

**LAST LECTURE SERIES****SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY  
DIVISION OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND THE OFFICE OF THE  
PROVOST****Busch Student Center 170/171****April 27, 2009****Dr. Timothy Lomperis**  
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Spring 2009 Inaugural Last Lecture

**“The Bridge to Albuquerque”**

Thank you very much for this honor—I think. Nevertheless, I am grateful for this recognition from the nominating students and from the selection committee in the Division of Student Development. I see so many students from most of my classes. You all had so many other things you could have been doing on a rainy night like this. I would also like to thank many of my department colleagues for coming. It is not as if you needed to come to hear yet another lecture from me. I also see friends from my current church, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, and from my former church, Green Trails United Methodist Church. We seem to have a Protestant insurgency going here. Seriously, thanks to all of you for coming out tonight.

This lecture tonight could not have happened without the lifelong—well, nearly thirty-three years—of love and support from my wife, Ana Maria. She’s been with me every step of the way. Ana Maria, would you please stand so that everyone can see you... Thank you!

We’ve had about a month to get ready for this, and Ana Maria and I were recalling my First Lecture. It was in 1977, when I was a TA for an introductory

International Relations course at Duke University. The professor suddenly had to go out of town, and asked me to fill in for him—and give a whole lecture all by myself. I was pretty scared and nervous—like I am now—and to calm me Ana Maria prepared a special breakfast that even included the luxury of scrambled eggs. In wolfing them down, since we were running a little late, Ana Maria somehow choked on these eggs. I panicked and said, “Ana Maria you’ll have to go to the hospital on the bus. I need the car to go to Duke.” She spent the whole day in the Emergency Room while I went to give my lecture. Two thousand five hundred lectures later, she’s still with me, one of life’s miracles of forbearance.

I also can’t help but note that this particular evening just happens to be the 63<sup>rd</sup> Wedding Anniversary of my parents, The Reverend Clarence and Marjorie Lomperis. They were married in Calcutta, India in 1946.

For this evening’s lecture, I also would like to express my thanks to Father Ralph Huse, Rector of Jesuit Hall, for leading me through the Nineteenth Annotation of the Jesuit Exercises in 1999-2000. He was my Spiritual Director and led me to the gateways that are at the heart of tonight’s message.

As I said, I think I am glad to be here tonight. But I am wondering how much of a “last lecture” is a matter of encouragement, of wishful thinking—and even of a kick out the door. In holding up this book The Last Lecture, by Randy Pausch, the Computer Science Professor at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburg, I have a hard act to follow. I am not dying of pancreatic cancer. In fact, at the moment, to my knowledge—I am not dying of anything, other than of life itself in its day-to-day increments. Still, just to be sure I

would have no dramatic, maudlin announcement to make; I decided to postpone my physical until after tonight.

Seriously, it is a sobering thought: what would I really say if this were my last lecture—which, I pray, it is not. The prospect of this lecture does at least bring up the subject of RETIREMENT. This is something I have not really thought of much until this came up. I have been on a Merry-Go-Round in this profession that seems to have no end. I AM sixty-two. Maybe I should start thinking about hanging it up. I am not sure I am grateful for this thought. I have long been in denial over the slippage of my youth.

As I began to think about this lecture, I had an easier time deciding what not to talk about. I have taught a total of fourteen courses. Some of them have some hairy last lectures already: Plato's cave in International Relations and Your Life's Credo in the Politics of the Future, for example. But a last lecture is really not about one course—or one part of knowledge.

I also began to realize that this assignment has come with some temptations. After all, I have been guaranteed the largest live audience of my life—with no rebuttals from anyone—unlike an academic conference, or even a class. I have been given a clear and absolute shot to say anything I want. There's a temptation of power here—to even some scores, get back at people (not here, of course)—to say something that will reverberate through the universe at bygone enemies. But what kind of way is this to end a career? How will it help my students? It would be a wasted self-indulgence.

Frankly, I probably should not brag about my scholarly accomplishments either. But...while I'm at it, and have your attention, I might just mention my most "famous" one: THE SUCKING VORTEX. It came to me during an International Relations class

when I was trying to explain the origins of World War One—a favorite topic of us war scholars. I showed the class this slide of the three empires facing each other in Central Europe. I was trying to describe the dangerous political currents unleashed by the disintegrating Ottoman Empire, as the Balkans were slipping from its grasp. While the Austro-Hungarian Empire salivated over this vacuum, the Russian Empire started to jump at the opening it saw for its long-cherished desire for warm water ports into the Mediterranean. All of this horrified the more distant, but hovering Queen Victoria, even though she was dead, as the echoes of the clarion cry of her British Empire rang out: “Above all else, the Russians must not get out!” It was a SUCKING VORTEX!

Fast forward to the contemporary world of the Middle East, and we have brushfires from Somalia to Baghdad all the way to Kashmir in the Indian subcontinent. Zbigniew Brzezinski called this, “the arc of crisis.” I realize the drawing in this slide is rather rudimentary, but if you give me a raise, I’ll give you a power point. In an updated lecture focusing on Iraq, I thought, in explaining the larger significance of this conflict, I would just turn this upward arc over—and what do we have: a downward SUCKING VORTEX, with Baghdad at the pit of this geopolitical toilet bowl. Well, this cosmic conceptual commode is globally mobile, and may be put over the headwaters of the Amazon, over the depths of warring international armies in Zaire, and even over the glacier glinting nuclear missiles of India and Pakistan facing off against each other along the Line of Control in Kashmir. *Voila!* We have something here equivalent to  $E=MC$  squared, to the discovery of electricity, or even to String Theory and all its Quarks!

Fortunately, my colleagues in political science are doing much more serious work than I am. Indeed, I think their work will form a crucial part of the claim of Saint Louis

University to become the finest Catholic University in America. **Ken Warren** has written a book on polling that explains just how polls should be interpreted to understand what is really going on in American politics. **Steve Puro** will be retiring this May after thirty-seven years of service to Saint Louis University. He is perhaps best remembered for a much-cited article he wrote on the role of the Solicitor General in judicial politics. **Ellen Carnaghan** published a book in 2007 addressing the difficult transition to democracy going on in Russia today. She has reached her conclusions from interviews she has conducted with ordinary Russians over a number of years. Just last year **Jean-Robert Leguey-Feilleux** came out with a fundamental text on diplomacy. **Michelle Lorenzini** has a major treatise detailing the different paths to prosperity among the four newly industrializing Asian tigers based on her own extensive interviewing. Our chair, **Wynne Moskop**, is at work on a study using a framework from Aristotle to explain the leadership styles of American presidents. We have a colleague from Nigeria, **Emmanuel Uwalaka**, who is publishing articles on comparative AIDS awareness in Africa to focus on areas where AIDS awareness campaigns need to concentrate their efforts. We have recently hired some junior faculty who have also embarked on important projects. **Chris Witco** has just published work on both the politics and effectiveness of charter schools. **J.D. Bowen** will be traveling to Ecuador this summer to study social movements in the Andes. And **Ruth Groff** is becoming a real expert on John Stuart Mill. I am proud to be associated with such fine colleagues, who are also gifted classroom teachers.

Speaking of the classroom, more and more we are finding that the lecture itself is becoming passé as a pedagogical form. Some of my younger colleagues call themselves facilitators rather than professors. They rearrange the desks and chairs in every

classroom into a big circle where everyone sits around and experiences something called interactions. Others enter “smart classrooms” all gussied up with technology and stick a disc or flash drive into a computer and dazzle students with mind-numbing lists of this and that on power point slides dishing out more knowledge than any five conventional lectures.

I don't do any of this stuff. I still write on the board and draw my free-form cartography. I do lecture, and now I have been asked to give my last one. Rather than introduce some new exciting theoretical treatise to further the academy's general advance of reason, I have decided to give this lecture on faith. It is, after all, the other side of the coin to a faith-based institution. At Duke University, where I both studied and taught for a number of years, the motto was *Eruditio et Religio*, but the religion part was mostly swept aside. We all know of Harvard's *Veritas*, but the original motto was *Veritas pro Christo et ecclesia*, or Truth for Christ and His Church. Indeed, here at Saint Louis University our slogan is *Ad majoram Dei gloriam*, for the greater glory of God. At the end of his life, a very materialist Aristotle admitted that “my thoughts tend towards the gods.” For me, as well, when I think of a last lecture, my thoughts stray from my courses to more of who I am, a child of God.

The secular humanist creed and its focus on a rationalist formula to explain all of Garrison Keilor's “life's persistent questions” has bleached out religious faith from even church-related institutions like SLU. Of all the wonderful things that reason can do, one thing it cannot do is to disprove faith. Nor can faith rely on reason alone to reveal its truth. The truth of faith lies in other realms of human experience like in dreams, in leaps of creative intuition, in revelations from the Holy Spirit in holy texts, in the mystery of

the divine presence in the Eucharist and other rituals, in miraculous encounters with God in inexplicable places and situations, and in testimonies from trusted people in our lives. This last lecture, then, is my testimony about “The Bridge to Albuquerque,” and in the encounter with God’s Truth that it brought home to me.

We came to Saint Louis as a deliverance for our family. Two jobs at the same institution had eluded us—until we came to Saint Louis. Good schools and wholesome environments for our children had evaded us—until we came to Saint Louis. For our daughter, Kristi, there was Nerinx Hall; and for our son, John, there was Saint Louis University High School, and then Parkway West.

But I came to Saint Louis in a great deal of pain. God had let me down. I was supremely confident that Duke University would give me tenure. I had justice on my side. Coming to Saint Louis was more than an injustice, it was a crisis of faith. I grew up with God on the Lutheran mission field in India. God and Gods are everywhere in India. But like you saw in *Slum Dog Millionaire*—if you saw *Slum Dog Millionaire*—bad things happened all around, but not really to me. I really could not complain about all the twists and turns meted out to my life. I even came through my two tours in Vietnam OK. I never came close to combat and I managed to avoid the pitfalls that represent the seamier side to wars. I had an Al Gore type of war. I returned home to marry a wonderful woman, Ana Maria Turner from North Carolina, and we had two fine children: Kristi Cain, who teaches English in Eastern Tennessee, and John Lomperis, who is a student at the Harvard Divinity School.

So, when I came up against this struggle over tenure at Duke, I knew God would come through for me in my four years of appeal over this unjust denial—as He always had before. But He didn't.

Faith has always been important to our family, and as soon as we came to Saint Louis, we became involved in church—first at Green Trails United Methodist Church and then at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. I also participated in Campus Ministry events. Coming to Saint Louis University was a liberation for me. For the first time at work, I felt that I could be explicit about my faith. I particularly enjoyed becoming acquainted with some of the Jesuits. One of them, “JJ” Mueller, soon understood that I had a troubled soul. He recommended and set me up to do the Nineteenth Annotation of the Jesuit Exercises with his friend, Father Ralph Huse.

Rather than in the intensive month-long retreat as the Jesuits do the Exercises, the Nineteenth Annotation is for laypersons who are busy in professions. The Exercises are stretched out for a year in a regimen of an hour-a-day of private devotions with bi-monthly meetings with your Spiritual Director, in my case, Brother Ralph. I did the Exercises in the 1999-2000 academic year, the year my Mother was dying. The purpose of these Exercises is two-fold: to become a companion of Christ and, in so doing, to discern your God-given desires and talents so that your life can more fully reflect God's glory. In each of these hours in your home, you are to open with prayer and follow with meditation around scripture passages portraying the pathways of the ministry of Jesus with his disciples. In these meditations, you are to make mental images of the scene, and even imagine yourself present in both the scene and even in the story of the passage so

that you fully become a companion of Christ. For me, this full experience only happened three times.

The first was at the manger. I have never liked crowded places. But this was different. I was one of many shepherds around the manger. There were the Wise Men and their servants, angels hovering around like noiseless helicopters, and noisy camels, sheep, and goats, and a whole slew of jostling shepherds. I was way over to the side. But Mary looked at me—radiant—and took me in to her joy. It was enough for me. I didn't need to be close—or in a reserved seat. Her glance was all I needed. I really didn't demand justice any more. Funny, for a Lutheran, to have a Mary moment.

C. S. Lewis warned in his Weight of Glory that the greatest temptation facing modern, professional people is something he called the Inner Ring. Wherever we find ourselves situated, there is always an inner ring that leaves us on the outside. Of course, we strive to get in, and the more we strive to get in—and in—the more there is always another inner ring to peel back. The closer we get to whatever this inner core of elite belonging is, the more desperately we jostle others out of the way, cut corners, and start shoving desperately—to get in. In the process, we lose sight of who we are, and what we have become—lost souls to the false god of pride. The only way back from the incessant pull of this seductive trap is to refocus more on who you are and what you like to do and be, find the friends with whom you like to be around, and who like to be around you—and suddenly you will find that these rings will form around you, not outside you.

There are moments of slippage to these Exercises. As I continued with them, and thought of Jesus with his disciples, I was having trouble feeling a friendship with Jesus, as the twelve disciples clearly did. How could I really be a companion of Jesus, when I

had suffered such an injustice? I had been unjustly excluded from an inner ring and resentments still burned towards all the people who had voted me out. These resentments gelled into a hard barrier between me and God. I couldn't accept the friendship of Jesus unless he put me back in my proper place—back inside that elite ring. I could not be so humiliated and keep my dignity in His presence. I had to feel worthy.

Brother Ralph saw this barrier, and bluntly told me, “You know, Tim, God loves ‘Peter Smith’ (not his real name) just as much as he loves you. He wants good for him, just as much as He wants good for you.” I was too stunned to speak, but my face flushed with the gushing of my mind's cherished outrages. How could He? Peter was the one who flew all the way from California just to vote against me. He was the one who overturned the table of Duke students who were gathering signatures of appeal supporting my case. And he was the one who definitely torpedoed the publication decision on my book (the heart of my case for tenure) at Cambridge, and probably at Yale as well—decisions that sealed my doom. I was the one who had been the victim of injustice. God owed me big time. Why did he owe Peter, of all people, anything!?

As I continued to flush, I also began to consider a bit: Who do I think that I am? My wounded pride was taking me to dangerous heights of arrogance. Who could really say who deserved what? Who was I to be so declarative of what justice was here? Had I risen to such a perilous height that I was judging God? As Brother Ralph's words began to strike deeper and deeper within me, to the depths of my soul, everything just bled right out of me as I confronted just how twisted a path of arrogance I had been taken on: literally to the gates of Hell itself. Who was I to levy such a claim of privilege on God?

This revelation, which was like the flash of light that struck Saint Paul, so exhausted me that I began to weary of the Exercises. It was just too emotionally enervating to do all this fantasizing. If I thought I had been caught unawares by Brother Ralph before, this time he hit me with something that shook me to the core: “Tim, you know the Devil does not want you to finish these Exercises. He is working over time to capture your soul. He nearly got you over Peter Smith. Look at what you can do for him with all your students.”

This gave me a huge pause: war, social justice, good works, the Devil likes them all. Good, bad, it doesn't matter, pride is always there, and this human hubris is his greatest ally. Of course, it was his own pride that tempted him to challenge God in the first place. Lucifer, the bright one, he was called. Born to it, pride is something he can quickly sniff out in humans—and seize on. The bright and beautiful ones are his favorite food.

His greatest strength, though, is his stealth—and that our susceptibilities to his lies lie unbidden and unrecognized, and, all too often, within us. Modernity, and its secular humanist creed, has not stripped us of our belief in God. Even for secular humanism, a belief in a just and merciful God serves the purpose of supporting the belief in progress and the ideal of social justice and the possibility of human perfection that form the cornerstones of this humanist agenda. But not the Devil. The very idea of a Devil or evil force undermines confidence in the triumphs of these ideals. Intellectuals of all stripes, and other good souls, have gone out of their way to ridicule the Devil out of existence—or at least out of mind. Not surprisingly, then, in most surveys on religious beliefs in America, 80% to over 90% believe in God. Less than 20% of this same public, however,

believes in the reality of an evil force in human life, and even less in a personal Devil. Secular humanism, I submit, is the Devil's Mask.

Brother Ralph's warning about the Devil led me to despair. Could I overcome this consuming pride over the very essence of my intellectual abilities? The Gospels recognize these soul-wrenching struggles with the command that if parts of you are at war with the commitment to salvation, grave sacrifices may be required: "If your right arm offends you, cut it off; and if your right eye offends you, pluck it out." C.S. Lewis, in this same Weight of Glory, wrote of the value of a calling to the academic world to the building of God's kingdom, but he was blunt about the spiritual dangers as well:

The intellectual life is not the only road to God, or the safest, but we find it to be a road, and it may be the appointed road for us. Of course, it will be so only so long as we keep the impulse pure and disinterested. That is the great difficulty...we may come to love knowledge—*our* knowing—more than the thing known: to delight not in the exercise of our talents but in the fact that they are ours, or even the reputation they bring us. Every success in the scholar's life increases this danger. If it becomes irresistible, he must give up his scholarly work. The time for plucking out the right eye has arrived.

Could I pluck out this eye?

Rob Weber, a Methodist minister, in his book Beginnings [of] the Spiritual Life, relates the story of the Indian Chief who tells his grandson about the two wolves: Every man is born with two wolves within him. There is a good wolf that is courageous, loving, and generous; and there is a bad wolf that is cowardly, hateful, and greedy. They are always fighting for control of the person that they inhabit. The boy, desperate to know, demanded of his grandfather, "Which one wins, Grandfather?"

"The one you feed, son. The one you feed."

I despaired because I knew that I could not stop feeding this ravenous wolf with the sin of my pride.

Then I had my second fantasy. The scriptural passage was about the resurrection scene in the garden in the Gospel of John. I was in the garden, and Jesus emerged from the tomb. The thrill I felt in seeing Jesus was indescribable. He was a big man in this fantasy—quite dark with flowing black hair, a full beard, and deep and very kind brown eyes. He opened his arms and came towards me. I knew that in those arms lay my only hope against this devil within me. Before he embraced me, the fantasy faded—NOW WAS NOT QUITE MY TIME. But there was a peace that settled over me. I could feel the imprint of his arms. Jesus took me “just as I am.” With Jesus, I did not need my resume. I could be his companion. He had just invited me.

In a last lecture, your thoughts are bound to turn to ultimate things. In our lives, we are always looking, and plotting, for happy endings—for completing our resumes, having nice retirement parties, and fading contentedly into the sunset. In my Politics of the Future class, I have my students start out by writing their obituaries. As college seniors, these obituaries are all happy stories of graduation, marrying the girl or guy of their dreams, having illustrious careers and fine children to be proud of, and ringing off from this planet with lives “well done.”

As I myself get closer to this point, I have come to realize that life is a journey, not a destination. The destination is somewhere beyond even our best-laid plans. There is always unfinished business. Death, without fail, is an interruption. Among my Mother’s things were folders with plots and sketches of never-finished novels. But there

were also a lot of very good poems. My wife's father, Daymond Turner, spent his working life translating all of Oviedo's fifty books on the Spanish conquest of the Americas, but never got it published. Many years later, his daughter, Rosa, persuaded the Rare Manuscripts Archive of the University of Virginia Library to accept them as a research resource for scholars.

Our journeys take us on roads along many byways to bridges—bridges to the other side beyond the mortal veil. For my Mother, her dying of ovarian cancer was a big adventure. One afternoon, I was wheeling her in her wheel chair around the parking lot of her nursing home on one of the last warm fall days in Pennsylvania when she startled me by exclaiming, “You know, Tim, It's just amazing, amazing! I can't believe this is happening to me.”

“What, Mom?”

“This dying. I mean it's never happened to me before!”

For Mom, life and death was a seamless adventure. Mom died on the Sunday before Thanksgiving having Communion at her bed with a delightful Lutheran “friar.” Later, he described the moment, and told me, “Tim, every time you take Communion, raise your cup in the air so that your Mother can click goblets with you.” Every time I take Communion and raise my cup, she's there! Mom died in 2000 never knowing about 9/11, but she did know that our daughter Kristi was engaged, so, as she said, “The family will continue to grow.”

After my Mother died, my Father's last years were a struggle. I think mostly he was in denial over the inevitability of his own transition. After their retirement from forty years on the mission field in India, Mom and Dad had some wonderful years in

Albuquerque, New Mexico, where my sister Sue lived. Family responsibilities and other issues, however, brought them back to Pennsylvania where they set themselves up in a Lutheran retirement community. Always overwhelmed with all he had to do, as he approached the end, Dad insisted on becoming more and more busy—and resentful—and wanting to return to the good old days he remembered in the Southwest.

His last week-end came over Labor Day of 2006. He was admitted to the hospital seriously malnourished to see if they could get some food in him. When we arrived from Saint Louis on Friday afternoon, we thought he was going to be released. He had had an operation to insert a feeding tube to get food into his system, but, we learned, the tube had not penetrated his stomach. A team of doctors wanted to do an exotic operation. A courageous nurse told us, contra these doctors, that Dad was dying. We decided to let him try to absorb some concentrated food naturally. On Saturday, our two children joined Ana Maria and me around his bed, and two of my sisters, Elaine and Anne, as well as our nephew Martin and brother-in-law, Wayne, also gathered in this vigil.

By Sunday it was clear that his system was shutting down. Dad was lucid through this whole ordeal. That afternoon, he asked me, “Tim, what’s my future? I mean I can’t just stay here lying around all day in this bed!” This, I knew, was the time to say SOMETHING. I then uttered the most difficult sentence I have ever spoken in my life, “Well, Dad, you are dying.” Naturally, I choked up, and could not go on for a good while. Then, from somewhere in my head, something came over me that let me go on. I felt as if someone had just handed me a script. “Dad, there is a bridge. You’ve got to get up on this bridge. Mom is there.” And I mentioned all of his fellow missionaries from India days who had passed on who I said were also waiting for him.

“Well, where is this bridge going?” he demanded.

“To Heaven, Dad.”

“Heaven! I don’t want to go to Heaven! I want to go to Albuquerque!!”

Dad died three hours later. Maybe Saint Peter let him swing by Albuquerque on the way. I don’t know.

A few months later, I received a package from my sister Sue, the one from Albuquerque. “In rummaging through Mom’s and Dad’s things in Pennsylvania,” she wrote, “I found this in Mom’s desk drawer.” It was a poem she wrote to Dad shortly after she got her cancer.

### BRIDGES

Bridges of childhood—bridges of tears—

A bridge to the pulpit out of the pew

A bridge out of bachelorhood to a world quite new

A bridge from loneliness to Fatherhood’s Feast—

Bridges in the world of the West—and the East

The Hooghly we crossed with a honeymoon song

The Ganges at Allahabad—two miles long

The Tiber, the Thames, a silvery stream

The Jordan, the Indus—all seem a dream

At San Francisco we sailed under the bridge

The Hudson we crossed from ridge to ridge

The Ohio, Susquehanna, Father of Waters

These we crossed with our son and our daughters  
 There'll be more bridges for you  
 We cannot see them from here  
 But we'll remember the spans that we  
     bridged in the past  
 And face the bridges of the future—  
     without fear—  
 Lovingly,  
     Marge

Without fear. Without fear, my friends. With “coincidences” like this in our lives: Tell me that there is no God. Tell me that there is no God who cares for us and loves us and reaches out to us and inspires us in moments like this.

For my last lecture my proclamation is this (and proclamation is what I finally discerned from the Jesuit Exercises to be my deepest desire and God-given calling to reflect His glory): At this, and all other universities, let *religio* live alongside *eruditio* so that in all of our rational brilliance we do not forget our calling to become humble servants of the Lord. In so doing, He can reach out and embrace us so that we can live out our days without fear. There are roads and bridges ahead of you leading to destinations beyond *eruditio* to *religio*—even beyond Albuquerque and Saint Louis. Walk with friends; walk with family; but walk also with the Lord as your sure companion and protection against the Devil.

This is my last lecture: *Ad majoram Dei gloriam*. Here I stand. God help me—  
and all of you. Amen.

