

Epilogue

The Fresno Pacific College Idea is now a nearly thirty-year effort to create a distinctive Christian liberal arts college. In many ways the story is a very successful one. In the past years the college has gained national recognition. In the early 1990s *U. S. News and World Report* ranked it as among the “up and coming” or “best” small colleges in the West. Its dramatic growth during the last decade, the achievements of its graduates, and its increasing prominence in the San Joaquin Valley are testimonials to a successful college.

This successful history, as these essays suggest, is also a story of paradox and ambiguity. It contains the essential dialectic of theory and praxis—the difficulty of giving ideas institutional forms, or to use biblical language, of incarnating them. The mind can outrun the constraints of student needs, accrediting agency criteria and the auditors' insistence on paying the bills in a timely fashion. Robert Enns invokes the stories of Brandeis, Wheaton and Guilford seeking to hold together commitments that sometimes pull in opposite directions. These essays suggest the differing ways in which FPC has tried to hold together sometimes conflicting ideas—liberal arts and professional education; Mennonite particularity and evangelical ecumenicity; a supporting denomination with an immigrant past and a strong sense of ethno-religious boundaries and ethnic inclusiveness; a strong sense of community and cultural diversity. Straddling those differing ideals and realities is not peculiar to Fresno Pacific College. The building of national and international cultures during the past century has brought the same pressures to many institutions and communities.

The college's self-conscious adoption, in the early 1980s, of a strategy to “Broaden the Base” only multiplied the diversity of

students, faculty and institutional supporters. If defined in numerical terms, that strategy has certainly been successful. The decade since 1985 in many ways paralleled the explosive growth of the 1960s. In addition to dramatic enrollment growth, the physical appearance of the campus changed significantly through the addition of three new buildings. During the past decade the college has also undergone a process of maturation. In so doing it became more things to more people. It serves more diverse publics than at any other time in its history. As that happens the centripetal forces can easily overwhelm the centrifugal restraints.

At one level, the "Broadening" transition did exactly that, but at another level it has not. Concurrent with the writing of these essays has been a faculty/administrative process of reflection and revision of the Fresno Pacific College Idea. The third form of the idea (following the 1966 and 1982 editions) was formally ratified by the college's Board of Trustees in January 1995. Unlike the 1982 revision, the impetus for which came from the Board of Trustees, this one came from internal pressures. The significant influx of both new faculty and administrators in the decade following 1985 called for a sustained dialogue about institutional mission and identity.

The 1982 revision diminished the distinctive elements and pushed the college toward becoming a more generic evangelical college. This revision articulated a more distinctive mission statement. A committee composed of John Yoder (Graduate Dean) and Rod Janzen (faculty), together with trustees Winnie Bartel and Patrick Evans, held campus-wide hearings and submitted a revised document for community discussion and consensus-building. With Yoder and Janzen as the principal authors, the document embraced the enlarged diversity of the campus. More than previous versions of the Idea, it offered an understanding of Christian faith as transcending and including cultural, racial, ethnic and ideological partialities. All have room in a community seeking to establish a foretaste of the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God. Simultaneously, this revision, more than the 1982 version, emphasized the prophetic function of a college that stands in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Authentic knowledge and understanding need to be transformative. They not only "illuminate darkness with light and dispel ignorance with wisdom," as the document suggests, but they also "contribute to developing a vision for wholeness, justice and reconciliation."

The revisioning of the document was clearly part of a larger dialectic. Precisely as Fresno Pacific College became more ecumenical and diverse it needed to identify its particularity. As the bound-

aries became more permeable, it was incumbent again to rearticulate the center. As the college gained a greater measure of success and solidity it had a greater freedom again to dream of being a distinctive college. After the college had proven itself as evangelical, it had a new opportunity again to articulate its Anabaptism.

For a long time the West's prevailing understanding of modernity was that the plurality of the past would of necessity give way to a more uniform future. Global integration would inevitably result in greater sameness. During the past fifty years it has been easy for various commentators to write of a coming world unity. In the United States throughout much of the twentieth century we utilized the image of the "melting pot" to visualize the kind of society that we were building. The melting pot metaphor assumed that each particular group contributed some distinguishing ingredient to the new American culture that was being built, but that the ingredient only flavored it rather than remaining distinctive or autonomous. In Christian higher education the non-denominational college represented the search for a homogenous Christian faith and presence in the world.

More recently we have come to understand that the American future is a pluralist one rather than an integrative one. We are a nation of diverse races, cultures, ethnicities and denominations. Each contributes to the richness of the larger culture. Denominations, which can be interpreted as the failure of the church, can also be seen as the smaller incarnations of the God we worship, who transcends any particular form. Colleges that nurture distinctive theological ideas also contribute to the richness and pluralism of American higher education. To the degree that Fresno Pacific College works at the incarnation of the Fresno Pacific College Idea it also makes such a contribution.