

# A Reflection on the Mission

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Good afternoon. My name is Bob Wetzel. I'm a member of the Institutional Advancement team, and it's my privilege to offer this semester's reflection on our mission.

One of my favorite movies is *A Very British Coup*, which was a Masterpiece Theater presentation in the late 80's. The movie tells the fictional story of Britain's first socialist government. Wonderfully portrayed by the late Ray McAnally, the main protagonist in the film is Harry Perkins, third-generation steelworker, trade unionist, socialist, and leader of the Labor Party. The story begins as Perkins is elected Prime Minister. In his victory speech, he shares these thoughts:

"During this campaign, I have been called many things by my good friends from the press. *The Times*, our great paper of record, called me a simple-minded fool...simple-minded fool. Well, so be it. Maybe they're right! For if it's simple-minded to believe that people...all people...are entitled to food, to warmth and shelter, to a good education and free health service, and a well-paying job, then, yes, I am simple-minded. If it's foolish to want to spend money on milk for children and care for elderly rather than on even more sophisticated bombs for the military, then I am a fool. If it is simple-minded and foolish to feel revulsion at the fact that millions of men, women, and children are forced to live in hell so that a tiny bunch of fat cats can eat their brie, then, yes, I plead guilty and I confess, I am a simple-minded fool. And I would like to thank the other millions of simple-minded fools who indicated by their votes that they feel the same way."

I love that little speech. Nothing like a little righteous indignation! But it's been a long time since I first saw this movie, and the issues Harry talked

about – jobs, universal healthcare, education, the latest war and its cost – still challenge us. So maybe it really is simple-minded to care about those in need and foolish to think we can somehow find the resources to actually change things. But if it's simple-minded to care and foolish to share, it's also very Christian. In fact, there are those who contend that such caring and sharing is the essence of Christianity.

Some of you are familiar with John Dominic Crossan. Crossan is a former priest who taught comparative religion for decades at DePaul University. He has literally spent his professional life searching for the historical Jesus, and was a founder of the controversial Jesus Seminar. Last fall, I was talking with Professor Joe Stoutzenberger and mentioned that my wife had me reading a book by Crossan. Joe said something to the effect that Crossan and his friends take all the good stuff out of the Jesus story. No question about that. Crossan's Jesus, as described in his book, *Jesus – A Revolutionary Biography*, wasn't born of a virgin or laid in a manger. He didn't walk on water or raise the dead. His historical Jesus is simply a preacher.

But give Him His due, Crossan's preacher is some preacher! Crossan's historical Jesus is a preacher who did nothing less than change the world by providing His followers with what Crossan calls "a revolutionary strategy." That strategy basically involved 1) free healing and 2) commensality, or sharing meals with others. Crossan writes, "Here is the heart of the original Jesus movement, a shared egalitarianism of spiritual (healing) and material (eating) resources." (*Jesus – A Revolutionary Biography* at page 107.) In other words, caring for others and sharing with others, or "loving your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12 and Luke 10).

What did Jesus mean by loving your neighbor? Crossan and his Jesus Seminar tell us He meant "Give"! Give to others, even beggars (Luke 6), and even your coat and shirt (Matthew 5). And who is "your neighbor"? For the man who went down to Jericho, it wasn't friend or family. It was a

Samaritan (Luke 10). A total stranger, even an enemy, can be the neighbor who needs your help – or will help you – in time of need.

This strategy, this revolutionary strategy, that Jesus shared with His followers may be summarized as “give what you can to others and your needs will be similarly met.” Or, more simply, just take care of each other. That was the strategy. That was His plan. Care for one another, share with one another, and you’ll have nothing to fear, now and forever.

What a plan...and what a promise! But we’ve all heard the contrary “wisdom,” too, haven’t we? Caring...for strangers? “Don’t (even) talk to strangers”! Isn’t that what we tell our kids? A stranger’s problems? That’s none of your business. You better take care of yourself. And what about sharing? Haven’t we learned that “a fool...a fool and his money are soon parted.” You better hang on to that. You never know when you’ll need it.

From this “practical” point of view, caring and sharing aren’t exactly virtues, are they? Caring? That can be stupid. Sharing? Don’t be foolish. So should we be simple-minded enough to care? Or smart enough to mind our own business? Should we be foolish enough to share? Or wise enough to keep what we have for...well, who knows when you’ll need it? Here at Holy Family, it’s part of our mission to seek direction and inspiration from the life and teaching of Jesus, so the answers to these questions have been provided by faith not fear. Jesus provided a great plan: love one another as I have loved you; care for one another and share with one another. We are bound by our responsibility to follow His plan, even at the risk of being labeled simple-minded fools. It is part and parcel of our mission to take the risk...and be simple-minded enough to care, to take the risk...and be foolish enough share.

Those who have contributed in so many ways to make this University what it is today have been smart and wise, but not too smart to care nor too wise to share. Because, as Harry Perkins might say, if it’s simple-minded to

believe that students of all ages should receive a first-class education, then we should be simple-minded. And, if it's foolish to want to keep our doors open to students who don't have much money but loads of talent, then we should be such fools.

As we begin this new semester, may we as a University community, in furtherance of our mission and service to community, continue to seek and find inspiration in the life and teaching of Jesus and encouragement in the simple-minded foolishness of predecessors who were not too smart to care nor too wise to share. May we, like those who've served before us, have the courage, when needed, to be simple-minded fools who care, and share, and make a difference.

Thank you for what you do each day to serve our students and community. I hope you have a great semester.