

**7 February 2011  
Christ Church, Elbow Park**

**Response to Prof. Douglas Shantz's Lecture, *The Church and the Academy:  
What an Historian of Christianity can offer the Church of Today*  
by Dr. Roy Darcus**

Professor Shantz has kindly asked me to make a response to his address. I will try to draw attention to his main points and then open up our evening to questions. First, Doug speaks of the two cultures of the Church and Academy. The culture of the church is to promote faith as a dimension of human life, in its healing and teaching guises. This culture goes back to the early church and its mission. The culture of the academy is to engage in criticism, in critical reflection on all aspects of life, from the sciences to all the human shapes and forms of life as illuminated by history, sociology, anthropology, and so forth. This culture is indebted to the Enlightenment but has deep roots in the origins of the University in 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

Here I may say that I certainly do wish that the culture of the church were marked by faith, with faith understood as a commitment to regard human life as open, to sustain humanity as an unfinished project. Faith, as faith, has a quality of radical openness to what God can do for us, what God can do for this world contrary to all normal human expectations. In contrast, the life of criticism must take a view of things in their settled definite form. Reason must set up its canons, its criteria, and they remain fixed. As we all know, if they start to study you, you are as good as dead. In the words of Hegel, the Owl of Minerva takes flight only at dusk. Many aboriginal cultures have known this truth only too well.

It is clear that all too often the culture of the church is not faith but that highly

organized state of affairs we call religion. Religion, unlike, faith, is notorious for closing life down. It tells us exactly what and who we are, how to behave and what to expect from life, with all the consequences. Likewise, because life is complex, the life of criticism adopted by the academy does not confine itself to the strict canons of academic rationality. Many scholars are inspired to keep life open and regard their work as serving that purpose. Strictly speaking, I would say they were operating out of the dimension of faith.

To illustrate how the two traditions of faith and criticism overlap and cooperate with each other, Doug presents the actual examples of two scholars, Margaret Miles and Rowan Williams. Margaret Miles, an American professor of Historical Theology, feels that scholarship has a prophetic imperative to challenge settled convictions of the current church. Scholarship has the uncomfortable habit of making it plain that there have been continuous innovations and changes throughout the life of the church. Historical scholarship may make us reflect on the sometimes strange twists and turns of human change.

Rowan Williams, now Archbishop of Canterbury, in his study of Arius and the formulation of Christian belief out of the Arian controversy, makes it plain that sometimes the church must be committed to explicit innovation. It is not enough just to appeal to restoration of a previous happier and purer state of faith, a make-believe state of affairs. In a personal way I may say here that I have been very happy to live in this period of the church's life where we have seen measures adopted which I believe are in harmony with Rowan Williams' insights. I speak of course of the ordination of women to the priesthood and measures taken to respect a more adequate understanding of human sexuality, especially in regard to acceptance of homosexuals as full members of the Christian

community. Of course some regard these measures as dreadful innovations, even crimes, but such rhetoric betrays much of what served to establish our faith in the first place.

Doug then proceeds with a personal account of his own journey as a scholar and how he offers that endeavour in good faith to the church community. Here Doug speaks in a post-modern fashion, offering his biography as an exercise in transparency of cultural formation and personal inclination.

I was struck by an underlying irony. Pietism of course is noted for being fairly dismissive of human reason. It stressed subjectivity and often relied on charismatic revelations. I wonder what the early Pietists would make of earnest students of social science who come to study their social and family structures and mating habits. I mean to say here that Doug as a scholar is claiming a certain authority, the authority of reason, to render an account of the Pietist movement. By his inquiry, Doug offers an opportunity for those of the Pietistic tradition to be self-reflective on what have served the movement as its unique characteristics.

Doug's intent for us tonight, however, goes beyond strict scholarship. He speaks to us more out of the passion of his scholarly commitment. This passion breaks into the prophetic mode, because scholarship, as an address to our self-awareness, can be an invitation to repentance. His six *Theses* have, I feel, much of that intent. Repentance is a particular stance of the believer towards God but also entails an openness to critical scrutiny. We do tend to lapse into the easy ways of understanding and condoning ourselves. Scholarship works against our selective vision or preferential option for the way we think things have always been done.

I offer these observations with sincere thanks to Doug for his talk to us this

evening and now ask for questions from the audience.

- Roy Darcus

**Rev. Dr. Roy Darcus** is an Anglican priest who has been engaged in teaching various aspects of the Christian theological tradition. He has an M.A. in Classics from UBC, a Master's degree in Theological Studies from Harvard, and in 1982 received a Ph.D. in philosophical theology from Concordia University, Montreal.

Roy was ordained in the Diocese of Montreal in 1972. He has worked both in parish life and university chaplaincy during his ministry. From 1983-1994 he was chaplain at the University of Alberta and in 1994 came to Calgary as Associate Priest at Christ Church, where he was responsible for liturgical, educational and pastoral activities. He retired from full time ministry in 2008. Since then he has served as part-time Anglican Chaplain at the University of Calgary.