnist Will Rogers. Although he can't claim (as Rogers did) that "he never met a man he didn't like," he does like most people and he knows that God loves them all. Descended from farmers, printers, journalists, surveyors, cowboys, and ministers, he values the big questions of ordinary people. He was introduced to philosophy by a superb high school debate coach at Oologah High; and this, combined with the formative experiences of Baptist church life, led him to take up a calling to study religion (at Oklahoma Baptist University) and philosophy (at Vanderbilt). He now teaches "the best which has been thought and said" in the Great Texts Program at Baylor University, but he never has far from mind the plainspoken, hardworking, common-man roots of his northeastern Oklahoma heritage.

Thomas Albert (Tal) Howard considered several vocations before becoming a historian. Always a lover of the water, he began scuba-diving in high school and thought that life as a marine archaeologist would be the way to go. But the expensive nature of scuba-diving was driven home to him in graduate school, and his love of the water now manifests itself mainly in kayaking and in bodysurfing in the Atlantic with his children. The aforementioned graduate school was the University of Virginia, where he completed a Ph.D. in European intellectual history. Presently he teaches at Gordon College on Boston's North Shore, where he also directs Gordon's Center for Faith and Inquiry.

Kathryn A. Kleinhans is a fifth-generation Lutheran pastor. It was not obvious that she would follow in those ancestral footsteps, however, since she grew up in a denomination that did not ordain women. Under the influence of Perry Mason reruns (and because she likes a good argument), she also considered law—a vocational trajectory that she dropped when she realized that (a) not all her clients would be innocent, and (b) she would not win all her cases. As one of the few Lutheran adolescents who actually enjoyed confirmation class, her love of theology led her to Valparaiso University (B.A.), Christ Seminary–Seminex (M.Div.), and Emory (Ph.D.), and eventually to Wartburg College, where she happily continues to engage in good arguments with colleagues and students—but without the nuisance of winning and losing.

Charles Pinches arrived as an undergraduate at Wheaton College in Illinois with very little sense of where his life might be headed. After almost failing calculus in his first year, he decided he was not being called into a career in math. In a literature class he chanced upon Shakespeare, who went from “terribly boring and antiquated” to “incredibly perceptive and enlivening” in the space of just one play. After that, Pinches was mainly interested in reading books: plays and novels, but also philosophy and theology. He kept this up as long as people would allow it, and ended up with a Ph.D. in theological ethics from the University of Notre Dame. He landed a job teaching philosophy at a state school in Arkansas, where he came to recognize that he could not stop thinking theologically and needed to teach where such thinking mattered. He thus moved to the University of Scranton, a Catholic and Jesuit institution, where he has taught for the last 25 years.

Darby K. Ray spent more than a decade helping students discern their vocations at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, where she was professor of Religious Studies and founding director of the Millsaps Faith & Work Initiative. In 2012, she decided to heed her own advice about pursuing one’s passion. Giving up tenure and sure-bet professional success (not to mention warm winters), she moved her family from Mississippi to Maine, where her full-time focus could be on equipping and mobilizing a college community for publicly-engaged learning and informed civic action. Now happily ensconced at Bates College as director of the Harward Center for Community Partnerships, she teaches occasional courses in religious studies, leads workshops and seminars in community-engaged

learning and research, and delights in the daily challenges of developing college–community collaborations for the common good.

Caryn D. Riswold was taking that dreaded second-required-religion-course to fulfill the general education requirements at Augustana College. After class one day, the professor asked whether she had ever thought about going to seminary. She scoffed, assuming that the only people who did so were absolutely certain about their religious beliefs, or were extremely pious people, or both. She was (and still is) neither of these, so she demurred. The professor’s simple response—“Well, you’re asking the right questions”—eventually transformed what she thought it meant to study, and to teach, religion. She then set about pursuing questions and exploring answers, first at the Claremont School of Theology and then at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She has been inviting students along on this journey ever since, for two years as a postdoctoral fellow in the Lilly Fellows Program at Valparaiso University, and for twelve years at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois.

Hannah Schell had her first experiences of community in Methodist Youth Fellowship and Girl Scouts, while growing up in the otherwise heartless San Fernando Valley in the suburbs of Los Angeles. As a student at the University of Redlands, she joined the Johnston Center—a living/learning community committed to the messy work of consensus-building. Her first-year seminar professor made her take a course on Asian religions and read Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart*; in these and other ways (including sending her to China in 1989), his wise mentoring changed the course of her life. She eventually graduated from Oberlin College with a major in philosophy and went on to study religion at Princeton University. She has taught at Monmouth College since 2001, where she has the good fortune of spending time with delightful students who mostly put up with her thought experiments and crazy ideas, including some of the ones presented here.

Paul J. Wadell’s vocational journey, like any blessed adventure, has known a few surprises. It first took him from Louisville to a high-school seminary in a small town in Missouri, where over four years he experienced mentors and peers whose friendship and goodness changed his life. After college, he took vows in a religious community and headed to Chicago to study theology. Ordained a priest in 1978, he went to St. Louis to work in a retreat center and in campus ministry, and from there to Notre Dame for doctoral studies. That led to teaching Christian ethics at Catholic

Theological Union in Chicago for sixteen years. A very different chapter in his vocational journey began in 1997 when he left the priesthood and his religious community and taught for a year at the University of Scranton. He never expected his vocational journey to take him to Green Bay, but there he has been since 1998—teaching theology at St. Norbert College and, with his wife Carmella, wondering where the journey might take them next.

Stephen H. Webb quit the fourth-grade track team to write a novel. He remembers more about the coach's angry reaction than his novel. The coach, who was also the gym teacher, confronted him during recess while he sat on the end of a slide. Little Stevie stood (or sat) his ground; and while he never ran track again, he has been working on a couple of novels—though nothing has been published (yet). His Ph.D. is from the University of Chicago, and he has taught theology in one form or another for nearly thirty years at Wabash College, Semester at Sea, and Christian Theological Seminary. Raised in the independent wing of the Campbellite-Stone tradition, he migrated to the Disciples of Christ and then became a Lutheran before being received into the Roman Catholic Church in 2007.

Cynthia A. Wells is the great-granddaughter of traveling Bible lecturer turned nation's first female police officer, Alice Stebbins Wells—so perhaps the mixture of her life's callings shouldn't have taken her by surprise. She attended Occidental College, declaring a psychology major in her first year but slowly and surely taking enough religious studies courses to graduate with a double major. The intersection of these disciplines gradually found clarity, first through her doctoral work at Ohio State University, and then in conversations with college students who were grappling with the intersections of faith and personal experience. During her fifteen years in higher education, she has discovered that, much to her chagrin, not everyone shares her zeal for the transformative power of the liberal arts; still, she finds her deep joy in passing along her enthusiasm in the classroom. She has found, however, that in cocktail-party conversations, she should focus less on her love of general education, and more on her descent from the nation's first female police officer.

At This Time and In This Place

Introduction

Time and Place

WHY VOCATION IS CRUCIAL
TO UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION TODAY

David S. Cunningham

IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT, the topic of “higher education” has always elicited strong feelings and generated lively commentary. In recent years, however, the volume and pitch of that discussion have increased in magnitude, as has its generation of heat (though not always of light). The contributors to this conversation include not only experts in the field (whether self-proclaimed or otherwise), but also business leaders and sports reporters, parents and politicians, and the prospective, current, and former students of the motley array of educational institutions that are being identified by the designation *higher*. On this topic, it seems, everyone has an opinion; and perhaps rightly so, since we are all markedly affected by the colleges and universities that populate the higher education landscape.

Yet even though these conversations may be as perennial as the grass, the current round of discussion has taken on a more urgent quality. The debates range not only across the usual issues, such as cost and access, privilege and elitism, or administrative inertia, faculty politics, and student overindulgence. Rather, the current discussion seems to be asking deeper, more philosophical questions—questions that could have a greater impact on the future of higher education and on American culture more broadly. Among these questions are: what, exactly, is the *purpose* of higher education? Are colleges and universities

the appropriate vehicles for the development of a well-functioning adult population? Should these institutions even continue to exist in their present form? Perhaps our culture could learn to do without them, just as it is learning to do without the items that once filled those institutions' libraries: physical newspapers, printed books, traditional-age students, and full-time faculty.

This conversation has gained particularly strong traction with regard to *undergraduate* education. While many concerns are also raised about graduate and professional training, these segments of the education sector are more closely aligned with particular fields of work and expertise; this means that they resonate with the longstanding American enthusiasm for all that is practical and economically relevant. But undergraduate education—with its lofty ideals and less-narrowly-defined goals—tends to come in for a great deal more scrutiny; concerns are regularly raised concerning cost, value-for-money, access, privilege, and “return on investment.” This in turn encourages the public to leap on any research that even *hints* how little progress is made, over the course of a student's undergraduate career, in certain important areas of preparation for adult life. No surprise, then, that some commentators argue that the primary value of undergraduate education is its capacity for credentialing. But while all college graduates can proudly display a bachelor's degree, such documents only retain their worth if their value is accepted by all. As in the case of paper money, baccalaureate diplomas are radically endangered by any widespread loss of confidence in the institutions that issue them.

In the face of these circumstances, many colleges and universities are asking serious questions about their mission and purpose. These are not new conversations; the academy is one of the most self-reflective (some might say, “prone to navel-gazing”) of all American institutions. But this internal analysis has taken on a new urgency as questions of confidence are raised on every side. Colleges and universities are eager to show that their graduates not only get better, higher-paying jobs; they also develop important skills in reading, writing, and critical thinking, not to mention various kinds of emotional and personal development. Skeptics argue that young people could make the same kind of progress if they spent those four years in a less leisurely, more rigorous enterprise (an apprenticeship, the military, or simply working in a lower-paying job), perhaps also enrolling in one of the many self-directed educational programs currently available online. This leads all sides back to the original question, which still bears asking: *What is college for?*

Focusing the discussion

Interestingly, one important facet of undergraduate education seems to have been missing from the conversation—a facet that is, according to the authors of this volume, among its most important elements. In particular: as undergraduates, students are allowed, encouraged, and sometimes even forced *to think about their futures*. This thought-process may focus primarily on the world of work: the knowledge and skills students will need in the labor market, the first job that they will get after graduating, and the ways they will position themselves to move up the economic ladder. Such matters are indeed on the minds of students (and even more on the minds of their parents); nevertheless, a narrow focus on matters relating to future employment offers a highly attenuated picture of the ways that college students can and must think about their futures. Work is certainly part of it, and often an extremely vexed and neuralgia-inducing part; but it is hardly exhaustive of the concerns that students have as they look five, ten, or twenty years down the road. Instead, they face a panoply of opportunities and obstacles that will, to some extent, shape the entire course of their lives. These include: where and with whom they will live; how they will engage with the economic and political systems that will govern and limit them; what sorts of civic, philanthropic, and religious institutions will garner their time and attention; how they will be affected by the increasingly global nature of concerns that seemed more geographically limited only a generation ago; and how they will make the future decisions that they will inevitably face (some of which, they realize, cannot even yet be imagined). They are also aware, as they gaze into this complex and largely unknown future, that while their fellow students will have to face similar questions, they must do so in their own particular ways; there will be no magic formula that will demystify these matters for everyone at a stroke. Of course, these students' puzzlements in facing the future are intensified by the fact that they are still in the process of trying to understand themselves—that is, to determine what sort of persons they are and who they will become. In a world as complex as ours, twenty-year-olds remain relatively *unformed* individuals; they are already uncertain enough about who they are, let alone how they are going to manage the alarming-sounding complexities of the adult world awaiting them on the other side of that dignified-looking platform at commencement.

Which institutions are best able to help these gradually developing young people attend to the unknown future that they face? Many of us believe that,

while colleges and universities are well positioned to carry out this very important work, it is too often eclipsed by the myriad tasks—most of them more immediate and more practical-sounding—that higher education has been assigned. Historically, colleges and universities sought to create the time and the space necessary for thoughtful and reflective consideration of one's future and one's own character in relation to that future. Such reflective consideration has traditionally been described as the exploration and discernment of one's *vocation*, which is to say, one's *calling* in life.

Words such as *vocation* and *calling* draw our attention to two important networks of concern, and to the interface between them. The first of these is the specific range of characteristics—personality traits, talents, abilities, judgments, and general approach to life—that is particular to each human being. This is why we typically speak of a specific *person's* callings or vocations, rather than to something more general; we recognize that every human being is marked by a unique combination of traits and talents, and that what might be an appropriate calling for one individual may be a totally disastrous path for another. But individual characteristics are only one side of the story; vocation is also about the specific context in which a person lives, which may open up or close off the opportunity to pursue some kinds of vocations. (Indeed, only in the modern era, and only within certain socio-economic strata, have most people even had the *opportunity* to explore their vocations.) The process of “discerning one's calling in life” requires an exploration, not only of one's own capacities and proclivities, but also of the world into which one has been “thrown”—and not just in its present state, but also the world of the future. To discern one's vocations with care, and to pursue them with energy and conviction, one must be in control of an enormous range of raw material: a clear-headed picture of one's own capacities and desires, a sense of how one can and should develop these in the years to come, and an almost preternaturally accurate account of the many facets of the future world with which one will be expected to engage.

It may seem obvious enough that the most appropriate time for undertaking this kind of discernment would be the years immediately beyond secondary education, when many young people move out of the family home and start to develop at least some degree of independence. This stage of life, which we have recently begun to call *emerging adulthood*,¹ seems to

1. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); see also

be lasting longer, and to be requiring more dependence on others, than was the case in previous generations; this extended period, marking the transition from adolescence to full adulthood, provides an excellent opportunity for vocational exploration and discernment. But this raises questions about the claim, already noted, that the outcomes of undergraduate education could be relatively easily duplicated among those who spend this period of life in another endeavor, such as an apprenticeship, the military, or an entry-level job. Filling the years of the late teens and early twenties with these kinds of activities could have tremendous value; it would also equip young people with a range of practical resources for the lives they will lead.

Nevertheless, in contrast to these alternatives, undergraduate education provides emerging adults with considerably more of two important resources that they need in order to explore and discern their vocations. The first of these is *time*: relatively unfettered time, time that does not put a person under immediate pressure to make a final and unrevisable decision. Discerning one's calling is, as noted above, a complicated business, so it cannot be resolved in an instant; it requires pointing oneself in a particular direction, giving it a reasonable trial run, and (often) discovering that something isn't quite right, which means a certain amount of backing up and starting over. This kind of process can be guided and directed and made more efficient, but it can't be rushed; the best way to find out whether some things work is to do them. And equally important to having adequate *time* is having what the late Bart Giamatti called "a free and ordered space":² a place where one can range widely, but that is also equipped with certain limits and safeguards, such that it can serve as a relatively *safe* space within which to undertake the experiments that are necessary to any thoroughgoing process of vocational exploration and discernment. In such a place, older adults are present in order to provide various kinds of guidance, to make sure that at least some obstacles are temporarily minimized, and to tolerate a certain degree of failure—so long as it is followed up by future efforts that have been tempered by the knowledge that is gained in the process.

Jeffrey Arnett and Nancy L. Galambos, eds. *Exploring Cultural Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), as well as Jeffrey Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, eds., *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006).

2. A. Bartlett Giamatti, *A Free and Ordered Space: The Real World of the University* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988).

All of these factors help us understand the importance of bringing young people together to spend a substantial period of time in a relatively safe place, and to be urged and helped to use this time and space to reflect on themselves and on their past, present, and future contexts. Of course, during this same time, we also want them to improve their ability to read with care, to think critically, to describe and analyze the world around them, and to write with clarity and grace. They also need to undergo certain kinds of emotional and personal development, progressing through an extended adolescence into the realm of emerging adulthood. But alongside these laudable goals of undergraduate education, students also need to make use of this relatively unfettered time, and this free and ordered space, to explore and discern their *vocations*: the callings to which they are truly called.

Needless to say, some institutions are better than others at providing students with the time, space, and necessary tools for undertaking such reflection. But some readers may be surprised to learn that an institution's ability to take on these tasks is not necessarily determined by the size of its student body, its student-faculty ratio, the size of its endowment, or any other of the common statistical measures that are increasingly used to rate and to rank colleges and universities. Nor does it always have much to do with the institution's "elite" status or its name recognition. It has much more to do with the degree to which the institution has thought carefully about questions of vocation and calling, has created opportunities for its students to undertake a process of exploration and discernment, and has institutionalized these structures as key elements of its programming and its ethos. Most significantly of all, it depends on a cadre of educators who, both inside and beyond the classroom, have learned how to entreat, cajole, encourage, and ultimately *inspire* young people to discern and explore their callings in life. Helping educators to undertake this work is the primary goal of this book: to promote, support, and sustain the *teaching* of vocational exploration and discernment in higher education today.

The contributors to this volume have all worked at colleges and universities that have embraced this goal—and that continue to seek out new ways of achieving it. We are, collectively, quite convinced that guiding and encouraging undergraduate students through this process is among the most important tasks of higher education today. It is, unfortunately, a task that is difficult to define, complicated to explain, and almost impossible to quantify; it does not show up on most of the charts and graphs that attempt to offer a statistical comparison of whether colleges succeed at

achieving their goals or to specify how they rank among their competitors in this regard. Vocational exploration and discernment is a multifaceted activity that demands attention over an extended period of time, during which those who undertake it are being buffeted with a thousand other influences and demands; consequently, its role in undergraduate education cannot be easily isolated or assigned a numerical indicator of success. The best way to demonstrate the difference that this work makes, and to advocate for its importance in undergraduate education, is to describe it and to discuss it: to unfold its contours at considerable length, to account for the narratives on which it depends and the virtues that it cultivates, and to place it in the context of contemporary culture and current trends in higher education. That is precisely what the following thirteen essays seek to do.

At the outset, it seems important to offer a few paragraphs of reflection on the word itself: *vocation*. Unpacking this word's nuances will require us to venture into the fields of history, linguistics, philosophy, and theology. And while much of this work will take place throughout the volume as the authors seek to explain and illustrate the concept, some readers may appreciate a brief introduction to the word and its historical sojourn—even if this must necessarily be no more than a thumbnail sketch.

Defining the terms

The word *vocation* derives from the Latin *vocare*, to call. Hence, the words *calling* and *vocation* are etymologically similar, though their English-language nuances are slightly different. Perhaps because of its more clearly Latinate origins, the word *vocation* is often seen as having a longer history, and one with more explicitly theological contours, when compared with the word *calling*. In fact, both words come into English in the 16th century; still, the perceived difference between them has some historical justification, since the Latin noun *vocatio* was, in the medieval era, largely restricted to what we would today call “religious vocations” (priesthood and the monastic life). This meaning still lingers, particularly in some Roman Catholic environments, where asking young people to “think about a possible vocation” is sometimes another way of saying that they should consider taking holy orders.

In cultural settings more strongly influenced by Protestantism, *vocation* tends to have a broader meaning, largely due to the Reformation

tendency to broaden the reference of the word *vocatio* well beyond its previous range. As one of our authors will describe in detail (in chapter 4), this shift was largely the work of Martin Luther and his followers, who helped to endow the German verb *rufen* (to call) with a range of reference involving all walks of life—so much so that today, the closely related German noun *Beruf* means “occupation” or “profession” or even simply “job.” This helps to explain why we tend to associate the English word *calling* with a person’s work or career; as Luther would perhaps have put it, whether we are priests or farmers, tradespeople or homemakers, these various roles can be understood as *vocations*: our work and our various stations in life constitute the place to which God has called us.

This historical shift in the meaning of the word *vocatio* had, in part, an anti-clerical intention. It was designed to help offset the commonly held view that priests, nuns, and monks had a uniquely privileged relationship to God, a divinely appointed station in life (as opposed to all other stations, which were presumably merely inherited, or accidental, or in some cases chosen from among a fairly narrow range of possibilities). More positively stated, the word’s revised meaning tended to accord a greater degree of dignity to a wider range of human occupations, marginally offsetting the more hierarchical structure of medieval life.

At the same time, however, this shift also had certain political and socio-economic implications that tended to ratify the status quo; if one’s stations in life, broadly defined, were seen as appointed by God, then any self-motivated attempt to change one’s status could be understood not only as politically revolutionary but also as rebellious against God. This problem might well be designated the “core danger” of using the language of *vocation* and *calling*: even today, these words still resonate with a certain degree of dramatic intensity and mysterious, quasi-religious power. Once we become convinced that this or that “station in life” is the one to which we are appointed by some powerful force outside ourselves, it can be difficult to accept the possibility that we might be mistaken about that notion—in other words, that we may not have discerned our callings with as much care as we might have. Admittedly, this tendency was mitigated somewhat by later strands of the Reformation; still, the language of vocation has often tempted people to use its resonances of divine sanction to encourage a certain kind of societal stability—and to discourage individuals from an ongoing consideration of shifts in their own vocational journey. This concern is addressed by several of our authors, and it is one to which any discussion of vocation needs to remain alert.

I have used the phrase “one’s work and one’s stations in life” as a reminder that, although we may associate vocation and calling primarily with a person’s occupation or profession, its range is considerably wider. Since most adults spend a significant amount of their time undertaking some form of employment (either for subsistence or for wages), a person’s work certainly plays a significant role within the broader concept of vocation. However, one’s various stations in life can also be affected by a number of factors that we traditionally classify under the term *demographics*: age, marital status, level of education, location of residence, socio-economic class, race, sex, gender, sexual orientation. Are these factors determined by forces outside ourselves? Or do we choose them through the exercise of our own will? Obviously, the answers to these questions have generated a significant degree of debate (whether in the past, the present, or both). If we think more broadly about these categories, and think about them not merely as sociological statistics but as deeply important matters that individual human beings must face, we may find ourselves asking questions such as these: Where and with whom will I live? How will I engage with the economic and political systems that will shape my life? What sorts of civic, philanthropic, and religious institutions will garner my time and attention? How will I negotiate the larger global context that increasingly affects everything I do? How will I make the future decisions that I will inevitably face? It will not have escaped the reader’s notice that these are the same questions that we listed, a few pages ago, as those which most urgently confront undergraduate students. To them, and to their own work of vocational exploration and discernment, we must now return.

Initiating a new conversation

Precisely because the category of *calling* or *vocation* addresses not only the world of work, but also a wider range of questions about one’s “stations in life,” it provides us with particularly useful and effective language for carrying out conversations with today’s undergraduates. Colleges and universities have always been eager to talk with students about their careers; institutions feature prominent, well-staffed offices with names like “Career Services” or “Professional Development” that help students think about their futures, and particularly their engagement with the job market. Often these offices even guide students through a process of discernment, providing a number of tools designed to help them assess

their talents and skills, as well as helping them pair these with appropriate employment. But given the enormous range of questions faced by today's undergraduates, most colleges and universities are sensing a need to *expand* the kinds of conversations that they have with students about their futures. These conversations cannot be restricted to matters of future employment: they have to include every aspect of one's calling. This is why a recently published book insists that "colleges must talk to students about vocation."³

In fact, many colleges are already having that conversation. Some have been doing so since they were founded, while others have been making it a priority over the last several decades. Nationwide attention to the topic of vocation and calling took a quantum leap forward around the year 2000, due to an initiative undertaken by an important philanthropic foundation that focuses its initiatives in the fields of education and religion. Sensing the potential of the language of vocation to better address the aspirations and concerns of college students, the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment encouraged colleges and universities to develop programs in this area.

From the outset, this initiative had to consider whether, and to what degree, the programs that were developed by various colleges and universities would be expected to have a specifically faith-based character. On the one hand, some such orientation seemed necessary—not only because of the role that the word *vocation* has played in the history of religion in general and of Christianity in particular, but also because the Endowment sought (among other goals) to help students to examine the role of faith in shaping their callings, and to develop a better-prepared cadre of lay and ordained leadership for the church. On the other hand, however, the foundation's program officers were well aware that such concerns were not of paramount importance for all colleges and universities; even in the case of those founded by a particular denomination, many had since evolved away from, or deliberately downplayed, that part of their history. The Endowment hoped that these institutions as well—and not just those with strong ongoing relationships to a specific denomination—would be interested in developing programs for vocational discernment.

The solution that the officers of the Endowment hit upon was to describe its initiative as seeking to develop "Programs for the Theological Exploration

3. Tim Clydesdale, *The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students About Vocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

of Vocation” (PTEV). This meant that the conversation about vocation would be expected to have some kind of theological component, but the Endowment was careful not to specify just what shape this aspect of the program would need to take. Notably, one of the Endowment’s officials, Craig Dykstra, posed and answered the question this way, in an address to representatives of the recipient institutions: “What does Lilly mean by ‘theological exploration of vocation’? The honest answer to the question is this: we don’t exactly know. That is what we hope *you* will figure out.”⁴ This left colleges and universities a great deal of latitude to shape these programs as befitted their institutions, and to accord them greater or lesser degrees of theological specificity. Many of the institutions that received grants had strong ongoing relationships with Christianity in general or with a specific denomination, but other grantees had weakened those ties many years ago or regarded them as being of primarily historical significance. At least a few were, or had become, the kinds of institutions whose constituencies would never have imagined them applying for anything with the word *theological* in its title.⁵

Over the decade that followed, the colleges and universities that were developing these programs met in various settings to compare their work and to discuss best practices. These events were typically attended by teams that included not only the program directors and other individuals in leadership roles within each institution’s vocational discernment program, but also senior administrators, including (in most cases) the institution’s president and its chief academic officer. This increased the likelihood that each program would gain a high level of visibility within its own institution and play an important role in its overall mission. In 2009, this ongoing conversation received additional impetus from the Council of Independent Colleges, which launched its Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE)—a network that has grown steadily and now has roughly twice as many member institutions as were involved in the original PTEV program.⁶

4. Craig Dykstra, “The Theological Exploration of Vocation,” address delivered at the 2003 Plenary Conference for Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation, October 1–3, 2003, Indianapolis, Indiana.

5. A complete listing of the original recipients of the PTEV grants, and the programs that they built with the grants they received, is archived at the program’s website, www.ptev.org.

6. Up-to-date information about NetVUE can be found online at www.cic.edu/netvue. A more complete account of the origins and growth of NetVUE is provided in Richard Ekman’s foreword to the present volume.

Clearly, *vocation* is a theme whose time has come. Given the current conversation about the purposes of American higher education, coupled with an increasing desire on the part of undergraduate students to reflect on their futures, a great many colleges and universities are cultivating programs for vocational exploration and discernment on their campuses. This volume is designed to support the constituencies of those institutions that are already taking part in this movement; to encourage others to do the same; and to engage the broader public in an ongoing conversation about the meaning, purpose, and relevance of higher education today.

Mapping the territory

In order to offer a clearer picture of this book and the essays that it comprises, let us return to our discussion of the “two networks of concern” that were mentioned earlier in this introduction: the specific network of characteristics that each student brings, as well as the specific context in which each student will live. Discerning one’s various vocations with care—and pursuing them with conviction—requires a careful account, both of one’s own abilities and desires, and of the future world into which one is about to be launched.

A number of writers on the topic of vocation have found concise and poignant ways of expressing the dialectical relationship between these two orders of concern. Frederick Buechner, a writer often quoted on this subject, defines vocation in these terms: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”⁷ This is, obviously, a strongly theological way of putting the matter, naming God as the author of the call and using religiously significant words like *joy* and *hunger* to invoke regions of our lives in which the material realm is invested with spiritual meaning and purpose. Still, Buechner’s language is sufficiently broad and inclusive that a wide range of institutions have found it to be an appropriate motto for the kinds of conversations that they seek to generate among their students. In that respect, Buechner’s phrase bears some similarities to the motto of the United States, which also invokes a rather unspecified notion of “God” in whom we claim to place the rather spiritual attitude of “trust.”

7. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 95.

Of course, precisely because this language is relatively generic, some institutions—especially, in this case, the more strongly church-related ones—have chosen to describe their engagement with questions of vocation in more explicitly theological terms. Some have used Christian language to flesh out the two “networks of concern” that vocational exploration involves—describing, for example, human life in terms of its relationship to Christ or to the Church, and describing the world into which one enters as created and sustained by God in ways that mirror the biblical narratives and/or Christian tradition more broadly. Most of these programs explicitly encourage conversations about the relationship of faith and vocation, and many include programming that is specifically designed to foster future church leadership, whether lay or ordained. Hence, vocation can be—and in many undergraduate institutions, very much *is*—a conversation vested with deeply theological resonances.

But this is not always the case. Indeed, many colleges and universities that have made quite widespread use of the language of *calling* and *vocation* have done so without invoking its theological roots, because this approach provides a better fit for their particular ethos and mission. Such institutions tend to avoid mottos that hint at “God” or make other theological references, instead preferring something like the following quotation from Hermann Hesse:

There are many types and kinds of vocations, but the core of the experience is always the same: the soul is awakened by it, transformed or exalted, so that instead of dreams and presentiments from within a summons comes from without. A portion of reality presents itself and makes a claim.⁸

Like Buechner, Hesse seems to gesture toward the two networks of concern that have been described in this introduction: the inner world of the person who is exploring, discerning, and wrestling with his or her own vocations (Hesse here calls it “the soul” and speaks of something coming “from within”); and the outward realm from which one perceives something like an attraction: a summons, an urging, a call. Without identifying the precise nature of the “caller,” Hesse is still able to imply that our

8. Hermann Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi)*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 58.