Chapter 6

"Fresno Pacific College is a Prophetic College"

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"Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint."
(Proverbs 29:18, NRSV)

The vision of Pacific as a prophetic college was set forth in one of the seven major sections of the original Idea of 1966. This section has had a mixed history. When the Idea was first published in the 1969-1970 college catalog, this section, together with the section identifying the college as an "experimental college," was deleted. The full Idea appeared in the college catalog for the first time in 1972. When the Idea was revised in 1982, no reference to Fresno Pacific as a prophetic college appeared at all. It again appears in the 1994 revision.

In the words of the original statement,

Pacific College is a Prophetic College. The college views itself as a center of independent critique of all of men's endeavors. It is not simply an institution that transmits the values of the culture in which it exists. It purposes to serve as the conscience of society and the church rather than become a tool of any institution or idealism.

Cultural critique was pervasive in American society during the 1960s. The civil rights movement, the Vietnam conflict, and politics
intensified by assassinations and distrust of established authorities dominated the consciousness of the nation. Countercultural movements of all sorts emerged. To declare oneself as “prophetic” in this context was to be both “with it” and suspect. Among conservatives supporting the college, suspicion was more likely. The inclusion of this segment in the Pacific Idea, however, was not centrally motivated by the spirit of the time; rather, it was motivated by a deep consciousness of the college's longer Anabaptist Christian heritage. Prophetic witness to the unity of faith and practice in obedience to God, though religious or worldly powers may oppose and even persecute, has been a hallmark of this tradition.

THE PROPHETIC ORIENTATION

The prophet Micah succinctly summarized the message of the biblical prophets: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). As Old Testament scholar Bernhard W. Anderson has observed,

Just as rabbis summed up the whole Torah in the two great commandments “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18), so [Micah's] pithy passage encompasses the major themes of the prophetic message: “Let justice roll down like waters” (Amos 5:24); “[I] desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6); when the Day of the Lord comes, the pride of people will be humbled (Isaiah 2:8-11).²

In the New Testament the apostle and prophet Paul summarized the prophetic message: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). Phillips renders this passage: “Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed.” In his second letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul speaks of persons being changed or “metamorphosed” into the likeness of Christ (II Corinthians 3:18). The prophetic challenge, then, is not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed into the image of Christ. “The task of prophetic ministry,” Walter Brueggemann writes in The Prophetic Imagination, “is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a conscious-
ness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.\textsuperscript{3}

The pressure to conform to the world is pervasive and unending. Ancient Israel was forever seduced by the practices and gods of their neighbors. The prophets railed against this conformity. They denounced it as spiritual prostitution, and pointed the people back to God as their true love. But ancient Israel was not alone. Every age faces this pressure. Brueggemann observes that "prophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing, in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated."\textsuperscript{4}

Christian higher education itself has experienced this domestication in American society. In 1960 Yale historian Sydney Ahlstrom observed that a key fact of American higher education is that in the last several centuries it has been "remorselessly secularized."\textsuperscript{5} No institution is immune. Pressures come from various quarters. Consider, for example, the fact that faculty for Christian colleges are educated principally in the graduate programs of secular universities. Here they are acculturated into the dominant secular perspectives of their disciplines, which routinely become themes of their later teaching in a Christian college. Furthermore, textbooks used in classrooms throughout Christian higher education tend to be the prevailing secular texts of the time. This is not to argue for a narrowing of attention to the scholarship of the world, but simply to recognize the frequent provincialism of this scholarship in its neglect of religious perspectives. Furthermore, accreditation agencies move institutions toward the prevailing norms of the larger academic culture. So pressures toward conformity are multitudinous. The Christian response should not be a cloistered education. On the contrary, the Christian college should actively and rigorously engage the world. Indeed, a prophetic college will invite and promote this engagement. But it does mean that the Christian college will not receive much help from the larger academic culture. If it is to be prophetic, the Christian college will need to be so intentionally and deliberately.

To be a prophetic college requires that an institution first order its own house. This begins with a clear articulation of its center. In this respect the formation of the Pacific Idea in the mid-1960s was a prophetic act. Prophets have a center. A prophetic college is one that has united around a particular core of value and has chosen actively to educate from the perspective of that core. The prophet has a
stance, a point-of-view. Transformation as process is not an end in itself, but is directed toward clear goals.

To be a prophetic college, furthermore, requires the continuing education and nurture of that center with the faculty, administration and staff. Given the domination of the secular university in graduate education, a Christian college must take upon itself the responsibility to re-educate faculty, administrators and staff who join its community. One must enter a prophetic college first as a learner.

To be a prophetic college, finally, requires prophetic teaching. Prophetic teaching unites word and deed. This unity is central to the Anabaptist understanding of New Testament Christianity. Thus faculty and leaders in a prophetic college will not only talk about integrity, but will also practice integrity. They will not only talk about community, but will also create community. They will not only talk about responsible investments, but will also practice responsible investments. They will not only talk about peace, but will also be peacemakers.

In 1980 Bethel College, a Mennonite college in North Newton, Kansas, sponsored a National Conference on Faith and Learning. Church historian Martin E. Marty, a speaker at the conference, later reflected on the experience in a Christian Century article entitled “On ‘Being Prophetic.’” He observed that at the conference participants frequently called upon their Anabaptist peers “to be prophetic in America.” In a perceptive critique of this call, he observed:

Today prophecy comes to mean radical criticism of society. That is cheap. Stick around; on glum days even I can provide that—at no expense, including none to myself. The tongue screws may be out there in the future, but they are not out there in the current landscape. Should the heirs of radical Protestantism prove they have prophetic credentials by being more shrill, publishing more statistics about injustice, or having a bad conscience for not being more strident? Again, I wonder.

Or could it be that today the critical and prophetic burden should pass also to others, while the Mennonites keep doing what they do at their best? Praising God in song and art and prose, simply. Loving the soil and helping bring forth its fruit. Being among the first with almost the most to meet boat people or share know-how or grain. Sending a large percentage of their young into service occupations. Providing alternative service. Maybe all those things, subtle though they be, will take more doing and will speak more clearly than would “being prophetic.” I think to do these things would be “being prophetic.”6
A prophetic college unites word and deed, but in the end may witness most powerfully through demonstrations of what it proclaims. A college that has ordered its own house by articulating its faith center, by first educating its own faculty, administrators and staff, and by uniting faith and practice in its teaching strategy, is prepared to be a prophetic college for its students and for the world. This ordering of Fresno Pacific's own house over the years has been imperfect. The Idea itself has at times received considerable attention; at other times it has receded into the background. The education of the faculty, administrators and staff to the college's center has been very uneven. Faith and practice have at times been united and at other times been contradictory. But through it all the Idea has endured as the vision toward which the college continues to grow.

**Faith and Culture**

The relationship between faith and culture has been a key concern in prophetic history. Since the 1950s the discussion of this relationship often has been shaped by H. Richard Niebuhr's seminal work, *Christ and Culture*. Niebuhr identifies five different views of the relationship between faith and culture in historic Christianity. The categories “Christ against culture” and the “Christ of culture” represent the extremes of Niebuhr's continuum. The first sees Christ as opposed to culture, the second sees Christ as integrated with culture. Between these extremes are three more central positions: “Christ above culture,” “Christ and culture in paradox,” and “Christ the transformer of culture.” The “Christ above culture” view is exemplified by the synthesis of natural law and the higher way of Jesus in Medieval culture. “Christ and culture in paradox” suggests that Christ represents a higher way, but reality dictates that humans must also adjust to the ways of the world to be productive citizens. Christ as transformer suggests the view that Christ is both independent of culture and a shaper of culture.

Niebuhr linked the Anabaptists with the “Christ against culture” view, but that interpretation has been strongly challenged. Charles Scriven, for example, has argued that the Anabaptists represent a more adequate understanding of the transformative perspective, which Niebuhr favors, than does Niebuhr himself. Indeed, Scriven asserts that “the true Niebuhrian way is the Anabaptist way.”

The Fresno Pacific Idea envisions the college to be a transforming presence in the church and world. As stated in the original version,
the college "purposes to serve as the conscience of society and the church." These are strong words and may even sound presumptuous, but they suggest the deep feeling of the framers of the Idea that the college should have a strong, prophetic witness. The further assertion that the college "views itself as a center of independent critique" and not "a tool of any institution or idealism" should not be understood as rejecting identification with the church or culture. Independence and identification may seem contradictory, but can coexist in a creative tension. Niebuhr's view of Christ as transformer of culture suggests both. Those who proclaim the bumper sticker message, "love it or leave it," would quickly resolve this tension by separation. But for the prophet, independence and identification are handmaidens. The biblical prophets were most often participant critics in their communities. They were members of the community and identified deeply with the community. They were willing to risk their very lives because they cared so deeply on one hand about truth and justice, and on the other about the community.

THE PERSONA OF THE PROPHET

Eyes and Ears

Biblical prophets were first called Seers. They were in close communion with God and gifted with keen insight into the human condition of their times. Discerning eyes and ears are prerequisites for prophecy.

True prophets are not driven by self-interest or self-seeking. Their pursuit is truth and righteousness. Viktor E. Frankl has wisely observed: "The ability of the eye to see is dependent upon its inability to see itself." Likewise, the ability of the ear to hear is dependent upon its inability to hear itself. True prophets have clear vision and hearing focused on God's will for creation and humankind.

Memory

The prophet is a storyteller. The prophet remembers God and the story of God's people. To pursue strange gods is to forget God and God's shaping of one's own unique story. The prophets reminded Israel of God's call and promise to Abraham, their sojourn in Egypt, deliverance from Egypt, struggles in the wilderness, and entry into the promised land. Faith is rooted in history. Remembering God's shaping presence in the past is a key to renewal in the present.
God provided ancient Israel with aids to remember pivotal moments of their history. The people were to celebrate the Passover to keep alive the memory of their liberation from Egypt. They erected monuments of stones to keep alive the memory of such events as the miraculous crossing of the Jordan into the promised land. Yet ancient Israel, as people today, forgot. The prophet was God's instrument to call the people back to memory.

No one has made the case for remembering more poignantly in our time than the Jewish writer and prophet Elie Wiesel. As a survivor of the Holocaust, Wiesel has determined that this and future generations must never forget what happened. Elhanan, a character in Wiesel's novel, The Forgotten, states Wiesel's case well. Elhanan, too, is a survivor of the camps, and in his old age is losing his memory. He offers a prayer to God about remembering. Wiesel calls it simply "Elhanan's Prayer":

You well know, You, source of all memory, that to forget is to abandon, to forget is to repudiate. . . . Remember, God of history, that You created man to remember. You put me into the world, You spared me in time of danger and death, that I might testify. What sort of witness would I be without my memory?10

Witness requires memory, but prophets must do more than remember their own stories. Prophets must also understand other stories. Prophets live at the interface between faith and culture in all of its manifestations, including politics, economics, business, human relations, education and the arts. The stories of these human enterprises must also be understood if prophets are to speak with insight.

Voice

"If I have prophetic powers," the apostle Paul writes, "but do not have love [agape], I am nothing" (I Corinthians 13:2). Prophets who speak truth without love are like "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (I Corinthians 13:1). They make much noise, but their message does not take root.

The biblical prophets adapted the tone in which they spoke to the situation. Jesus as prophet demonstrates the possibilities. The gentle but firm Jesus is revealed on the Samaritan road discoursing across cultural, religious and gender barriers to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's historic well. Jesus gently confronted the woman with the truth of her situation, and she recognized him as prophet (John 4).
The gentle but firm Jesus is further revealed on the Jericho road calling chief tax collector Zacchaeus down from his bleacher seat in the sycamore tree and inviting himself to his home. We do not know what Jesus said to him in his house, but Zacchaeus' declaration—"Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much"—indicates that whatever Jesus said took hold (Luke 19:8).

Jesus often used this gentle, yet clearly confrontational, mode with those who were oppressed and authentic searchers for truth. Both the Samaritan woman and Zacchaeus manifested lifestyles contrary to the way of Jesus, but both were confronted and drawn to faith in a straightforward but gentle mode. One could multiply the examples of this mode from the life of Jesus as he addressed those across the social and economic structures of the society in which he moved.

A second mode was more pointed. Harsh words of critique in the more stereotypical image of the flaming prophet were reserved for those who were self-righteous and resistant to faith. The stubborn scribes and Pharisees as well as the resistant cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are illustrative. On these Jesus pronounced harsh words of judgment (Matthew 23:13-39; 11:20-24).

Strong words were also addressed by Jesus to those who followed him but for the wrong reasons. His prophetic challenge to those who chose to follow him after he fed the five thousand in the wilderness, simply because they thought he would be a continuing source for easy food, led to a mass disaffection. So many turned and left when confronted with his hard truth that he finally turned to his core group of twelve disciples and asked whether they too wished to leave (John 6). For the prophet, right reasons for actions are important. Crowds hold no virtue if they are attracted for the wrong reasons. The prophet's strength rests in the ability to speak the truth though the crowds may vanish. The demagogue speaks what the crowd wishes to hear, the prophet what they need to hear. Jesus was a prophet.

A prophet who escalates a confrontation to strong words must not forsake agape love. When a Samaritan village would not receive Jesus on one of his journeys through Samaria to Jerusalem, James and John, those sons of fisherman Zebedee whom Jesus renamed "Sons of Thunder," lived up to their nickname by asking whether they should call down fire from heaven to consume the village (Luke 9:51-56). Jesus rebuked them. The intent of the prophet is not to destroy, but to convert the other. Truth speaking may require a hard message, but the message must be delivered with the intent to effect
change and not destroy. There is a place for "tough love," and the goal is conversion.

_Hands and Feet_

Finally, true prophets are persons of action who model what they preach. Here we may return to the insight of Martin E. Marty about "being prophetic." Actions in the end may be more prophetic than words. The image of the flaming prophet making pronouncements from some high or bully pulpit is a stereotype. Prophecy is not bound to a single form, but in the end is most powerful when modeled in action.

_A Prophetic College_

In the first chorus from "The Rock," poet and prophet T. S. Eliot reflects on the cycles of nature and history. He climaxes the opening stanza of the chorus with a series of questions and a conclusion:

Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.\(^{11}\)

A prophetic college is not content simply to transmit the accumulated knowledge of the past to the present generation. It is possible, as Harvard professor Robert Coles has observed, for a student to earn an "A" in a course on religion or moral development and yet flunk life itself.\(^{12}\) A prophetic college calls itself, its students and its constituencies to account for the totality of being. Education in this mode cannot be simply the cultivation of the mind; it must be the transformation of the whole person. A college accomplishes such an education through its teaching and mentoring, curriculum, convocations and worship, student life programs, public service programs, and the example of its faculty, administrators and staff. Fresno Pacific College has pursued these goals in several ways.

_Teaching and Mentoring_

New undergraduates at Fresno Pacific, whether first-year students or transfers, begin their educational experience by taking a biblical
studies course called "Jesus and the Christian Community." Central to this course are the Gospel texts. An additional text used in the 1990s has been Donald B. Kraybill's *The Upside Down Kingdom.* Kraybill's work illuminates the radical nature of God's Kingdom as articulated in the Gospels, and demonstrates how the values of this Kingdom often oppose the values promoted in the prevailing culture. This is prophetic teaching.

The first-year version of "Jesus and the Christian Community" is taught by faculty members from across the academic disciplines of the college. This course becomes a means of engaging issues pertaining to the fundamental values and shape of God's Kingdom. These faculty also serve as mentors to first-year students in small groups called collegiums. They are assisted by student mentor assistants who have previously completed the course. A service project and a weekend mountain retreat add experiential components to the course, and provide demonstrations of Christian values.

Graduate students in the college's master's program in education encounter similar ideas in "Values in School and Society." This course includes an examination of the implications of the college's distinctive orientation expressed in the Idea and its related graduate mission statement for schools and society.

Prophetic teaching occurs in varying degrees throughout the college. A student who took course work concurrently in a public institution and at Fresno Pacific observed that in the public institution, she had learned to do what needed to be done as a participating member of a particular profession. Basic values undergirding the profession, however, were not questioned. At Fresno Pacific, she reported students not only learned how to do things, but also to question and examine basic values. Surely such questioning may occur in either place, but a prophetic college is committed to such questioning as a critical part of its mission.

Curriculum

Curricular structures also enhance the prophetic ministry of the college. For example, the faculty in the early 1990s adopted the "Focus Series" within the General Education program. These are six to eight-unit interdisciplinary concentrations that unite biblical/theological and interdisciplinary studies. Focus Series themes reflect central concerns of the college, such as Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies, Environmental Studies, Intercultural Studies, and Studies in Conflict and Peacemaking. Students select one as part
of their General Education program. Each series challenges existing understandings and practices in both the church and world.

Convocations and Worship

College Hour is the college's designation for its twice-weekly convocation and worship gatherings. A long tradition exists of including in this series speakers and storytellers who have challenged the prevailing culture and modeled alternatives based on a commitment to Christian discipleship. Themes such as discipleship, service, justice, culture, peace and ministry are common in College Hour.

Student Life Programs

Community, service, and "servant leadership" are dominant themes of student life programs at Fresno Pacific. These themes are expressed in a variety of programs including residential life, student leadership development, and service ministry. Theory and practice are united in these programs to build alternative models to individualism, the focus on self-seeking and advancement, and a power-oriented concept of leadership.

The boundary between academic and student life at Fresno Pacific is soft. At times the boundary is indecipherable. Community emerges in classrooms, faculty become counselors, and students help and serve each other both in the classroom and beyond it. Program structures such as those in the adult degree completion program encourage integration. Here students progress through their entire program in a single learning group that becomes an intentional community. Graduate programs develop their own unique dynamics and sub-communities. The focus of the college Idea on the holistic development of persons encourages faculty, administrators and staff to relate to students in multiple ways beyond the narrow specifications of a particular work assignment. Interpersonal interaction is encouraged through a de-emphasis on the use of formal academic titles and the general practice of calling persons by their first names, including faculty.

Public Service Programs

The Older Adult Social Service program, or OASIS, is a college program that provides alternative day care for semi-dependent
elderly persons. This program integrates service and learning for students, and serves as a model of ministry in an area of need not addressed by the usual social agencies of society. It is an example of being prophetic in the world. The college's Center for Conflict Studies and Peacemaking provides training, consultation and mediation services for persons and organizations within the church, school and community. In the midst of a culture torn by conflict and violence, "peace" is a prophetic word. A prophetic college will build alternative models of public service as it bears witness to the community in which it exists.

Example and Model

In the end perhaps the most powerful witness of the prophet comes through modeling, personally and communally. Prophets witness not only through speaking, but also through demonstrating. Charles Scriven speaks of being a "transformative example."¹⁴ A college that seeks to be prophetic must first model what it professes. Faculty, administrators and staff must model in their own persons what they profess. The college in its corporate existence must model Christian community. Otherwise, a college becomes guilty of the heresy that Jesus observed in the first-century scribes and pharisees. Simply put, Jesus said, "they do not practice what they preach" (Matthew 23:3). Hence, their witness was ineffective if not destructive, and they are not to be emulated.

Faculty in American higher education have been characterized as "invisible models." Most of their lives are closed or not known by the students they teach. Fresno Pacific has taken steps to encourage more visibility. Beyond the sharing that occurs in the classroom, faculty are given financial support to entertain students in their homes and to take students out for lunch. A long-standing tradition is for one or two faculty each term to share their personal stories with the undergraduate student body in the College Hour program. Students have consistently rated these among the highest valued College Hours. Surveys of students and alumni at Fresno Pacific reveal that student-faculty relationships are among the most valued aspects of a Fresno Pacific education. The power of example and modeling is inestimable.

Modeling is also a matter of corporate life. Jesus once told his followers: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Communities in the Jesus way are called to be model communities in the world.
Community has been a central tenet of the Fresno Pacific Idea. Throughout the years the college has sought to realize what it means to be a community in the Jesus way. Community transcends national, cultural and ethnic boundaries. Community has meant practicing redemptive discipline among its members. The college has sought to be a community where people support each other. Collaborative and consensual decision making has been the ideal, though not always realized. Members of the community have sought to work out conflicts in cooperative and restorative ways, though often imperfectly. The college has worked at developing an approach to leadership often called "servant leadership."

Model building should be a continuing and active pursuit of a Christian prophetic college. Experimenting and demonstrating how the communities of the church and world can become genuine communities of Shalom should be a central mission of such a college.

CONCLUSION

Scholars have debated whether the gift of prophecy as understood in the New Testament church has survived that period. Does God still give his people the gift of prophecy as in that time? Whether so or not, the framers of the Fresno Pacific Idea of the 1960s were convinced that a Christian college must be prophetic if it is to accomplish its mission of serving the church and world. This conviction has now been reaffirmed in the 1994 revision. Realistically, such a prophetic stance may be accomplished rarely through a direct word from God as received by biblical prophets. Nevertheless, God has revealed himself through Christ, and the prophetic foundation for examining the life of the church and world has been established. Michael Novak has observed that on occasion God breaks into human existence in a marvelous, revelatory way analogous to the "flight of the dove." More often, however, humans are faced with the hard work of discovering truth analogous to the "ascent of the mountain."\(^{15}\) A prophetic teacher and a prophetic college must be committed to this hard work, while also being grateful for those unexpected moments when God breaks through and illuminates life in a special and unique way. But it will be mostly the hard work of climbing the mountain that will qualify the teacher and college to speak and act prophetically.
NOTES

1. All scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.


4. Ibid., 13.


14. Scriven, 156.