Where Loyalites Lie?

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In the last decade an increasing number of prospective faculty members have shown more interest in identifying themselves within their (philosophical) discipline than emphasizing their loyalty to the universities that employ them.

At the end of my first run as Chair of the Philosophy Department, 1989-1995, my experiences — in the curriculum "wars," with an external review of the department's Ph.D. program, with reappointments and tenure decisions, and especially with our hiring — left me with a haunting impression that a significant shift had taken place, or at least was in the making. A shift in what might be called faculty loyalties. After I returned as chair, 1999-2002, this impression has developed into a strong conviction. Further reading of applications for our graduate program, more hiring experience, working with our own graduate students as they enter into the search for that first faculty appointment, and conversations with new chairs and new colleagues at Fordham and other Jesuit institutions have only confirmed my sense about this shift.

Just when this impression struck me, I cannot say; it emerged gradually during the department's hiring process, which included interviewing many strong candidates who far outnumbered the positions for which they were competing. So many excellent candidates seeking to fill far fewer positions recalled my own, sometimes lonely, job search in the mid seventies, when I was filled with apprehension about first impressions in the initial interviews at the American Philosophical Association meeting between Christmas and the New Year. I distinctly recall the orienting questions entering those interviews: how might I fit in with this department and this school? How might I become a part of this community, this university? Within that horizon of expectation there was no question that my primary allegiance would be to the university I would join as a member of its faculty. That my graduate education was a preparation for this end. To be sure, continued study, research, publication and participation in the wider profession were essential parts of that horizon, but clearly as subsidiary to the end of serving the university I might join as my primary academic community. In this way the disciplinary community of philosophers beyond my university, the "profession," was secondary and instrumental to the vocational community of my university.

At that time, excited, grateful and apprehensive, I entered my first faculty appointment, here at Fordham University, believing, as I still do, that without question a college or university professor's primary allegiance is to his or her school. I also believed, and still do, that this is all the more so for faculty at Jesuit institutions who accept its educational ideal of "cura personalis" and the magis that is its telos; its end or goal. A magis — a striving for something more — that includes scholarship, but not as an end-in-itself. I also had a sense that the other baby boomers of my generation shared this horizon.

In contrast to our comportment back then, today's generation of faculty candidates exhibits a...
much stronger concern about their career development in their disciplinary profession. In my role as chair of the philosophy department, I came to see and hear more and more candidates, and new faculty, spending less time asking about the school -- its core curriculum, its faculty or students, its mission and identity. Their questions shifted to matters of support for research, travel to conferences, teaching loads (not in the interest of teaching courses), release time for writing and similar kinds of concerns that manifest a preoccupation for how the university might support their work! In spite of the fact that there were always many more candidates for faculty positions available, the "best" and most competitive candidates with multiple job offers from competitive institutions more often acted like free agents in the draft.

I am not saying that I believe that my generation of young academic Pips with their great expectations were morally superior to today's or that we had a superior sense of our primary allegiance. We simply were students of the sixties who did not see beyond a horizon of the single loyalty of the "organization man." When seen in the new context of what I should like to call today's "postmodern professionalism" in academe, the new generation emerges as no less responsible to the multiple communities and constellations of their professional engagement. But the ordering of the allegiances seems rearranged. Reverberations from the shadowy subtext underlying the particular questions asked by those smart candidates, newly exiled from the graduate program that was their Eden, discloses a drive to know how the university they might join would support them in their work, that is to say, their research, writing and professional activities beyond the walls of their classrooms in face to face meeting with their students!

When I finished six years as chair in 1995, I wondered whether there was any truth to my impression about professionalism and its centrifugal impact at the local level where we teach and work while, at the same time, we constitute the various professions and disciplines which exert those pressures that can pull us apart. It also struck me, and still does, that the further irony is the fact that for virtually all faculty it is the university that continues to provide our primary financial means of support as we shift our primary allegiance to our respective professions. After completing a return as chair (1999-2002), I have little doubt that a significant shift has taken place in the primary allegiance among the newer generations of PhD's -- a shift in where their first loyalties lie, from the university community where they teach toward the wider disciplinary community that lies beyond the walls and halls of their home institutions, beyond the
students and colleagues they engage weekly, if not daily, in the concrete lifeworld of their university. Four episodes offer a window onto this conviction.

The first was my reading of Mark Schwehn’s insightful *Exits from Eden*, which opened recalling a seminar meeting of faculty colleagues at the University of Chicago. The group gathered that year to examine aspects of the professionalization of the social sciences. It was just after tax filing time, so while waiting for all to arrive and in line with the seminar’s theme, one of those present asked each to state what he or she had listed under the heading “occupation” on the tax form. One after another reported writing under “occupation” — “sociologist,” “anthropologist,” “historian,” and the like. Schwehn recounts his feeling of alienation at the “combination of mild alarm and studied astonishment” exhibited by his colleagues at his disclosure that he had listed as his occupation “college teacher.” Schwehn’s opening pages immediately resonated with me, and the rest of this insightful exploration of the distinctive tensions within an academic vocation for individuals of religious faith assured me that my thinking about professionalism’s pull on our allegiances, especially for those at Jesuit schools, was not misguided.

As the second episode occurred, I found myself understanding it in light of Schwehn’s work. It was in 1997 when I asked, one might even say “pushed,” my chair to consider the idea of what I called a post-doctoral teaching fellowship. The idea was to address the needs of the undergraduate curriculum in a way that solved a number of problems due to an increasing use of adjuncts to cover core courses: availability of teachers to the students, exploitation of adjuncts, and increasing professional demands on tenured faculty. The department faculty decided to treat this as a “prestige” postdoctoral appointment. They also decided to conduct the search and hiring for the “best” candidate out there on the normal job market. That is, we announced the position and called for applications in order to interview at the APA meeting in December, just as we did for tenure-track, ranked faculty positions. What was to serve the teaching needs in our core philosophy courses had been named a prestigious sounding postdoctoral fellowship raising candidates’ expectations of something more than teaching core courses. The top three or four candidates, one after the other, asked about prospects for teaching advanced courses, and even a graduate course in their specialty, as well as the questions about travel and research support. Thus it was no surprise to me that among the top candidates — one after the other — declined our offer. In fact, we failed to appoint any of our top five candidates. It was an interesting lesson in the new professionalism. Guided by Schwehn and my previous experience as chair, I learned that it was not simply a question of loyalty to Fordham or the profession. Rather, it was a question of how to bring together the interests of each in a mutually beneficial way. Today, adjusting to the new context, our postdoctoral teaching fellows program is in its third year, to the mutual benefit of Fordham’s undergraduate students, our own graduate students, and other recent Ph.D.’s, as well as the philosophy profession at large.
The third episode illustrates how the profession transforms our home institutions. Rather than the "old" sabbatical leave, Fordham has a Faculty Fellowship system for which one must submit a plan of proposed research and writing for a semester or year released from teaching. It is not automatic, but the advantage is that one can apply every four years. Until recently only tenured faculty were eligible to apply. That "old" eligibility requirement reflected a sense that non-tenured faculty -- as probationary -- were not full members of the community, nor were they expected to publish like those who had release time from teaching. As the faculty, as well as Deans, have come to require more research and publication for tenure, two years ago our Faculty Senate recommended that the Board of Trustees extend eligibility for a Faculty Fellowship to non-tenured faculty. Recognizing the state of the academic profession, the Board approved this change. Finally, there has emerged in the last ten years or so a proliferation of graduate student conferences and journals with an ever growing expectation that a graduate student will have presented papers at professional conferences, will have published at least one or two articles and some book reviews. All this before the dissertation is completed and defended. The question is not whether such widespread activity should be judged as premature, or even arrogant, as it might have been in the past. Rather, the question is how this new environment to which graduate students must adapt, orients their loyalties? And what does this portend for the Jesuit university?

**Professionalization within a Postmodern Horizon**

In the mid-1960's, under financial constraints from their universities and challenges from a new generation of Jesuits more focused on a faith and justice ministry, Jesuit communities transferred fiduciary responsibility and legal authority to independent boards of trustees. No doubt Vatican II's call for a vigorous role for the laity and a new generation of successful, well-educated American Catholics made such a change conceivable. Though there were many Jesuits on those boards, the new configuration changed, albeit slowly, the culture of the boards from clerical to professional. For the lay members were lawyers and doctors, leaders in education and business, authors and even actors. They were professionals who introduced a new perspective, professionalism, in directing the Catholic university to enter the mainstream of American higher education. By the mid-seventies a more research-oriented, professional model7 that was
"religion blind" often guided the hiring and tenure of faculty. Its objectivist dimension -- that of knowledge as value-neutral theory tested by independent facts -- seemed especially appropriate to the professional conduct of academics in the business of disciplined, disinterested inquiry into truth.

The Jesuit university's appropriation of the professional model may now be seen as ironic. As Vatican II was opening the church to a modern world releasing the Catholic university from its defensive posture toward modernity, in the twilight new thinkers led an intellectual movement mounting an epochal critique of modernity. The American Catholic university was catching up with the Enlightenment as it was waning. The irony here is double. For I believe a distinctively intellectual factor, postmodern thought, has worked unwittingly in consort with a growing professionalism to produce what I called a postmodern professionalism in academia.

There seems to be a dynamic, reciprocal relationship between publication and specialization that mutually calls forth more of the one from the other. The professions pressure to contribute, usually through research or scholarship that results in publications, demands more differentiation in respect to the subject investigated and thereby further specialization. This in turn generates differentiation of disciplines into new subdisciplines and on occasion new disciplines, spawning new organizations or professional associations which may often result in new journals, association proceedings and other venues that offer the fledgling academic professional many opportunities to publish the products of the work they have really been trained to do -- research. It is not surprising that universities and colleges have pursued this Weberian direction, for it is the model of the graduate school under which most new academics have been formed. It is, in Schenkl's metaphor, the Eden from which the young, newly trained professional -- just as she has proven herself -- is exiled. Accordingly, they seek to return by seeking participation in the professional communities as extensions of their respective Edens.

Another outcome, perhaps better called "fallout," of this process of professionalized specialization and specialized professions is the fragmentation of a commonly shared discourse which, in its turn, weakens the university as an academic community eventually to the stage where no center holds. This is most manifest by the virtual disappearance of a common core curriculum at too many universities and colleges, and a correlate weakening in many Jesuit schools. Of course, a decrease in the core curriculum permits more space for an increase of the requirements for the major. It effectively invites "outside" disciplinary and professional organizations to enact more demands on the major for accreditation.

A corresponding growth in the professionalization of administration across the university -- in academic matters (from admission to graduation), in athletics, in student life, in alumni affairs and other extracurricular areas -- has only reinforced the transformation through its own legitimation of what might be described as an ideology of professionalism. In its way C.P. Snow's prescient concern about the threat that the "two cultures" posed for our thinking and willing anticipated in a vague way the fragmentation in our thinking and willing that is manifest in current postmodern critiques of modernity's reason. More recently, George Grant has articulated this fragmentation as the modern multidisciplinity wherein thinking has devolved into scholarship which has further devolved into research production. The correlate loss of shared discourse inhibits conversation about what is thought and by whom (consider the
disappearance of the author, the self, etc.). Dialogue that engages across the departments, sometimes even within departments, and within the colleges declines. When research output within strictly defined disciplinary boundaries becomes an end-itself, the university as a place for thinking through a common discourse cannot hold together. At best it is a multiversity!

One possible response is to resort to the ideal of the pursuit of truth and counter that each discipline's research results are for the purpose of getting closer to the truth of its respective subject matter in its distinctive way. The serious problem with this is that recent philosophy and sociology of science has made persuasive arguments that this is not the case in either the theory or the practice of science. Moreover, the postmodern discourse occurring in the academy has unveiled the "truth" that there may be a critical mass of the faculty who do not believe in a reasonable, sharable truth, even as a pursuable ideal. In its discourse, power replaces truth, and Thracymachus's challenge to Socrates at the beginning of the Republic, that "might makes right," is transformed into a new challenge of "might makes truth." Sometimes it appears that it, the modern multiversity, is what we are; and it is about power -- sometimes competing, sometimes conflicting, and sometimes cooperating power of the administration, the schools, the departments, and the various faculties. It also seems that this power is transferred through faculty and administrators to their respective, various professional organizations -- the ABA, the ASBC, the APA, Middle States, ACU, and so on -- which then direct it back upon us only to pull the university apart. If thinking has devolved in the modern multiversity as Grant has described it, can teaching's devolution from educate to professional preparation to technical training be far behind? Most recently, the former president of Harvard, Derek Bok, has argued that the widespread commercialization of higher education in a market economy seriously threatens its integrity. If he is right, the university devolves further into a marketplace where interpersonal relationships last no longer than the relationship between seller and buyer. In such a market faculty act more and more like professional athletes, with the strongest professional academics acting like "free agents" selling their expertise to the highest bidder. For both professionals it is business, all business.

The Road Ahead

Since the mid-nineties more and more universities have turned to address their identity and mission in seeming recognition of the challenges of the multiversity, of the divergent, sometimes competing interests of professional disciplines whose ends lie outside the center of one's university. Today, as more and more universities turn to considerations of identity and mission, Profs. Appleyard and Gray, of Boston College, argue that the Jesuit university has also moved beyond the "professional model" to that of a "mission model." It has restored talk of Jesuit and Catholic identity; but in an environment of academic and administrative professionals with differentiated roles and distinct tasks, including an office of identity and mission. Appleyard and Gray further assert that in the current stage "loyalty is not to an organization or to a professional guild but is self directed." They suggest that such direction is toward "what it means to be a whole person." But the very question of a whole -- whether the whole of knowledge, or the whole of a community, or the whole of self -- is what has been rendered problematic by postmodern critiques for many academics and intellectuals outside the university.

This problematic -- whether the pursuit of any whole is tenable even as an ideal -- coupled
with the centrifugal forces of professionalism threatens the ideal of the whole as embodied in a community of scholars teaching students. As such, it places the Ignatian ideal of cura personalis at risk. Might we turn to another Ignatian ideal, that of the magis or "the more," to find the road from here? I suggest this is so only if we seek it in colleagues and students who manifest it in a living engagement of the academic community. Can such colleagues be found? In my own department two colleagues immediately come to mind, James Marsh and Merold Westphal. They are outstanding scholars, professionally active, excellent teachers, and true citizens of Fordham University. As such they give the lie to what I have said above, unless you understand that it is not a question of citizenship in either one's university or one's profession or one's religion. Rather, it is a question of how to navigate the new terrain of multiple allegiances in exemplary ways. By their example they teach many how to be more through multiple loyalties.

The ubiquitous is that in the current intellectual milieu, professional allegiances and complex organizational structures make it all the more difficult to cultivate a sense of intellectually meaningful citizenship within a university. A time when Jesuit institutions are renewing mission and identity and navigating the new terrain of multiple loyalties distinctively challenges the Ignatian charism of cura personalis, finding God in all things, and the magis. When understood in the larger context of the Catholic mind, as one of faith seeking understanding, the Jesuit university as Jesuit can only continue as a community where faith and reason seek mutual growth in dialogue punctuated by moments of relative integration. This means if the Jesuit ideal of cura personalis is not to be an empty abstraction that diminishes into a marketing slogan, we as professional teachers and scholars must always remain in real presence to our colleagues and students within and outside our universities.

ENDNOTES

3 Recall Dr. Rhode's keynote address at Georgetown University, "The Mission and Ministry of Jesuits in Higher Education," America, July 29-August 5, 1989, Vol. 161, No. 3, delivered to what was the largest gathering of faculty and administrators, Jesuits and lay, in Jesuit higher education in the United States. As he bade the Jesuit institutions for retaining a center while most of higher education in America had abdicated any center, he exhorted us in Jesuit higher education to sustain a center and thereby shape others a way to survive one.
7 Appleby and Gray, p. 13.