

The Integration of Liberal and Professional Education

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Education, in its final and highest achievements, tends to develop the contemplative capacity of the human mind. It does so neither in order to have the mind come to a stop in the act of knowing and contemplating, nor in order to make knowledge and contemplation subservient to action, but in order that once man has reached a stage where the harmony of his inner energies has been brought to full completion, his action on the world and on the human community, and his creative power at the service of his fellow-men, may overflow from his contemplative contact with reality – both with the visible and invisible realities in the midst of which he lives and moves.

--Jacques Maritain

As a member of both the theology and management departments, I find Jacques Maritain's words to capture the essence of what it means to integrate liberal and professional education. As a form of contemplation (and leisure), liberal education cultivates the human intellect in a particular kind of ability to respond (responsibility) to the world. Its educative role must never be merely instrumentalized to careerist goals or even social utopianism. Yet, liberal education is not divorced from one's work. It should be an animating source of meaning and insight as one begins to understand the meaning of one's work.

Maritain's vision of integration is a tall order to convey to undergraduates. It's hard enough to teach the liberal arts to those students who are narrowly focused on career aspirations, and it's also difficult to prepare students for a fast changing global economy; but educating students in a way that the two are integrated seems next to impossible. In teaching, I have found older students easier to engage in this vision of integration since they tend to bring their whole selves to the classroom, rather than only their career anxieties and aspirations. Yet, older or younger, Maritain's message points to a powerful synthesis of liberal and professional education that is critically important for a comprehensive university like

St. Thomas: to fully understand professional education and work, we need to understand liberal arts and leisure. For if we fail to get liberal arts and leisure right, we will not get professional education and work right.

In this paper, I explore some of the obstacles we face at a Catholic university in attaining a synthesis of liberal and professional education. The basis of this synthesis is a non-instrumental view of leisure which serves as the foundation to liberal arts and the key to a profoundly moral and spiritual vision of work and professional education. The notion that

one's liberal and professional education have little to do with each other for certain people may be true, but it is true in a life that represents either fragmentation or a deficient education. A liberal arts education should foster the exploration of the teleological question "what is human life for?" In developing the habit of mind and heart to consider human ultimacy, students will begin to look at their work in terms beyond personal gratification and economic utility. By raising the question "what are we working for?" students begin to encounter their work as virtue and not just as a technique or skill. If we fail to raise and address these teleological questions as faculty, we become deficient not only in our vocation as a Catholic university, but we fail our students in helping them develop a more integrated life of action and contemplation, work and leisure, practice and faith.¹

Obstacles to Integrating Liberal and Professional Education

One of the most difficult preconceptions to help undergraduates overcome as they enter St. Thomas is an "instrumentalist" view of the liberal arts. This view is fostered by the good intentions of parents who want their children to be economically stable to bring up their grandchildren, as well as by the colleges and universities who in their marketing campaigns lure students to their schools with promises of career and economic success. In addition, students find themselves in a culture that appropriates things in individual rather than social terms. Embedded in this culture, some students look at their future careers in largely individualistic terms – "Will I be personally satisfied?" "Will it make me feel good?" "Will it give me autonomy?" "Will it give me security?"

Students face great temptations to hold their education hostage to their own individual careers at the expense of social and spiritual goods. The root of this problem is found in the very meaning of the word "career," which has the same etymological root as "car." William F. May explains that they both refer to movement, and increasingly a private way of movement. With our massive highway infrastructure, one's "auto-mobile" or self-driven car lets the person travel alone. Even though the car drives one out into society, it does so within a "glass-enwrapped privacy" that shields one from traveling with others. In similar terms, the careerist calculates his/her travels not in public, but private terms. Like the privacy of a car, the careerist is interested in what means, in terms of education, contacts, money, skill, power, etc., are necessary to get from here to there. While the activities of careerists are within the law, they have little connection to the public good. As May points out, "questions of public obligation and responsibility seem marginal and episodic at best, distracting and suicidal at worst. The careerist travels by public thoroughfares and largely obeys the rules of the road, but toward his or her own private destination."² Work for the careerist is, at best, therapeutic, but nothing more.

How does this careerism affect liberal arts education? With careers as the dominant focus of many students, the liberal arts takes on what Karl Rahner calls a "regenerative function."³ Liberal arts education, like all leisure, is not a break from work, but is for work. Liberal arts, for the careerist, is justified because it serves as an efficient instrument to be more effective at work. By learning how to write, argue, speak, think, etc. liberal

arts serves as a career enhancer by providing students with skills and techniques to make them more productive, efficient and profitable. All too often, liberal arts requirements are seen as two years of classes that makes one more clever by acquiring useful mathematical, reasoning or rhetorical skills that prepares one for their professional major. Liberal arts is merely another productive function. Once students fail to see the "career" connection, liberal arts courses lose their validity and relevancy.⁴

This instrumentalist view must not inform a Catholic university's understanding of the liberal arts. It misses the profound depths of a liberal mind by failing to understand what is at the core of liberal education: leisure. Josef Pieper explains that "leisure in Greek means skole, and in Latin scola, the English school." People of leisure create time and space for "re-creation," for re-creating themselves by being open to the reality of the world. By employing their minds toward understanding creation, students in the liberal arts begin to develop "an attitude of mind and a condition of the soul that fosters a capacity to perceive the reality of the world."⁵ In other words, liberal arts should begin to develop the act of leisure, which is an act that concerns the whole person. A liberally educated person is one with a point of view from which he or she takes in the whole world. Rather than truncating reality by only focusing on narrowly defined careerist aspirations, the liberally educated person is "capable of grasping the totality of existing things."⁶ Ultimately, liberal arts is a celebration that the world is good, even with all the evil and suffering that exist, and it is comprehensible, even with all the apparent confusions and contradictions that exist.

In light of this classical and Catholic view of liberal arts, the implications of a careerist distortion of liberal education are monumental. A careerist, or what Pieper calls a proletariat view of the liberal arts, deforms its central characteristic: celebration (note that for Pieper as well as John Paul II the Marxist proletariat and capitalist careerist are critiqued on same grounds). Careerist students come to see themselves as masters and owners of creation. They view the world as "raw material," and their education provides them the means on which to act for their own personal purposes. Careerists have difficulty in seeing "the goodness of creation" in seeing the world as a created order in which one participates and for which one has reverence. They are so busy planning, organizing, leading and controlling, they cannot stop to receive anything beyond their own initial preferences. Careerists have nothing in their vocabulary to call work good. They suffer an inner impoverishment that prevents them from developing those conditions necessary to receive the reality of the "whole" world.⁷

As an essential mark of a student's education, liberal arts cannot be justified or validated by greater success or better productivity. Rather, liberal arts as an authentic expression of leisure, is to initiate the student in "grasping the world as a whole and realizing his full potentialities as an entity meant to reach Wholeness."⁸ A liberal education points to the reality that the world of work does not exhaustively define itself. We cannot develop fully as a functionary or a worker and nothing else. A full human existence cannot be contained within an exclusively workaday existence.

As a search for wholeness, liberal education, as leisure, is not an escape from the work world, but rather a time to reflect on the ultimate meaning of all that is in the world, including one's work. It is a time not to flee reality to an ivory tower, but rather a time to open oneself to the mystery of creation including the mystery of human labor.

Connecting what happens in liberal arts to what happens in one's profession captures an essential element of an integrated life, and a necessary experience for our students if we are to be faithful to our Catholic and liberal arts identity.

As faculty, we cannot distance ourselves from some of the blame for this instrumentalist view of liberal arts among our students. As individuals in separate departments, we can view the university as a marketplace of ideas where one idea competes with another, but none can be held as true. Such a view is a major obstacle to the integration of liberal arts and professional education. Modern academic inquiry that seeks not integration, but only itself, runs the risk of seeking further and further specialization at the expense of further and further alienation from other disciplines. As Michael Jordan has pointed out, we ask our students to go from one academic discipline to another expecting them to integrate their knowledge. This may in part be the reason why "purely academic" has sunk to mean something sterile, pointless and unreal" for students.⁹ When students experience such intellectual fragmentation, they reach for the only meaning left—economic and career utility. This lack of integration especially as it relates to liberal and professional education, translates into a segmented curriculum that has lost a "vision about ways to achieve 'an amalgamation of the two.'"¹⁰

If little emphasis relative to the student's education is devoted to the integration of their liberal and professional education, then a gulf between liberal arts and professional curriculums occurs creating the impression in students that they are receiving two types of education: one that makes them more human, and the other that makes them more money, but many are unclear about how the two fit together.

The Integration of Liberal and Professional Education

What does all this mean for faculty? It means we have a massive responsibility to ask habitually What makes professional education liberal? If we answer this question negatively then we are giving our students two different types of education. If we answer it instrumentally, we are giving a distorted liberal education. Liberal education must pervade the whole university. For this to occur, professional education must be infused with the principles of liberal education, and liberal education must be open to engage professional programs. But this question is not an imposition of liberal arts on the professional world, or a diversion of what really matters in the world of work. Liberal arts education provides a fuller account, a greater grasp of reality of work than a mere technical account. If our students are not to be merely trained in the most recent fads of the practice, they must be educated in the first principles of their discipline which provide the foundation for a "disciplined sensitivity" to human development, and opens the student to the mystery of creation.

How can faculty develop a university curriculum where students enter a life of leisure in its most profound sense, and at the same time are inspired to see their work as a response to that leisure? Rather, than giving specific curriculum recommendations,¹¹ I would like to develop a suggestion Bob Wahlstedt, President of Reell Precision Manufacturing, and Jean Loup Dherse, former CEO of the Chunnel Project, suggested at a conference on the Catholic identity of business schools co-sponsored by

St. Thomas' "Institute for Christian Social Thought and Management." As we discussed the various dimensions of this question of Catholic identity, Wahlstedt and Dherse asked "Are students at Catholic universities any different?" If we claim that Catholic business schools are unique in terms of their identity, does this unique identity carry over into our students, and if so, how? Wahlstedt and Dherse's insightful question is an appropriate one especially as we enter a process of assessing our programs at St. Thomas. Under our assessment process, can we measure whether our programs provide students an integrative education as expressed in Maritain's quote at the beginning of this paper, or a fragmented one? I am not sure we can measure this, but it does seem to be an important question to pursue, since the mission of

St. Thomas University should impact the kind of students who graduate from our university.

In order to see what this integration of liberal and professional education may look like for the student, I turn specifically to the integration of liberal and management education. Ernest Pierucci gives one of the most succinct statements of what this integration should look like:

Liberal education is the cultivation of the person's capacity to apprehend the totality of existence as the gift of God's love. Business education is the cultivation of the person's creative capacity to respond to that gift by fostering the common good through economic activity. They are two sides of the same coin. The latter makes no sense without the former. Without the latter the full implications of the former are not seen. Liberal education and business education are a synthesis that reflects the nature of the person and society.¹²

The kind of integration Pierucci describes here is profound and complex. In order for students to begin to grasp the integrative dimensions of their education we need to ask: "Does St. Thomas provide an experience of integration between liberal and management education where students develop the habits of:

- 1) first principles (philosophical thinking);
- 2) a discipline sensitivity to human development as well as human suffering (social thinking);
- 3) a spirituality of work (theological thinking)."

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. The habits of historical, mathematical and psychological reasoning, for example, could be added. But because of space, I focus only on the philosophical, social and theological dimensions of the liberal arts and how they integrate with management education.

1) Philosophical Thinking: As a complex body of knowledge, management entails an understanding of first principles. Critical to management education (as well as all professional education) in a liberal context is Cardinal Newman's philosophical habit "of pushing things up to their first principles." All management theory presupposes various first principles concerning the human person, motivation, community, work, property, authority, wealth, nature, hierarchy and so forth. These first principles shape organizational practices that shape people and their societies. For students to understand the profound depths of this change they must understand the first principles that are driving such changes. If management students do not understand the philosophical underpinnings of their own practice, they fail to give a full account of what a business is by failing to foster those conditions of the mind that enables one to see management in terms of the "reality of the world."

Take for example, the question of property in the area of finance. As the step child of economics (and economics a step child of philosophy), finance proposes a financial philosophy of organizational purpose: to maximize shareholder wealth. Instead of "a" slice of reality, finance inflates itself by presenting the property relationship of shareholder and company in essentially economic terms. Finance sees itself as the ultimate account of what a business is. This account of business from finance is rooted in and supported by particular first principles of property from classical liberalism, a view of property that is rooted in eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophy. These principles rarely if ever are adequately exposed, let alone engaged with contrary communitarian views of property, in a student's business education.

If we fail to help our students understand the philosophical first principles that support the modern understanding of corporations, our students will merely join the technical forces of business, and have little to offer a corporate world so much in need of reform. As cultural institutions, universities especially Catholic universities, should engage students in these tensions of first principles over property so as to foster "an attitude of mind" to see corporate property in new ways.

2) Social Thinking: Managers are not mere economic exchange agents brokering contracts among individual atoms; rather, their actions take place in one the most powerful institutions in the world, business, which has massive social implications. Managers face issues of human development daily in their work; unfortunately, many of the issues will remain unseen because of their mistaken belief that their skills and techniques as managers are value neutral. As Lee Tavis points out "The real concern in the practice of management is the manager who simply does not see the moral component of the decisions he or she is called to make."¹³ The insensitivity toward human development by management in issues such as plant closings, job design, compensation

policies, marketing policies, and so forth, stem in part from an undisciplined education in the social dimensions of management.

Michael Buckley speaks of the need for the "discipline sensitivity for human suffering" in the curriculum of universities. All education is a process of sensitizing students to various realities. Catholic schools of management must face serious questions that get at the heart of their identity: Do they teach a "disciplined sensitivity" as a professional practice where those who suffer and are marginalized are given special consideration? Or do they rather teach a discipline sensitivity that simply maximizes productivity and efficiency and "reinforce[s] the social systems that do not benefit the poor majorities?"¹⁴

For example, a manager who must go through downsizing and plant closings is experiencing a profound human event that will affect in one way or another the human soul. Downsizing is an experience of human suffering which can either make the person more bitter or more humane and spiritual. If managers are formed within a university experience that provides only technical, legal and economic resources to handle layoffs, the likelihood, depending on their other cultural experiences, of a bitter reaction making them insensitive and hardened to the suffering of others is great. However, if their educational experience can bring to bear the rich and profound cultural resources within the liberal arts, an experience of downsizing and plant closures may be avoided by their long-term perspective, and if not avoided, the turbulence of closure could be one of growth by developing a discipline sensitivity to the suffering of those employees who, made in the image of God, must be treated with dignity.

3) Theological Thinking: In their document on the Church and the Modern World, the bishops at Vatican II stated that one of the greatest errors of the modern world is the "split between faith which many profess and their daily lives." They explained that from a Christian perspective there could "be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one hand, and religious life on the "other."¹⁵ Catholic universities are in constant danger of equipping students for "a peaceful coexistence of privatized faith within a secularized world."¹⁶ While there are many reasons for the split between faith and professional life, in part it occurs when universities fail within their liberal education to provide the foundations to an "interior life" that establishes a contemplative attitude. Louis Dupré explains that without this attitude, the student will be incapable of creating the emptiness needed to be open "to the relation of otherness."¹⁷ Not to engage faith in professional work is a distortion of the fullness of what faith means, and, in the words of John Paul II, "reveals a decapitated faith, worse still, a faith in the process# of self-annihilation."¹⁸ By penetrating the meaning of work within a faith context, there is also a simultaneous deepening of faith itself. To avoid this privatization of faith, faculty must de-careerize, or in the words of Pieper, de-proletarianize our students. Unlike the sociological definitions of the proletariat, Pieper describes the spiritual pathology of the proletariat as that person# who is shackled by the "process of work."¹⁹ Like the proletariat, the careerist fails to create space for leisure, and suffers a spiritual impoverishment in which "his life has shrunk inwardly, and contracted, with the result that he can no longer act significantly outside his work, and perhaps can no longer even conceive of such a thing."

Former US Senator David Durenberger highlights a particular dimension of this problem. At the height of his legal troubles, he gave a talk at a faith and work breakfast series in downtown Minneapolis. He started his talk with a list of his past achievements as well as a list of accolades from other people. As I listened to him, I feared he was providing a self-defense of his character in light of the political and legal attacks he found himself in the midst of. But at the end of his litany of tributes to himself, he regretfully stated that he made one mistake. He believed what everyone said about him, everyone except his family, and a voice called his conscience that still had remnants of a Higher Wisdom. As he succeeded in his career as a politician, he understood and interpreted everything in terms of work, particularly the luring power and egoism of political work. Space for contemplation, spiritual reflection, as well as family events were crowded out by the demands of further successful work. The world rewarded and praised him for his work, not for dealing with family problems. And like all us, he gravitated toward his successes and shied from his failures, including the failure to address the spiritual dimensions of his own life. And because work gave him so much affirmation of his own self-esteem, he became in the words of Pieper a "proletariat" shackled by the process of work. He could not think in any terms beyond careerism that formed his understanding of "political." He explained that he could not see things in a "whole" way. Near the end of his career as US Senator, he told of a profound spiritual pilgrimage he took with others that changed his life and enabled him to see things in a far clearer way. He only wished that his spiritual perspective had come sooner rather than later. It is important to note that spiritual insights do not make everything right and perfect. As Augustine states "the bottle always smells of its former wine."

Durenberger's reflections highlight the dangers of a careerist as well as the importance of theological perspective, a perspective that is able to take seriously the whole person because of its profound spiritual dimension. Walter Kasper explains that:

What the world and human beings need—above all in our world, where the truth has been forgotten—is a spiritual orientation and perspective. Today, when we are flooded with information, we more than ever need wise men and women who have a feeling for human essentials.

A liberal education, especially in its theological dimension, can help toward this spiritual perspective where students not only know more and love more, but "know the best that is to be known and . . . love the best that is to be loved."²⁰

Conclusion

The Catholic university can provide a context that fosters philosophical, social and theological thinking in students. Such habits of mind stem from the Catholic understanding of the good which the Catholic university cannot suspend, nor can it indoctrinate, but rather engage in a relational way. For if a Catholic university capitulates its mission, it would not only betray the mission of the Catholic university, but it would also lessen the pluralism in the world by not providing the leaven of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Our summer seminar provided us an opportunity to work together for a week, discussing, debating and exploring the role of faculty at a Catholic university. The seminar itself exemplified in part the role of faculty in a Catholic university: to develop an interdisciplinary and ecumenical community of work where we create conditions that foster the authentic development of our students, faculty, administration, and staff. The seminar, with the help of our seminar leader John McCabe, created the conditions to participate in a sustained discussion on our identity as a Catholic university. The question of our collective identity as a Catholic university is critical to our development as well as our student's development. I have attempted in this essay to highlight that the integration of liberal and professional education as an important part of this authentic development.

References

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3. Rahner, *op. cit.*, 372.
4. See John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992): 131.
5. Joseph Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture* (New York: A Mentor Book, 1952): front page.
6. *Ibid.*, 36.
7. *Ibid.*, 81.
8. *Ibid.*, 44.
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18. *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, 44.
19. Pieper, *op. cit.*, 50.
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