

Teaching and Learning in the University: A Theological Perspective

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Abstract: *In this article we attempt to suggest theological perspectives on the meaning and practice of "Teaching and Learning" (T&L). It is not primarily focused on the teaching and learning of theology, but seeks to explore the deeper theological and philosophical questions relating to the current discussion in Catholic universities of these core considerations: what is the meaning of our teaching? What does learning consist of? How are both activities affected by faith and culture?¹*

Key Words: tertiary education; wisdom; philosophical education; theological education; mysticism; modernity; empiricism; *ressentiment*

Teaching and learning, surely unexceptionally good activities in any university, presuppose other large issues. Without needing to be exhaustive, we could immediately mention the meaning and value of knowing itself, given both the quite wonderful explorations of current science, and intellectual diffidence of the current postmodern situation which tends to celebrate the collapse of enlightenment certainties. I would also like to draw attention to the collaborative character of every intellectual search, and the counter-cultural significance of both a university in general, including its ways of teaching and learning, and of a Catholic university in particular.

Implicit in the plans of the University, it can be presumed, is the whole of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990) which appeared, by a happy providence, at the very beginning of the University as we know it today. Whilst such a document can never do our thinking for us, it is a reminder of the breadth of vision that can be expressed only with difficulty in the urgent pragmatism of today's academic world.

We must contest such pragmatism, especially when it is driven by purely economic considerations. For at stake in all T&L, is the meaning and value of the human person, in its individual and communal embodiments and objectifications. Entailed also is the common good of the human community. That dynamic reality will necessarily include the whole hierarchy of values, from the vital values of health and well-being, through to those inspiring economic, political and social life, then to the higher values of cultural and religious expression. In this regard, Teaching and learning are limit experiences in the human condition: they both face the learner and the teacher with questions of hope and purpose, and with the intrinsic meaning and value of such activities within the cultural ambiguities of the present. Both are aspects of human communication: but communication between persons and communities is never far removed from questions dealing with what

¹ David Kelsey, *To Understand God: What's Theological about a Theological School* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992), 227-263.

makes for the common good, and the remedy for the evils that threaten. Plans of course do not allow for the conflicted and dramatic character of the human condition, nor for the cultural convulsions that are in fact taking place. What is simply referred to as the dignity of the human person, or spirituality, or the value of multiculturalism or social justice or interdisciplinarity, and so on, can appear as vague gestures when both a thorough diagnosis and beneficent prescription are required. Teaching and learning without the readiness to get beyond slogans into the pulse of history and culture, so as to employ the resources that Catholic faith can bring to the undoing of evil and the promotion of the good, could be conceived in a superficial manner. We must be critically alert to the temptation simply to conform to a reductive culture intent on designing education merely to serve its ostensibly immediate, even economic, needs.

Universities traditionally thought of themselves as places of critical thinking. It was presumed that the cultivation of mind led to the education of taste and desire, and to the enlargement of freedom, creativity and competence. The university could call on the memory of a classic past to examine new questions with a long term view of things – rather more than the next three years of a government's term of office. The academy in this great tradition was not so much concerned with teaching subjects that were immediately relevant to the present situation, but with enabling the emergence of new generations of reflective citizens, who, in turn, could be the creators of culture and critical agents of renewal in all aspects of human life. The concern was not so much 'relevant' subjects, but the formation of students who would be relevant to future responsibilities.

Given the economic and practical imperatives of our own day, is all this a rather outmoded and hopeless ideal? Some might think so. Still, I would like to draw attention to a number of factors necessary to offset a drift to inevitable diminishment of our cultural resources. If I refer to theology and philosophy I mean not only those schools and disciplines that are so named *in* the University curriculum, but also to the theology and philosophy *of* the University – in a word, their animating and integrating influence in the mission of the University.

A Larger Memory

With teaching and learning in mind, let me tease out some of the influences that should flow from our core-disciplinary status. First of all, philosophy and theology – the sapiential (from the Latin word for wisdom, *sapientia*) dimensions of intellectual life – collaborate to offset the current memory-loss that our culture is suffering. Consumerism, and its accompanying political and economic imperatives to be instantly and measurably relevant, tends to cause a creeping amnesia. The study of the past, with its classic literatures and memory of the great events and historical figures that have given us the resources to view the world more humanly, spiritually and hopefully, seems no longer a major concern when it comes to being trained for a good job in the present economy. As a result, many have opted for amnesia, and thereby culturally contribute to a kind of willfully chosen Alzheimer's Syndrome. With no long-term memory, with no sense of history and culture, we dance more nimbly to the advertising jingle, increasingly at the mercy of political propaganda, deprived of the resources to criticize what is taking place. A people stripped of its historical identity is easily manipulated. On the other hand, both philosophy and theology nurture the larger long-term memory of what it means to be human. Hope arises through familiarity with those commanding intellectual, spiritual and moral traditions without which our humanity withers into barbarism.

It would be a sorry judgment on our day if education so called was both the cause and symptom of a kind of social Alzheimer's syndrome. This is a problem especially for the Catholic University, since the Catholic dimensions cannot be understood without a strong sense of history nourishing the creative memory of the tradition: without memory, without history, authentic Catholicity is reduced to an ideological 'Catholicism' of the present, without the breadth and depth of its historical experience.

Personal Integration

Secondly, the core disciplines envisage holistic and personal dimensions of teaching and learning, perspectives particularly germane to Religious Education. They prompt the searching mind to ask not so much "What can I do with the truth I seek?" – as though knowledge were simply a commodity for individual gain – but, "What is that truth, or the search for it, demanding of me? How does this search draw me out of my current preoccupations into a universe of truth and goodness and personal responsibility?" Instead of seeing themselves in a more or less robot-like manner as receptors in a chain of an endless information process, instead of feeling that they are something akin to laboratory rats in some huge social experiment designed to maintain the way things are, students are invited to consider how they are being themselves transformed through the patient, demanding effort to understand, to reflect, and come to the truth, and act in its light. The ancient Dominican motto, *contemplata aliis tradere* ("handing on to others what we ourselves have contemplated") makes its point. And that is exactly the point that philosophical and theological learning suggests. It is the truth that sets us free. By personally assimilating it, humbly surrendering to it, and allowing ourselves to be judged by it, we are freed to be agents of renewal and freedom for the enrichment of society. Genuine knowing, at least in its sapiential aspect, is less a matter of passively receiving information about *something*. It is far more a matter of becoming *someone*, an intellectually alive and morally responsible person at large in the world. It envisages the formation of a mind open to the whole truth of the universe and one's place within it, with a self-transcending commitment to spread light rather than darkness, promoting the good and undoing of the evils and ills that beset the human condition.

Methodological Collaboration

Thirdly, the sapiential perspective inspired by theology and philosophy encourages us to see truth as an horizon of emergent wholeness. A bewildering fragmentation of learning is the current problem, at least for students, as their teachers propound more and more fully about less and less. It is possible, in today's competitive environment, that teachers can become monomaniac in commending the exclusive excellence of their own expertise. We may speak of interdisciplinary collaboration; but this presupposes that each discipline deeply respects the concerns and attainments of others. And that presupposes a deep communication based on openness to truth, the attractiveness of values, the worth of human knowing, the possibilities of human intelligence, the dignity of the human person and community, and a generously inclusive sense of the common good. In its own right, philosophy can uncover the dynamic drive to know which animates every aspect of the search for truth. For its part, theology places that search for truth in a radically benevolent universe, since God is the creator of all that is, and because, in Christ, the Word made flesh, God has claimed all that is human as his own, even in the depths of the problem of evil.

Wisdom, philosophical and theological, is a yeast working in and through the whole fabric of the University. It cannot but make it more a 'university' – a community of

teaching and learning promoting the *universitas*, the full range of human knowing. It cannot but make it more 'Catholic' – that is, 'all embracing,' holding together all the dimensions of knowing, believing and loving.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF WISDOM

Two Questions

Following on above comment, two questions suggest themselves, even if we cannot here give anything resembling a full response to either of them. First, how does Catholic faith, in its manifold tradition, inspire and underpin the meanings and values inherent in teaching and learning at this University? The short answer would suggest that faith locates intellectual efforts in a radically meaningful universe. To that degree it gives hope and assurance to intelligent activity. Intelligence occurs, reflects, and shares in, the originating Wisdom through which the world was made. In the words of the Psalmist, "In thy light we see light" (Ps 36:9). To the Christian believer, this wisdom has been revealed, in the midst of the violence and darkness of human history, through the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Word made flesh.

Secondly, given the fragmented and conflicted experience of human intelligence today, how does a Catholic university present an alternative kind of T&L? Again the shorter answer: it represents a tradition of integrating wisdom, or better, of different types of wisdom, namely philosophical, theological and mystical within the synergies of faith and reason. Each has its unique value, as expressed in a precious aside of Aquinas, 'every statement of truth, no matter who makes it, is from the Holy Spirit' (*omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*).² For him, the characteristic of wisdom is that it 'judges things from their deepest causes.' You might say it is the intellectual virtue that integrates and gives proportion and direction to all other forms of human activity.³ While Aquinas' language is medieval and Aristotelian, it can still make its point, given today's experience of the knowledge explosion and the drifting, fragmented information culture of our times.

The Wisdom of Philosophy

Our philosophers will make their own points; but theology, along with the rest of the University, can salute them as they pass in their grave and measured progress. In admiration and openness to the great philosophical tradition, we can ask, What is this philosophical wisdom, this largeness and energy of mind, that ranks it among the forms of knowledge that were once called wisdom, and inspires it to name itself, 'the love of wisdom,' *philosophia*? This big question allows more homely versions, for example, What does a good education mean? That question is dogging every current university curriculum. As we mentioned already, today's frequent lament is that, in these times of the specialist, more and more people know more and more about less and less. That situation cries out for philosophical wisdom. What are the depth dimensions of reality and how do we work together in exploring the full range of truth?

Here a genuine philosophical wisdom comes into its own. It does not promote a single bright idea. Nor does it promise some brilliant super-synthesis. For philosophical

² Aquinas, *STh* 1-2, q. 109, a. 1 ad 1.

³ Cf. Aquinas *STh* 1, q. 1, a. 6.

wisdom is a path of exploration that exhibits a deep sympathy for the capacities and dynamics of the human mind in its search for truth in all domains of knowledge. Philosophy tends that flame of intelligence which makes all understanding possible – across the whole spectrum of sciences, arts and types of scholarship. It anticipates, in a way, the meaning of all the differing realms of meaning the mind can explore. It cultivates a sense of the ultimate truth of the reality that every attainment of truth foreshadows. It has the courage to inquire into the final value of everything we find worthwhile in human endeavour. To this degree, the 'love of wisdom' lies at the heart the whole intellectual enterprise. Without it, all the glories of modern science and scholarship collapse, fragmented, and at odds in hopeless rivalries. With it, the search for truth is a vast, historical, hopeful and collaborative effort. There is a core and special value, then, in philosophy, as it highlights the search for truth in all its different domains, and promotes a convergence of the mind's varied efforts on the most profound of all questions, What is truth, and how can we come to it? Even in the asking of such a question, other question stir, notably, What is the philosophy of T&L, operating not only in Philosophy, but in the whole field of University activity?

Theological Wisdom

It remains, however, that my special concern is theological, and with it the meaning of theological wisdom. Like philosophy in this regard, theology is intent on judging matters in the light of the deepest cause and the ultimate horizon in which the drama of our existence is lived out. But, in contrast to philosophy, theology is concerned explicitly with the data of faith – not just as *data*, 'givens,' but also as *dona*, gifts, or 'grace,' even "the gift of God" as the tradition has it. Theology surveys within its horizon all the ways in which God is given and received, revealed and experienced, witnessed to and mediated, in a world radically affected by the incarnation of the Word, the cross and resurrection of Jesus, and the outpouring of the Spirit. In this exploration of faith, there are varieties of theological investigation – biblical, patristic, historical, political, liturgical, liberationist, feminist, and so on. Theologians make easy, but not always clear, distinctions between philosophical, fundamental, systematic, moral, pastoral, practical and spiritual kinds of theology, each with its different Trinitarian, christological, ecclesiological, sacramental, eschatological and moral perspectives. Students, those we teach and those who learn, can become confused at this vast array of sources, specializations, approaches and methods. But, once more, the characteristic wisdom of a theology is a calm concentration on 'the deepest cause.' Thomas, and the great medievals, would say that this deepest cause, the ultimate horizon, is the self-revealing and self-giving God. But St Bonaventure, the other great medieval Doctor of the Church, says somewhere that theology is the 'wretched miracle by which the wine is turned into water.' It is not difficult to know what he meant. Theology can collapse in on itself, as though we were to breathe our last invoking the procedures of a certain theological method, or entrusting our souls to the most celebrated current theologian. Theology can lose its real sense, and become, not a 'real,' but a purely 'notional' affair – to use one of Newman's distinctions. Countering this sorry displacement, is theological wisdom, namely, that sense of God, the inexhaustible Love and Light and Healing which integrates, pervades and directs the whole theological enterprise. Without it, we merely study theologies. With it, we are intent on hearing and serving the revealed Word. From this point of view, theology is not endlessly seeking to adapt itself in the hope of being found acceptable by contemporary culture. Rather, it is intent, on showing how

the contemporary situation, in its failures, aspirations and achievements, cannot itself be understood save in a theological and redemptive horizon.

Mystical Wisdom

Then, another dimension: there is a wisdom of another kind, a deep trans-rational way of knowing and judging. This is a knowing born out of loving union with what is not of this world; mystical wisdom, a special gift of the Holy Spirit. An immediate academic response would probably recommend silence on this matter; after all, the University is not a monastery; it is a tertiary institute of teaching and learning, not a conventicle of contemplatives. On the other hand, this other kind of wisdom is already proving to have a particular relevance, even to current 'deconstructionist' concerns intent on freeing faith from conceptual idols and subverting the totalitarian pretensions of any system of thought. In fact, our students seem to be showing a most disconcerting interest in spirituality, and an equally disconcerting interest in some of its strangest forms.

If I may make an aside, Aquinas is of special interest here. His philosophical categories are Aristotelian, and his theological goals are rigorously intellectual: *sacra doctrina* is, after all, to be elaborated as a *scientia*.⁴ And yet, at some point, there is a gifted excess in the ways we understand, deliberate and act. In his analysis, three levels of conscious activity are implied. At one level, there is deliberate 'rational' activity. We make do, as it were, with what we have in terms of reason and intelligence, conceptual analysis, systematic synthesis, moral deliberation and so on. These first two levels are occupied by the disciplines of philosophy and theology respectively. But Aquinas also envisages, when confronted with those ultimate dimensions of truth that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, that there is a waiting for a further evidence and assurance. At some privileged moment – which could carry over into an habitual state – there occurs a spiritual movement whose spontaneity and assurance only the gift of God can explain. It is as though the consciousness of faith, having exhausted all its intellectual and rational resources, must wait on God for the inspiration and energy to act in a way that surpasses the normal measure of what lies within our powers, even if we were habitually virtuous. It is a point at which the life of spiritual goodness becomes instinctive.

This is the sphere of 'the gifts of the Spirit.' In this milieu, the gifted person acts 'beyond the human measure.'⁵ In his later writings, Thomas can write, 'the Holy Spirit moves the human mind to act in a manner that surpasses reason.'⁶ Where Aquinas would speak of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord), a more recent rhetoric might speak of great acts of spiritually inspired intellectual, or moral or even artistic imagination, the point where individuals or groups break out of the stale, labored rationalisms of a culture, and enter the risk of living in a larger realm of meaning and value. A poet makes the point:

This, then, brought our new making. Much emotional stress –
Call it conversion; but the word can't cover such good.
It was like being in love with ambient blessedness –
In love with life transformed – life breathed afresh, though
yet half understood.
There had been many byways for the frustrate brain,
All leading to illusions lost and shrines forsaken...

⁴ Aquinas, *STh* 1, q.1, aa. 2-3.

⁵ Aquinas, *III Sent* d.34, q.1, a.1.

⁶ Aquinas, *STh* 1-2, q.70, a.4.

One road before us now – one guidance for our gain –
 One morning light – whatever the world's weather – wherein
 wide-eyed to waken.⁷

The Differing Responsibilities of Philosophy and Theology

Perhaps philosophy might absolve itself from any responsibility to this kind of wisdom. However, many mystics have been very good Platonists, starting with Pseudo-Dionysius; and, closer to our own time, Heidegger found himself unable to speak about the disclosure of being without referring to the 14th Century mystical theologian, Meister Eckhart; and, in the process, plundering the whole of the Christian vocabulary for his purposes – revelation, conversion, grace, fallen-ness, surrender, and so on. Likewise, a literary and philosophical treatment of deconstruction as we find in Kevin Hart, John Caputo and Jean-Luc Marion, combines references to Derrida and Levinas with those to Pseudo-Dionysius and other mystics. At least a prosaic form of the question will merit attention: how do the spiritual dimensions of experience enter into philosophical teaching and learning?

It remains, however, that theology bears the major responsibility in this area, as when our own Kerrie Hide writes on the mystical writings of Dame Julian,⁸ and Robyn Horner⁹ exposes the limits of phenomenology in her exploration of the meaning and possibility of the divine gift. It would be odd, then, if students could get some exposure to theology, and even do a whole course, yet find at the end that they had nothing much to say to the spiritual aspirations of the age, other than reciting a few ethical imperatives or repeating a list of theological opinions, or even doctrinal formulations. But this dimension of boundary-transcending excess and creativity is not easily measurable, even as Gerard Hall enlists the help of the eminent Raimon Panikkar to disclose all the varieties of religious experience.¹⁰ Great saints have often been regarded as odd, incandescent mystics as mad, Doctors of the Church have been treated with suspicion, martyrs have been looked on as criminals, religious founders and reformers have had most uncomfortable lives; and, of course, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified as a criminal. Still, theology does see T&L against this background of a vast and varied experience.

Theological Experience of History

For a theological perspective brings a long memory of different times and cultures to bear on the meaning of education today. While our own time has its own particularity, there is something to learn from the long ages of Christian experience, with its successes and failures. Faith had to begin understanding itself and others as it passed over from that original Palestinian Jewish community into the larger world of the Roman Empire. From there, the early formulations of faith concerning God and human existence entered during the patristic period into a fruitfully critical dialogue through the labours of such varied thinkers as Justin, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, within the Greek tradition of *paideia* and the philosophers it esteemed, Plato above all.¹¹ Yet that same faith continued on through the Dark Ages, and supported such learning as there was, even as the Empire

⁷ From Siegfried Sassoon, "Lenten Illuminations."

⁸ Kerrie Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfilment: The Soteriology of Julian of Norwich* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

⁹ Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift. Marion, Derrida and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Press, 1994).

¹¹ For the relation of Greek Paideia to its Christian variations, see Kelsey, *To Understand God*, 64-77.

collapsed. There came a time of remarkable creativity as the same faith built cathedrals and universities and embraced a wide world of learning, including not only the classic past with the then recently discovered writings of Aristotle, but also that its contemporary Muslim and Jewish scholars, Averroes, Moses Maimonides, Avicenna, Avicbron, and so on. After a time of mystical flowering, Christian intelligence was faced with the challenges and opportunities in the periods of the Renaissance and the Reformation, just as it had to bear the scandal of the Wars of Religion. At that time of special vulnerability, the Catholic tradition was subjected to the Enlightenment which aimed to set the individual intelligence free from any tradition of faith or learning. One consequence was the emergence of modern science as we know it. Its enormous impact was to be felt in every domain of existence, and in the technological prowess that ensued. The times of revolution gave birth to new philosophical systems in this period of modernity. Now, in an era which is often known as postmodern, there is a general sense of relativity and a distrust of anything resembling a grand narrative or comprehensive theory. Still others can speak of a Second Enlightenment in which the many voices in the human conversation making up the cultural world can be respected and interfaith dialogue is in the air. Theology cannot pretend to teach or learn without acknowledging this history; and to the degree it does, it understands teaching and learning from a special perspective. On top of all this, there are the wonderful tools of internet communication now available. Our T&L are clearly subject to many influences and interpretations when you consider the long history of Christian reflection, and the possibilities of the present.

SOME FEATURES OF MODERNITY

Theology has learnt, and, more often, forcibly been taught, a critical reserve in regard to any given culture. In some ways, it is must always go against the current, and suffer accordingly. This has been especially the case in the period described as 'the modern world.'

Dogmatic Empiricism

First of all, there is that peculiar absence of God – and the transcendent, in modern culture. As regards modernity, given enormous prestige of technological science, intellectual assent was subjected to the criterion of the measurable. With knowledge reduced to the empirical, God, and the transcendent generally, was outside the range of investigable objects. The religious heights of human aspiration or the depths of experience were not subject to empirical measurement – nor indeed are most things in human culture – and so they had to be relegated the realm of feeling, taste, a very private preference. A culture of evidence, taken to an extreme, would rule out theology altogether. Yet there are contrary voices, as when Václav Havel, President of the Czech Republic write,

The most dangerous enemy today is no longer the dark forces of totalitarianism, the various hostile and plodding Mafias, but our own bad qualities. My presidential programme is to bring spirituality, moral responsibility, humanness and humility into politics; and, in that respect, to make clear that there is something higher above us, that our deeds do not disappear into the black hole of time, but are recorded somewhere and judged, that we have neither the right nor the reason to think that we understand everything and that we can do everything.¹²

¹² From a speech to the Polish Government, January 21, 1990.

Still, this coarsening of human consciousness, as though it were merely a data- recording machine, has provoked its own reaction. It is not uncommon to find leading scientists who are quite religious, not only in their practice, but also in their outlook, and in their desire to provoke a new synergy between science and faith (Cf. the efforts of the Templeton Foundation in this regard). What is emerging is a more participative kind of knowing and one that is far more communal in form. Where the enlightenment exalted the supercritical, authoritative individual and overlooked the vast collaborative exercise of a tradition in which knowing can occur, the postmodern situation is more at home with a conversational, participative manner of knowing that goes beyond a very limited empirical constraint. It more apt to attend to data of personal experience and witness, without, however, denying the evidence of the senses and the wondrous extensions science has given them.

I may be giving the impression of appealing to exotic interior experiences. The opposite, in fact, is the case. By all means, let us attend to the experience of mystics and artists, and to the 'Eureka!' moments of scientists and philosophers, and the heroism of great moral leaders. But there are more accessible and intimate self-transcending experiences. They are found by attending to the experience of our own sensing, imagining, questioning, reflecting, judging, deciding and loving. In and through such experiences and activities, each of us is constituted in a self-transcending consciousness, as alert, intelligent and responsible subjects. It is unlikely, without giving cause for great alarm, that any teacher or learner would say that such experiences were totally unfamiliar to them, or that they belonged in a black box of inner workings, too obvious or too complex to merit attention. On the other hand, if there is no appropriation of oneself as a self-transcending learner receptive to the fund of data as it occurs, beholden to meaning beyond mere impressions, to truth beyond prejudice, and to value beyond satisfactions, there are consequences: not only is learning reduced to what some external authority deems to be the case, but the range of creative imagination and living intelligence, not to say, moral responsibility, is sadly stunted. The experience of wonder has no place, nor are the data associated with the major transformations of the human condition, such as may occur in religious conversion, artistic inspiration or moral conscience, welcomed into a generous comprehension of reality. If neither mind nor heart are prepared to go beyond themselves, reaching out into a meaningful and moral universe, the soul shrivels into increasing self-absorption.

In this regard, the unemployed *Self* is a malaise of the present. It provokes questions. How can we imagine an education, at the highest level, that truly *employs* this self, and does not reduce it to an economic function? The notion of person, a particular achievement of Christian theology in its strenuous debates about the Incarnation and the Trinity, is indeed enriched by recent phenomenologies of consciousness, the I -Thou of Buber, the impassioned ethical concerns of Levinas, and all the rest of personalist modes of thought. But, at a contrary extreme, modernity gave rise to the purely functional self, the person reduced to a task, leading to the repugnant language of today, the 'salesperson,' 'chairperson' and so forth, the person whose only worth and function is found in a role!

Informational Promiscuity

If no longer anchored in a self-transcending consciousness, both the teacher and learner are increasingly at the mercy of the informational promiscuity so abundantly procured in the World Wide Web. Reaction to this new kind of unreflecting idiocy has coined a new

word describe the state of the new rote-learner of the internet, the plight of the 'videot.'¹³ Von Lichtenberg's aphorism can be accommodated to this new www.information culture: the screen is like a mirror: if an ape looks into it, it is unlikely that there will be an theologian or a philosopher looking out.

The problem for any current T&L paradigm is that it risks being unaware of its dependency on a reductively empiricist modern of learning and teaching. To the degree this is true, T&L will both lack a refined appreciation of the symphony of consciousness in which mind and heart, sense and imagination, intelligence and responsibility, body and spirit, reason and faith, all have their respective parts to play. Unless there is a recovery of the multidimensional character of human consciousness, and the manifold character of self-transcendence, questions concerned with meaning and value, God, the personal self and the human world, let alone interdisciplinary collaboration, our various specialisations are at best competitively juxtaposed in a more or less cacophonous fashion. Yet, to the degree one comes to recognise the symphony of the self-transcending consciousness orientated to what transcends the prejudices and biases of a given culture, one is living a principle of renewal and creative critique.

Ressentiment

A more elusive bias, but just as destructive, is the cultural problem of *ressentiment* – the French form of word – better perhaps than the standard English 'resentment': it conveys the sense of re-feeling the hurts and wounds of cultural clashes. It implies pretty much an historical form of 'sour grapes' or the 'tall poppy syndrome." Following a particular historical clash of cultures, the victorious party feels incapable of measuring up to a certain range of values represented by the defeated opponent, and so proceeds to vilify them and declare them as disvalues. Thus, not only is a range of needed values disprized and demeaned but also, in the process, the whole scale of values is mutilated. There is a gaping wound in the common good. Nietzsche famously interpreted Christianity as the *ressentiment* of slaves, who, incapable of true magnanimity and courage, turned the pride and power – the truly admirable virtues in his estimation – into vices, and replaced noble qualities with the miserable attitudes of humility, forgiveness, care for the poor, hope and such like. But thinkers such as Scheler and Lonergan have used this category of *ressentiment* more positively as a tool of cultural analysis. Now, I suggest that the humanities in general, and philosophy and theology in particular, are suffering from the *ressentiment* of professional and science-based education, especially in the versions currently being promoted. The more reflective ranges of the humanities are declared useless and economically worthless, irrelevant to the real world. The opposite, however, is now appearing to be the case, given the spiritual predicament occurring in the wider domain of culture. But this is the damage *ressentiment* can do. In its incapacity to think reflectively on human existence, the professional-scientific education I referred to, and the government agencies that promote this way of thinking – or non-thinking – seek to justify their own incapacities in allowing for the kind of reflection that is, in fact, most needed – if anyone is going to contribute any good to the common good. Moreover, through the dismissal of the value of such reflection, the whole scale of values is mutilated. The *ressentiment* of the techno-consumerist culture underwrites its own destructive bias. Knowledge is reduced to commodified information safely removed from critical

¹³ Cf. Quentin J Shultze, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2002).

intelligence or the higher aspirations of the human heart: 'A civilisation in decline digs its own grave with relentless consistency.'¹⁴ Once more, Havel is worth quoting:

The worst thing is that we live in a contaminated moral environment. We became morally ill because we became used to saying something different from what we thought. We learned not to believe in anything, to ignore each other, to care only about ourselves. Concepts, such as love, friendship, compassion, humility or forgiveness lost their depth and their dimensions, and for many of us they represented only psychological peculiarities, or they resembled gone-astray greetings from ancient times.¹⁵

We ask, then, how does this cultural *ressentiment* affect the articulation of a T&L plan? How should a T&L plan meet this problem head on, and allow for the heights and depths of human existence, even if our economic masters at this time find no value in such kinds of thinking?

But, to conclude with a theological remark. To believe in the personal Creator, the God in whom we live and move and have our being, means that no human or other being is the centre of the universe, for all exist in a wondrous contingency of giftedness. Thinking, to use Heidegger's terms, is first of all *thanking*. Our knowing and exploration simply exhausts itself in the effort to grasp, possess, control and consume. But it comes into its own as a progressive awareness of the generative mystery in which the universe exists, in which each reality is related to the all, and the whole is given into existence by a Giver whom this world cannot contain – 'One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all' (Eph 4:6).

As regards faith in Christ, Vatican II makes a bold statement:

The truth is that only in mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of our humanity take on light... Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals us to ourselves and makes our supreme calling clear...¹⁶

How does our T&L bear on the objective, consciousness-forming, community-building, world-shaping impact of existence in Christ?

Through him, the crucified and risen Lord, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the world. The gift of God works in countless good lives, often in an anonymous fashion, as these good people are agents of peace and justice in the world. Lonergan says appositely,

It is as though a room was filled with music though one can have no sure knowledge of its source. There is in the world, as it were, a charged field of love and meaning; here and there it reaches a notable intensity: but it is ever unobtrusive, hidden, inviting us to join. And join we must if we are to perceive it, for our perceiving is through our loving.¹⁷

In this regard, can we, dare we, understand our T&L as a spiritual ministry, liberating persons and shaping our world to more human proportions? It is a time of generosity, of appreciating the mystery of God in its infinite life-giving dimensions, and of appreciating the breadth and depth of the world itself. The message of the Gospel resonates in worlds far beyond the domain of the Church, as in the words of the Great Upanishad:

From the unreal, lead me to the real;
From darkness, lead me to light;
From dying lead me to immortality.

¹⁴ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: DLT, 1972), 55.

¹⁵ Vaclav Havel, "New Year's Address, 1990," in *Open Letters: Selected Prose 1965-1990*, trans. Paul Wilson (London: Faber, 1991), 81.

¹⁶ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no.22.

¹⁷ Lonergan, *Method*, 290.

That can be used as an epigraph for any T&L plan.

CONCLUSION

I realise that this incipiently theological reflection on T&L is only one aspect of what needs to be discussed. True, I am not really content with talking about 'T&L' as though these were simple and available notions involving a certain range of prescriptive activities. The matter is a lot more complicated than that; still, it is an opportunity to discuss such issues from another, and, it is hoped, larger perspective; and this will enrich what teaching and learning might mean. I remain convinced that the University has nothing to lose, but everything to gain, by admitting such a perspective into its deliberations – if only for this reason: to fail to do so would it disqualify from claiming the distinctiveness that is written into its name: Australian Catholic University.

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