

By Their Fruits You Shall Know Them"

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As I was contemplating the form and content of this essay, I came to the conclusion that I certainly was not the type of intellectual who wrote the many works we had been assigned for the readings in our recent seminar. To be honest with myself in knowing my limitations, and with the readers of these post-seminar essays written by the participants, let it be known that the following pages are not the fully researched ideas of a scholar, but my thoughts and observations on applying, in a practical fashion, some of the concepts broached in the seminar in helping to make the University of St. Thomas more of a "Catholic" university. In the accounting profession, our generally accepted accounting principles begin with a process of what we call a "discussion memorandum" and proceed through a series of steps culminating in an accounting standard. I'd compare this essay with something tantamount to a discussion memorandum, whetting the appetite for further discussion.

In reading the material and listening to my colleagues participating in this summer's seminar, "The Idea of a Catholic University," I thought that we need to be results oriented, and only that should be driving the input in educating and developing our students. Would we be proud of the fact that we are producing graduates of the likes of a Boesky or a Milken, or would we rather have carrying the Tommy banner the Dorothy Days or Tom Dooleys? Are our objectives going to be that of improving the lucre potential of our graduates or their service potential to society? This examination of conscience comes at a very appropriate juncture in our history as we currently look at outcomes assessment in evaluating the adequacy of the education we're offering at the University of St. Thomas.

That said, this essay will first address the input of the education offered, add some practical applications in our quest for convincing the student of the value of cherishing and implementing the education received in his or her own life, and conclude with some suggestions in assessing and evaluating the quality of alums from this institution. Are we proud to call them Tommies as they make their imprint on life and society?

I would propose that universities can be classified according to a certain hierarchy of educational objectives.

In the purely secular institution of higher learning, truth is the essential criterion for evaluation. At the private institutions (I'll limit the coverage to Christian, though this could be expanded by modifying some of the descriptors), that truth is conveyed in an environment based on scriptural values. And, finally, at a Catholic institution such as the University of St. Thomas, the truth is conveyed not only with scriptural values, but is taught with the richness of many years of tradition and Catholic experience dating from the time of Christ.

I. Secular

A university "is a place of teaching universal knowledge" (Newman). "With every other university it (a Catholic university) shares ... that joy of searching for, discovering and communicating truth in every field of knowledge." At its most basic level, truth is the object of every university, regardless of origin, affiliation, or purpose. To intentionally convey anything other than truth would be deceitful and an abrogation of purpose. The means by which truth is sought, determined, and conveyed is what differentiates academic institutions. The greater the commitment to this goal, the better the academic quality of the institution.

At the purely secular level, truth should be conveyed in a sterile environment, one void of biases, values, and external trappings. One could hazard a guess that such an environment rarely, if ever, exists since the human element is necessarily involved; regardless of the attempt to the contrary, a certain subjectivity is present in all faculty, which results in an element of bias, skew, or taint. Since the secular institutions are an outgrowth of the Christian universities of the Middle Ages, it's not surprising that purity of knowledge, sans environmental effects, is ever a realized goal.

The term "truth" has different meaning to different people. As Jesus was being condemned by Pilate, He remained silent to Pilate's question, "What is Truth?" Turning to Webster, we find several: "1) Quality or state of being true; 2) That which is true; that which conforms to fact or reality; that which is or is characterized by being in accord with what is, has been, or must be; as, to seek the truth. 3) A synonym for God." Finally, in scripture, John tells us "... the Spirit is Truth" (1 Jn 5:6).

Of the above definitions, Webster's second comes closest to what a purely secular university would need for its purpose — conveying information that is in accord with fact. Certainly Webster's third definition (rooted in St. John's) would be unrealistic and problematic from its inception. If it were to be purely neutral in teaching truth (under this third definition of Webster) it would be, in effect, biased against Truth!

The main challenge of the purely secular institution in conveying truth is to present it as much as possible free of taint of the environment in which it is operating. Being values neutral in today's society, which values materialism, hedonism, and self-fulfillment, is quite probably beyond the capabilities of most institutions since they are dependent on that same society for enrollment, funding, and their total existence. On the other hand, to succumb to teaching truth (which never changes) tainted by an environment of changing values, results in prostituting the institution's purpose.

II. Christian

The responsibility of a Christian university is to convey truth in a Christian environment, that is, from a scripture-based set of values. This type of institution has the benefit of teaching truth in the sense of Webster's third definition — God is Truth. Far from the changing societal norms, the environment of a Christian university can be grounded in

the Christian ethic of "Love God; Love Neighbor." Rather than distorting truth, the Christian university embraces it — its source, its creator, its purpose in life! Truth is taught from that perspective; the student learns that all we have and are is a gift and that we are only temporary stewards of such gifts. We can squander them, we can treasure them, we can give them. The choice is ours. But one day we will be accountable on how we used our gifts.

Students with this type of education are counter-cultural to our day — they flow against the tide. That is no different from the early Christians and Christ in His day. Christians today may not, at least in this country, be asked to give their lives for their beliefs, but there is a certain hostile environment they face as their values are contrasted with the pagan values of the bulk of society. Can they withstand the pressures they encounter — overt or covert? Can they serve their detractors as neighbors in the Christian sense? Can they forgive "seven times seventy times"? A resounding positive response to all of these questions can be given if the Christian institution of higher learning is successful in its task.

In my scheme of classifying types of academe, it is obvious that this kind of institution has a much greater responsibility than the purely secular. It is no easy task to convert a student living in a pagan world to the scriptural norms of a Christian university. On the other hand, to abandon those norms in the face of opposition, declining enrollment, and adversity of any kind would be abdicating the institution's purpose. Alums from these institutions should be shining examples of the gospel in action — feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, etc. They need not "preach" the gospel; they live it! They are "the light of the world" (Mt. 5:14).

Need anymore be said on the purpose of this type of academic institution in our world today?

III. Catholic

What purpose could a Catholic institution serve beyond that of the Christian institution? I believe that the Catholic university is responsible for all that a Christian university is and more. It has the same responsibility to teach truth; it has the same responsibility to teach that truth in a Christian perspective grounded in scriptural values. Beyond this, we need to look at what differentiates the Catholic Church from all other Christian denominations. To list a few, Catholics

- have the Mass and the belief in the Real Presence in the Eucharist;
- supplement Scripture with tradition handed down over the centuries;
- have the Papacy occupied by Christ's successor on earth;
- have Marian doctrines and devotion to Jesus' mother;

- have Holy Days that were originated to be observed as "extra" Sundays in worshipping God.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list; however, if we would start with these, our Catholic institutions of higher learning would be distinctively different from our Christian universities.

To begin with the Mass and the Real Presence in the Eucharist: there is hardly a tradition as rich in our faith or as rooted in the earliest Christian times as the Mass. And, yet, I look in vain in our course catalog to find even a half course with the title. Has the Mass always been so available and without cost that we have lost interest in this rich, central sacrament of our faith and take it for granted? Is it any wonder that our students lack respect for and love of the Mass? Twice each year the Mass is promoted on our campus with the vigor and enthusiasm with which it is due — the opening Masses of each semester. It is offered throughout the semester with regularity at convenient times, but with little emphasis or promotion to urge people to attend. I'm in no way suggesting mandating daily Eucharist, but promoting it as a means of recognizing our Source and the Giver of all that we possess would seem to be in accord with our "Catholic" nature.

In the area of tradition, we do better in emphasizing it through our offerings in theology. On the other hand, some of our tradition, for example Marian devotions, we ignore. It carries with it the "taint" of being conservative or "pre-Vatican II"! Is the rosary offered publicly anywhere on campus? Granted, we have a Marian shrine on the south campus, but after a well-promoted fund-raising campaign to renovate it, she is a lonely figure on a beautiful landscape void of much veneration.

But let us turn to the Papacy. As a 40-year member of this institution, I can honestly say I have heard much more criticism of the Papacy than genuine support. In a country where freedom is of the democratic type — the will of the majority rules — it is not surprising that mandates originating in Rome are not going to be popular. Have we made much effort to teach that the Catholic Church is not a democracy, that the Chair of Peter is filled through the working of the Holy Spirit, and that following the pope's guidance will lead to our final salvation, not the destruction of it? Certainly, following his guidance will lead one farther from the secular stream of current society, but closer to the scriptural values that we are responsible in promoting.

Marian Dogmas and the Holy Days of the Church I will combine as they are closely related. As Holy Days are seeming to lose their appeal, I contrast them with the Jewish Holy Days, which have a much longer tradition than ours and a more devoted following by the Jewish people. It seems the decline in Marian interest (which includes three of our Holy Days) coincides with the decline of commemorating the Holy Days. Here at the University of St. Thomas, we have long since discarded the Holy Days from the academic calendar. That was disappointing as it was an outward sign of our Catholic heritage. Granted, we observe two of them with our business calendar, but those two are also recognized and commemorated by our pagan brethren. If we are truly interested in maintaining a "Catholic" nature to our university, why not implement it in our academic

calendar, discarding the spring break and restoring the Holy Days and Lenten Triduum in its place?

I am not advocating anything substantive to change UST's core curriculum and its current quality of teaching, but I'm proposing mainly modest changes to the environment in which it exists. Any student graduating from this institution with the environment I'm advocating will know he or she has had a Catholic education and not merely a secular or Christian one. The Catholic students will have been enriched in their faith, its beliefs and traditions; the non-Catholic students will have been exposed to the Catholic tradition with a keen knowledge of areas of our mutual faith agreements and distinctions.

IV. Evaluation

Finally, for the evaluative process: how well are we doing in the quality of student we graduate from St. Thomas? To restate the title of this essay, "By Their Fruits You Will Know Them," we will need a post-analysis rather than a current one in order to determine how successful our university has been in instilling a truly Christian spirit in our alums and how our Catholic environment has affected their lives. We certainly can develop an exit survey to be completed by graduating seniors. The value of this is questionable as the student lacks a benchmark (experience) for comparison. Polling the same student three or five years later about organizations (civic, religious, fraternal, etc.) in which he or she is now active, current employment and position, hobbies or other "after-work" involvement, impressions of UST in retrospect, suggestions for enhancing the quality of his or her alma mater, etc., would give a wealth of information on how well we have succeeded in weaning the student from the materialistic society at large to a values system that emphasizes the hereafter rather than the here-and-now, the "thee" orientation rather than the "me."