

Tolerance: Vice or Virtue

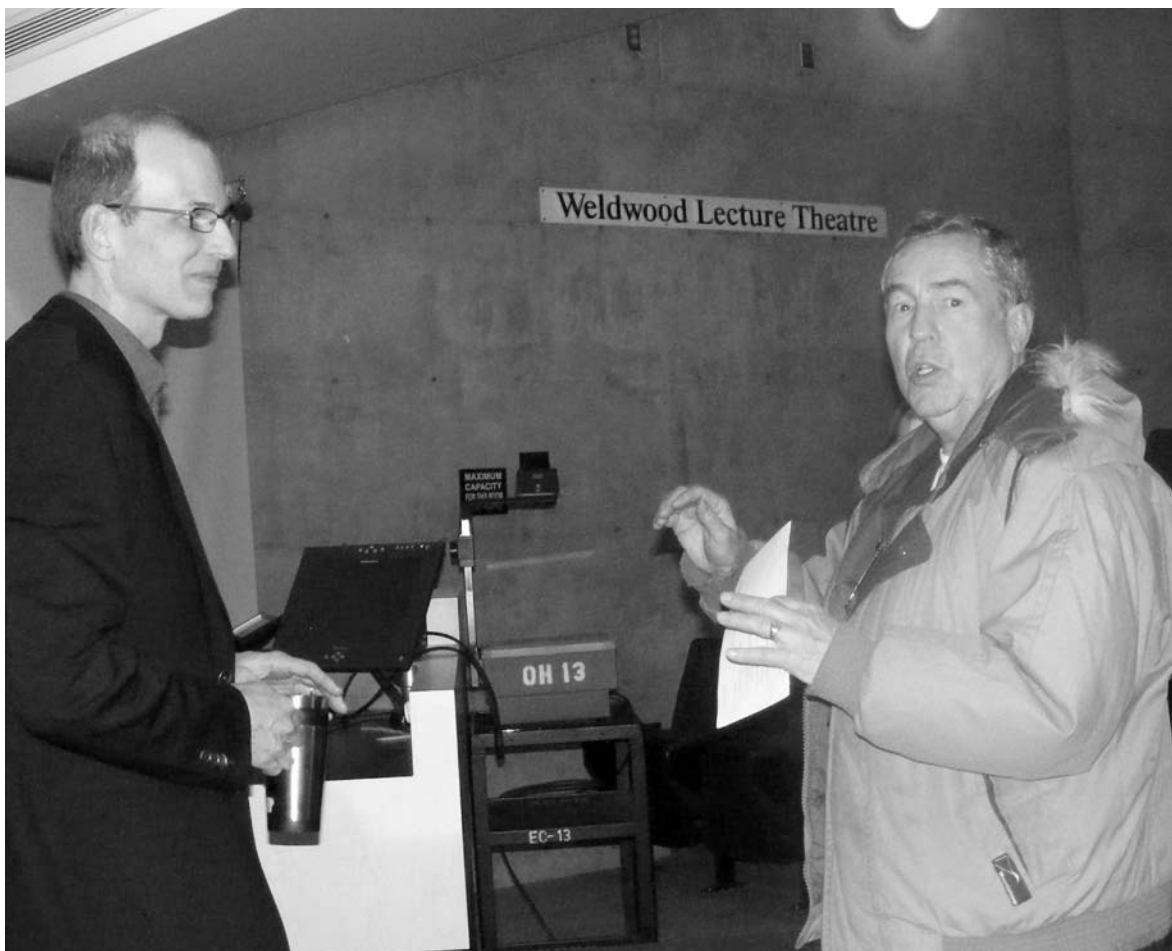
SHELBY PETERSEN
NEWS EDITOR

On Thursday, February 5, Dr. Otto Selles spoke at the UNBC Weldwood Theatre to a packed audience. The event was hosted by the UNBC interfaith chaplaincy and saw many people from outside the UNBC student body. Dr. Selles is a French professor at Calvin College. Calvin College is a liberal arts college located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with a distinctly Christian mandate. Before teaching at Calvin Col-

Selles started his lecture in eighteenth century France, with the enlightenment and the earliest views on tolerance. Sellers pointed out that since its inception, tolerance has been viewed in a positive light, and it is only today that it has come to be viewed negatively. Selles suggested that many people are weary of tolerance because it suggests moral relativism and a need to be politically correct. However, Selles also conceded that it is necessary to put aside one's selfish interests and think of other people. Through his analysis of the tolerance and its changing definitions, Selles meant to confuse people as to the words actual meaning. Throughout the years, tolerance has come to mean several different things from permission, to respect, and even appreciation. It is no surprise then, that such a muddled definition can lead to considerable animosity and fear. Selles believes that "it is not that we need to change tolerance - we need to decide what our society believes." Ultimately, tolerance is a loaded word that has a myriad of definitions, but is a word that is here to stay. The actual things that we "tolerate", according to Selles, are always changing, so if tolerance is a virtue it is, at best, and unstable one.

As the lecture came to a close, Selles acknowledged that "if we cannot agree on whether or not tolerance is a vice or a virtue, it is because we cannot agree on a definition for tolerance." Selles wants to rescue the word tolerance because he views it as a product of other essential virtues like love, empathy, and trust. Furthermore, Selles believes that tolerance is a form of community, and a stepping stone towards genuine love. Finally, Selles posed a challenge to us all "How is the word [tolerance] used on the TV, radio, and in politics? What are the goals of the world." It is only through everyday use, that one can truly decide whether tolerance is a vice or virtue.

lege, Sellers received his PhD from the prestigious Sorbonne in Paris, France. Selles concentrates his research primarily on the rise of tolerance during the enlightenment. However, for this lecture, Selles was asked to broaden his area of research to encompass the evolution of tolerance and its role in modern society. The lecture's primary thesis was to answer the question: What does tolerance mean today, and is it a vice or a virtue? Coming from a background in linguistics, Selles decided to approach the debate from an etymologist's point-of-view, and follow the word tolerance, and its many definitions since the enlightenment.



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