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## Why Write for the *Review*?

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# Why Write for the *Review*?

TODD A. CARLSON

There is a widely held belief on campus that publication in the *Review* does not "count" on an academic *vita* because it is not a peer reviewed journal. I think that this attitude is unfortunate and contrary to the undergraduate liberal arts mission of GVSU. Although scholarly activity and journal publication are an important part of a faculty member's career, it is possible for teaching faculty to overemphasize this type of professional activity. The value of a degree from many large universities has deteriorated because of the emphasis on research and publication to the exclusion of undergraduate teaching. After all, peer reviewed journal articles are written for a small group of highly specialized scholars and thus are not publications in the literal sense, in that these articles are not written "for the public." At a school like Grand Valley, however, we "publish" every day when we walk into a classroom. Teaching, is in fact, our most significant publication, because it makes our knowledge accessible to the general public. We will enhance our teaching if our professional publications include not only traditional peer reviewed journal articles, but also writings that interpret these ideas for the broader community of faculty and students. Furthermore, if we restrict our professional writings to a small circle of highly specialized scholars, we are undermining the generalist traditions of the liberal arts education. How can we justify the general education requirements for our students if at the same time we restrict our intellectual activities to just one discipline? If we are to be a liberal arts institution, then it is necessary to admit that all of the faculty members are our peers, and that our intellectual activities should include the entire university community. I think that the *Review* can be a significant vehicle for this part of our professional obligations. Through the *Review*, faculty members can demonstrate how and why their research activities are of interest to scholars of all disciplines. In other words, the *Review* IS a peer review publication.

## MARK LUTTENTON

The *Review* should reflect the very nature of the University. That is, it should be an open forum for thoughts, ideas, and creativity that transcend all fields and disciplines. I would like my colleagues in the sciences to submit articles to the *Review*.

As living organisms, we are undeniably tied to the natural world and it to us. Yet, as Carl Sagan points out in his introduction to Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, most people give little thought to, or have modest understanding of the natural world. Writing in the "popular science style", authors like Gould, Leopold, Carson, and Sagan have been able to translate complex science into comprehensible pieces of nature. Scientists may transform complex and often drab technical issues into understandable (yet scientifically sound) works. Timely issues such as biodiversity, habitat destruction, and human population growth may serve as examples. In particular, I would like to see writings that mold science with sociology, economics, or politics: in short, the application of a liberal education.

The task of writing pieces for the *Review* need not be considered an insurmountable burden. If, in the classroom, one presents thoughtful syntheses and interpretations of scientific facts, it may simply require the recollection and compilation of one's daily thoughts and remarks in that particular class. However, as science practitioners in an educational setting, we often focus on the factual information. Because we cannot teach all of the facts, we should attempt to build not just our students, but our own ability of thoughtful analysis and open discussion so that learning can proceed far beyond the classroom. Publishing in the *Review* offers the opportunity to stimulate that process.

## AREND D. LUBBERS

Professor Todd Carlson makes the point that the *Grand Valley Review* is a peer review publication for a university that is committed to a strong general education core for its students. The *Review* is one important medium for scholars at Grand Valley State University to share insights in their disciplines with the university community, and it is a medium for intellectual discourse on controversial academic matters. An opportunity for expression is necessary, even demanded, on campuses where the life of the mind is intense and active. A university-based *Review* is often the result. The existence of such a publication is evidence that the faculty of a university is doing its work and that the administration supports it. An interesting and energetic *Grand Valley Review* will demonstrate, therefore, that we have the academic intensity and energy that is expected at a university.

To enhance the future of the *Review* at Grand Valley, I submit the following three recommendations:

First: The faculty should consider publication in the *Review* for matters of promotion, salary recommendation, and tenure. Incorporating this concept in our faculty personnel policies will indicate our university's commitment and our desire for individual faculty members to interact with colleagues beyond their disciplines. In a university where "publish or perish" is not the guideline, professors who publish little or nothing in professional journals have an "in house" opportunity to share ideas and findings with their colleagues and students and get credit for it. For this policy to have validity, the editor's task is especially important: standards for acceptance must be carefully defined and maintained.

Second: The faculty and academic administration might add to the sabbatical leave policy a requirement that each faculty member submit an article to the editor, meeting the *Grand Valley Review* standards for acceptance, within six months after the sabbatical is completed. The editor, knowing those eligible for sabbaticals, could work in advance with faculty before they embark on their sabbatical leave. There are many opportunities for advance planning if such a policy is adopted. For those articles that are

not accepted, I suggest an annual sabbatical publication, printed on campus, and placed in the University library.

Third: Each year the *Grand Valley Review* could sponsor a symposium on campus, asking for papers of publishable quality. The subjects can be far-ranging. Some years the topic might deal with a macro subject, and scholars from several fields will be invited, each to apply his or her discipline to the topic. Other years the focus can center on one field or a problem within a single discipline. Schedules should be arranged to encourage faculty participation and attendance, and students whose studies involve them in the topic of the year should be required to attend. Advanced students, too, may be invited to present a paper.

As Professor Carlson suggests, the *Grand Valley Review* makes the intellectual activities of each faculty member who participates accessible to a broader audience. The recommendations I have laid before you are an attempt to encourage increased participation and create a university-wide audience.

## ANTHONY R. TRAVIS

In the year and in the day  
of obscurity and utter darkness,  
before there were days and years,  
the world being in deep obscurity,  
the earth was covered with water,  
there was only mud and slime  
on the surface of the earth,  
At that time.....  
there became visible a god who had the name 1-Deer  
and the surname Snake of the Lion  
and a goddess, very genteel and beautiful,  
whose name was also 1-Deer  
and whose surname was Snake of the Tiger.  
These two gods are said to have been the beginning  
of all the other gods....

### *Ancient Origin Myth, Mixtecs of Oaxaca*

My travels over the last several years to rural southern Mexico, an area where many Mayan Indian groups maintain traditional societies, have reawakened my interest in the work of the social historian, Mircea Eliade. In his book, *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957), Eliade maintains that people experience two existential modalities of being, the sacred and the profane. The sacred is most intensely experienced in space reserved for it. The boundaries of sacred space are marked with ritual, performance, myth, and created significance. Within this sacred space, time is experienced in a cyclical manner, often in rhythm with the seasons of planting, birth, maturing, harvesting, and dying. Through myth and ritual, the ultimate meaning of being and the nature of the cosmos are revealed. Sacred centers in archaic societies, such as temples and palaces radiate, sacrality outward, infusing every individual act in the community--eating, working, sexual relations--with ultimate meanings that often reveal the nature of the cosmos. The sacred is thus experienced in everyday life when the sacred

space is vitally connected to the central activities of the of the community. Profane activities are thereby infused with sacred meaning.

In contrast, according to Eliade, we in the modern western tradition see human activities as largely physiological acts, organic phenomena without much meaning outside the physical pleasure such acts in themselves give us. What additional pleasure they may give often lies in their relation to consumerism. We live in a society marked by commodification: the worth of everything is measured by the price it might bring in the market. The significance of life is limited, to a large degree, to the accumulation of money, power, and things as ends in themselves without reference to ultimate meanings.

In the West, we often treat means as if they were ends. For example, many Americans see economic growth as an end in itself. I once asked a gathering of local Grand Rapids economic leaders why they were putting economic growth as the number one priority of the region. They all looked at me as if I had two heads. One person answered that the region was in a very favorable position to achieve economic growth, and thus we should grow. This answer must have satisfied those present, because we went on to plan how best that growth could be achieved. I saw that no one was ready to talk about what constituted the good life. They were not even prepared to discuss the possibility that economic growth for the region might destroy the very things that they liked about living in the region.

In contrast to my American experience, I am amazed at how much of Mayan space and time is infused with the sacred. In fact, the profane seems hardly to exist at all in Mayan life. Farming in the *milpa*, cooking in the *casa*, and many other everyday activities are transformed into sacred activities by ritual and myth. Even a thoroughly secularized person can feel the power of the sacred through the medium of this myth and ritual. For example, on a Good Friday visit to a small town in the rural Yucatan I observed a passion play. It was enacted in the main square, with stores used as sites for the various acts. In one scene, the people had converted the general store into Pontius Pilate's palace, complete with centurion soldiers. All of the people had dressed up in hand-made costumes, decorated the plaza with real and colorful paper flowers, and filled the air with the folk music of the flute and drum. All the senses--seeing, hearing, smelling, touching--were focused on the unfolding sacred drama.

The priest waited on the high steps of the church at one end of the plaza for the procession, much as the pagan priests must have greeted religious

processions centuries ago on the steps of the ancient pyramid. In fact, the Christian church had been built on the site of a temple and out of its stones. For ages, both Christian and pagan ceremonies had been conducted here in front of the townspeople, ceremonies that revived the myths and made present ancient truths, giving meaning to the people's lives and revealing the nature of the cosmos. As the Mayan Jesus on his way to judgment and symbolic death passed and the people knelt in the street, I could feel the power of the sacred as it was created by the townspeople.

As the Mayan Jesus approached the site of his enacted crucifixion, I could almost hear the words of their ancestors from an ancient religious hymn from the *Book of the Songs of Dzitbalche* which establishes the link between blood sacrifice and fertility. In part it reads:

Go nimbly three times around  
about the painted stone column,  
where stands that virile lad,  
unstained, undefiled, a man.  
Go once, on the second round  
take up your bow, put in the arrow,  
point it at his chest; you need not  
use all your strength  
so as to kill him,  
or wound him deeply.  
Let him suffer  
little by little,  
as He wishes it,  
the Magnificent Lord God.

I also felt the power of the sacred one Sunday in the small ultra-traditional Mayan town of San Juan de Chamula in the Chiapas mountains of Southern Mexico near the Guatemalan border. In what appeared to be a Catholic church, Mayan families, many in traditional dress, gathered around individual statues of saints draped in Indian clothes and adorned with mirrors and beads. The families performed individual complex ceremonies; their rituals involved dozens of small lighted tapers, beds of pine boughs, and careful arrangements of eggs, colorful flowers, beer and soft drinks. During the ceremonies there was much chanting in their native language. The intensity of the devotion clearly created a sacred space, a space

extended to the whole central plaza of the town through periodic processions around the church and through the market and plaza to the town hall.

Social historians have documented that our own western tradition has been drained of much of its sacred nature in the last two centuries. Today there are left only small islands of sacred space, whose influences barely permeate beyond their immediate environs. Although many people in the United States visit a church on a regular basis, it is difficult to measure how much impact that has on their daily lives in the profane world of work and play. Despite the rise of the religious radical right and the religiously based opposition to abortion rights and gay rights, most social historians believe that religion as a dynamic force in American life has dramatically declined in the course of the 20th Century.

As I witnessed the sacred in Mayan life, I came to realize that it was not as foreign to my experience as I initially might have thought. I live in another sacred island, the university. With its origins in the medieval church, the university was clearly a sacred space in Western culture reserved for the study of ultimate things. Theology was the queen of the sciences, with philosophy also accorded a great deal of respect. Since then, the university has increasingly devoted its energies to the humanities, sciences, and the arts. Yet it has remained a space separated from the profane world.

The university's boundaries continue to be marked by cyclical time, myth, and ritual. We speak of the academic year as beginning with a fall convocation and ending with a spring commencement, a different cycle than the secular year beginning on New Year's Day. Academic semesters are named after the seasons--fall, winter, spring and summer. The academic cycle is marked by midterms, finals, winter break and spring break. The end of an academic year is celebrated with high ceremony. Robes, colorful symbolic hoods, medallions of office and service, traditional hats, reading of names, conferring of degrees, ritual music, singing and speaking, and processing all identify this as a sacred ceremony. Such ceremonies clearly mark the university as a sacred space.

The university's separation from profane society is also seen in the use of titles that grow out medieval times rather than modern professional organizational theory--for example, dean, provost, chancellor, faculty, professor, and registrar. The university grants tenure for life in much the same way that the churches confer ordination for life. We are now engaged in a debate as to which literary works should be in the canon, a religious term usually reserved for sacred scriptures.

Perhaps most importantly, the sacred nature of the university is maintained by the activities carried out on its campus. Martin Buber has pointed out in *A Believing Humanism* (1967) that every true community must have a center to which each person on the circumference of the circle is attached. For the university community, that center has always been the quest for the meaning of life and the nature of the cosmos. The liberal arts, divided into the sciences, the arts, and the humanities, carry on this quest in the modern age. Each of the discipline discovers truth in its own way.

The sciences, for example, by exploring the nature of the cosmos for the sheer pleasure of finding out why things are as they are participate in sacred task. Teilhard de Chardin, in his book, *The Phenomena of Man* (1958), has clearly demonstrated the connection between exploring the world through scientific questioning and a sacred yearning to understand the order of the universe and thereby the meaning of life. More recently, a number of scientists have been drawn to the idea that all natural and social entities are governed by the same fundamental principles. They are encouraged by indications that researchers from diverse disciplines have arrived at similar findings about the way patterns are established in living and non-living systems. Their work is summarized in recent books with titles such as *The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos*, as well as, *Life at the Edge of Chaos*.

Society, through the university, creates the space necessary to carry on the quest for the nature of order in the face of seeming chaos. In his book, *A Free and Ordered Space: World of the University* ( 1991), A. Bartlett Giamatti, former president of Yale University, places the liberal arts at the very center of the university. According to Giamatti, " a liberal education is an education meant to increase in young people a sense of the joy that learning for the sake of learning brings, learning whose goal is...the commencement of a life long pleasure in the human exercise of our minds, our most human part....[and]....to forge those links with family, neighbors, community, and country that allow each to sustain the other." Giamatti also points out that the university exists to protect and to foster an environment conducive to free inquiry, the advancement of knowledge, and the free exchange of ideas.

Such a view is not meant to disparage professional education. From its medieval birth the university included law and medical schools, giving testimony that the university has always included professional education as part of its endeavor. It is equally clear that if professional education is to be

centered in the university, it must be infused with the liberal temper; that is it must be animated by a love of learning and be willing to put the profession in the larger context of society as a whole.

It is the faculty that has been given the solemn duty to insure that the university protects and fosters an environment conducive to free inquiry, to the advancement of knowledge, and to the free exchange of ideas. Although the first obligation of faculty is to teach students, it is also vitally important for them to engage in continuing scholarship. It is in this way that knowledge is advanced. In addition, the faculty have an obligation to engage in a dialogue with their colleagues inside and outside the university, sharing the results of their scholarship to insure a free exchange of ideas.

The dialogue is carried on in many ways. Within the University there are colloquia, seminars, and internal publications. External to the university there are juried and nonjuried conference papers and publications. Although all forms of communication are important, they are not all of equal merit. The advancement of knowledge requires that some measure be made of the quality, validity, and importance of the scholarship. For example, the scholarly juried publication is the most meritorious because it is reviewed by colleagues and is in a form accessible to fellow scholars. Papers delivered at academic conferences are an important contribution to the advancement of knowledge because they put scholars in contact with each other to exchange ideas. Invitational conferences are valuable because participants are selected on the basis of merit.

Campus publication and colloquia are also important forums for the faculty and their students to try out new ideas or put forward the preliminary results of recent scholarship. Such forums are also useful for faculty and students to exchange ideas across disciplines. Alfred N. Whitehead maintained that the faculty should be a band of scholars who stimulate each other and freely determine their various activities. The whole point of a university, according to Whitehead, is to bring the young under the intellectual influence of a band of imaginative scholars. Thus such forums as the *Grand Valley Review* are important elements in the intellectual life of the university.

Often we hear the cry that a university has a publish or perish policy. Usually this is understood in a contractual sense. If one wants to keep her job it is necessary to publish. In a more profound sense, faculty must publish, or the essential dialogue between scholars will perish and with it the quest for new understandings of the world around us. If the desire for

new knowledge perishes in the heart of a faculty member, her intellectual life is in danger. With the enthusiasm of the quest dampened, how can students be motivated to learn? Thus scholarship, understood as a creation of new knowledge which is shared with colleagues and students, is the essence of good teaching. There is no conflict between the two activities.

In the area of applied research it is sometimes a different story. Profane society makes many demands on the university. Political and economic leaders, for example call on the university to create new technical knowledge that will help the United States compete in a world market place. These same leaders call on the university to equip students with the skills necessary for the high technology jobs of the future. Profane society increasingly asks the university to account for its existence in pragmatic terms.

These trends are not necessarily problematic. Even archaic societies used the sacred to produce profane results, *e.g.*, rain making, curing, etc., without endangering the essential role of the sacred. Such pragmatic activities enhanced the value of the sacred. The university ought not to reject such requests out of hand. They may often be appropriate.

What is problematic is the trend to marginalize, by under-funding and under-valuing the liberal arts, the sacred center of the university. If the liberal arts are ever moved to the periphery of the university, the university will no longer be reserved sacred space for the exploration of the ultimate meanings of life as well the essential nature of the cosmos. Given the tendency in western modern society to encourage the accumulation of money, power, and consumerism, the loss of one of the last sacred spaces in our society would impoverish us culturally. The ability of the sciences, the arts, and the humanities to continue to explore the nature of the cosmos will be severely diminished. Knowledge for its own sake will not easily find another refuge in our profane society.

Using the metaphor of the sacred and the profane does not imply that the university should be cut off from society. Although it must maintain its critical distance from society, the university through its graduates must insure that its understandings of the nature of the world, tentative as they may be, permeate society. These sacred understandings will breathe life into society, transforming it into a community infused with meaning. If this were to happen, alienation and anomie, the curse of the modern world, will finally be held at bay.