On Faith and Learning
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Eruditio et Religio. Academic Excellence and Spiritual Vitality. Faith and Learning. These are expressions of Asbury University's continued commitment to fostering a climate where students and faculty can participate in the process of discovering and engaging truth in all areas of knowledge wherever it is found, knowing full well and celebrating with confidence that all truth comes from God. Indeed, Pope John Paul II could well have been describing our own institution when he wrote in the introduction of his apostolic constitution of Catholic universities, Ex Corde Ecclesiae, "With every other University it shares that gaudium de veritate, so precious to Saint Augustine, which is the joy of searching for, discovering and communicating truth in every field of knowledge. A Catholic University's privileged task is to 'unite existentially by intellectual efforts two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth.'" To search for truth while possessing the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth eloquently states what is at the very heart of Christian education: the integration of faith and learning. On our campus the approaches to this integration most assuredly differ from faculty member to faculty member. Moreover, as we learned at a faculty retreat just a few years ago, there is no one way, no right way of integrating faith and learning, given the wide range of personalities of the instructors and the difference in the natures of the subjects taught. Richard John Neuhaus underscores this reality in "A University of a Particular Kind" when he writes, "The God who gave us reason and who keeps faith with the orders of his creation requires us to respect the integrity of every way of knowing. Different subjects and different disciplines have
their own integrity. It is neither possible nor desirable to teach Christian mathematics, Christian geology, or Christian chemistry. But a Christian university will not lose sight of the truth that these and other disciplines have their own integrity because they are an integral part of the Creator's order."

So how do I approach the task of facilitating an awareness on the part of my students of the vital connection between what they study and what they believe, since I do not teach Christian Latin or Greek per se (though, admittedly, Christian writings in both languages find their way into my classroom), and since my academic discipline focuses on culture, literature, and religion which often bear the "pagan" moniker? How do I help students recognize that Athens and Jerusalem can be on friendly terms? That the academy and the church are not mutually exclusive, but that they can and should serve one another?

What follows is not a research paper or a theological exercise. It is merely my reflection on the ways I address faith and learning in my teaching. At times, the integration of the two is more obvious because the curriculum or topic is such that it lends itself more immediately to this recognition. Other times—perhaps even most of the time—the integration is more subtle and less immediate, which in many ways is very desirable because it forces students themselves to consider and become more sensitive to the dynamic relationship of the academic and the spiritual. In either case, I have come to realize over the years that two dimensions are primarily involved in my efforts to integrate faith and learning: one which is informational by nature, and the other incarnational. The remainder of this paper will set forth how these two dimensions are at work in my role as a teacher, first by highlighting my courses and some of the ways I try to prompt students to consider the relationship between faith and learning through the course
material, and second, by briefly sharing how my relationship with my students is an incarnate expression of my own integration of faith and learning.

One of the first ways I integrate faith and learning is through the syllabus. More specifically, it occurs as the very last entry on each of my syllabi. Here students find the following verse: *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him* (Colossians 3:17, NRSV). While this verse is part of a passage where Paul is specifically addressing how those believers at Colossae are to live out their life in Christ within community, I think that the spirit of his admonition provides an altogether appropriate principle for our community of learners: to give their best in their classes is to give their best to God. I take a few minutes of that first class session to remind students that God has led them to Asbury to continue their education and will use their experience here to prepare them for a vocation which they may or may not currently have in mind; that because they need to be equipped as best as possible to engage the world, the time and energy they spend in the classroom and doing homework is as vitally important as any extra-curricular activity or ministry they might be involved in, on campus or off; that if they allow him to do so, God will sharpen their minds and shape their hearts for what he has in store for them, and that what they learn in any course may have significant ramifications for their lives and those with whom they interact; that it is a privilege for them to have the opportunity to attend a Christian liberal arts institution, and the way to honor and thank God and their parents for such an opportunity is for them to give nothing short of their very best in each class—no matter the discipline, no matter the professor; and that by giving their very best they are, in effect, loving God with all their mind. Thus, the academic enterprise becomes an act of worship—a sacred undertaking. If students are able to view every moment they spend on their studies from this perspective, then
they will be doing "it all in the name of the Lord" and integrating their faith with their academic pursuit.

Having shared this perspective with all my students, I feel that I am in a better position to be able to integrate faith and learning more effectively in specific courses. However, as I think about individual classes, I must confess that teaching the number and variety of courses I do per semester—six or seven, each one a separate prep since there are no multiple sections—presents a bit of a challenge in that I am precluded from taking the same approach to integrating faith and learning. For example, accomplishing this in a lower-division language course is far different from doing so in an upper-division Latin or Greek class. Regardless of the level or the language, I try to impress upon my students that not only is language a part of the created order, but that God ordered his creation through language: Genesis 1 describes God as speaking his creation into being. In fact, theologians refer to this creation event by the term *fiat*, from the Latin for "let there be." I then remind them of the role that language played—first in oral form and later in written—in preserving a record of God's salvation history, and that one of the original languages of that record is Greek. It is in this instance that the integration seems to be most obvious to the students in my elementary and intermediate Greek courses, in which first-year grammar focuses on biblical Greek and second-year texts are the Greek New Testament and early Christian writings, such as *The Didache* or *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

When it comes to Latin, I emphasize the point that not only is it the language of Cicero and Caesar, but of Augustine and Aquinas, too; that for centuries it was the official language of Christianity in the West, and, therefore, its role in the evangelization of Europe in the Middle Ages cannot be discounted. Or I will share passages from the Vulgate which contain a particular point of grammar under consideration or passages which have become part of the liturgy, such as
the "Magnificat" or the "Nunc Dimittis." Or I will bring in sacred medieval Latin poetry, the "Stabat Mater" being one example.

Whether in Greek or Latin class, I always encourage students to view the memorizing of vocabulary, paradigms, and principal parts; of mastering the syntactical constructions; of translating and composing—and, in Latin, even conversing—as more than just necessary exercises for gaining proficiency in the languages. Indeed, students can begin to see that the same mindset of a disciplined approach required for language acquisition can be applied to their spiritual walk.

For my upper-division Greek students, Euripides' Bacchae is a play which, interestingly enough, has parallels to theological issues and liturgical practices with which they are familiar. The drama centers around Dionysus, who upon returning to his hometown of Thebes declares that not only is he the son of Zeus but that he himself is a god and, as such, is worthy of worship (a worship whereby his followers are enthused through their ritual participation in the suffering and death of the deity). Such a bold claim meets with violent opposition and rejection by his fellow townsfolk, especially his own kin, yielding tragic consequences. Reading this work gives opportunities to discuss mystery religions, some of which were attractive rivals of Christianity; to examine how our worship practices may appear unusual or even threatening to the unchurched or to those Christians who come from a very different worship tradition, just as the antagonist in the play was threatened by the foreign worship practices associated with Dionysus; to compare and contrast the sparagmos and omophagy of the Dionysiac worship with our Eucharist; and to recognize how starkly different Dionysus is—depicted as mild to those who willingly worship him but cruelly vindictive to those who resist him—from our God, who lovingly and gently invites us into a relationship with him but who always respects our free will.
Euripides is not the only Greek author who allows for a more subtle integration of faith and learning. Plato provides my students with occasions to explore against the backdrop of their Christian faith such philosophical questions as the nature of God, the origin of good and evil, the role of inspiration, the relationship between an individual and God, and the education of the young leading to the development of strong moral character, to mention just a few. Homer, whose writings were the equivalent of a Bible for the ancient Greeks and Romans, is praised by the Roman poet Horace in the first book of his *Epodes*, "It is Homer who says what is fair, what is foul, what is useful, what is not, more plainly and better than Chrysippus or Crantor... Again, what virtue or wisdom can do." Horace then supports what he says about Homer by citing passages from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* which serve as a moral compass. How similar are these words of Saint Paul to the church at Philippi: "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (*Philippians* 2:8, NRSV). Both Horace and Paul underscore the importance of guarding the mind, and my students find it extremely rewarding when they find truth expressed in the writings of a pagan which corresponds to that found in scripture.

Much the same can be said of my upper-division Latin students who pick up the *Moral Epistles* of Seneca the Younger. Early on they are surprised to notice how the advice and observations of that famous Stoic have the familiar ring of scripture to it, and are excited to discover to what degree a number of his thoughts resonate with them. For example, when writing about the relationship between slaves and masters, Seneca states that slaves, too, are human and have dignity; and that all of us—free or not—are slaves in one way or another to our appetites and our inclinations; and that many times the slave is more free than the master. In
another letter he describes the negative effect that attendance at the gladiatorial games has on a person's character (a concern perhaps more famously articulated by Saint Augustine when he talks of his friendship with one Alypius). The worth of every individual and the nature of what one views for entertainment are most definitely issues with which our faith must be concerned.

Vergil is another author whom my upper-division Latin students read. He will be discussed at greater length below, but permit me to state here that there is much in his poems which commands consideration regarding faith and learning. And then there is the stamp of approval given by the early Church: Tertullian christened him an *anima naturaliter christiana* ("a soul by nature Christian"), and Lactantius regarded Vergil as divinely inspired because of the poet's Fourth Eclogue—commonly known as the "Messianic Eclogue"—in which a child, whose birth will usher in a new golden age, is praised. Seen as predicting the birth of Christ in this eclogue, Vergil found himself on the Church's list of "approved pagans authors." The first Christian emperor Constantine was a fan, and in the middle ages Vergil was employed by Dante to be his tour guide through hell.

My classics courses, which do not require any knowledge of Greek or Latin, draw students from all majors, and provide wonderful opportunities for them to explore the cultural, historical, and literary environment which shaped and informed the world of those first Christians and created the foundation of Western civilization. This past Spring 2011 semester, for example, students in my Classical Culture and Civilization course were given an overview of ancient Rome, learning about its history, government, military, family life, slavery, forms of entertainment, and so forth. In addition to gaining a better understanding of the superpower which ruled the world into which Jesus was born and through which Paul traveled, the students were able look at certain passages of scripture afresh. For example, Paul's use of the term
"adoptive" in Romans is greatly misunderstood by the vast majority of Christians because they have in mind the modern process, which is completely alien to the ancient Roman practice. After I walked the students through the Roman practice of adoptio, students could then appreciate Paul's amazingly wonderful declaration of what it means to be "joint heirs with Christ." They will never read that passage of scripture in the same way again.

Likewise, Paul's less-than-enthusiastic reception on the part of his Athenian audience makes more sense to students once they are exposed to the basic tenets of Stoicism and Epicureanism, the chief philosophical schools at that time. Reading that passage in Acts 17 with a clearer understanding of the philosophical and cultural dynamics at play helps students see why the altar rail was not full when Paul issued his invitation. Moreover, students can take a page from the notebook of Paul: he was well read and conversant in the literature of the Greeks, so he was able to quote their own poets in his message as an attempt to bridge cultural differences; although most of his hearers summarily dismissed him, there were some who desired to continue the conversation; finally, there were a few converts, including a member of the Areopagus Court. The lesson here, I believe, is that students need to be as well read and culturally aware as possible when they go out into the world to live out the gospel through their respective vocations, and there is no better training ground for preparing them than a liberal arts education.

In my Survey of Classical Literature course entire translations of The Iliad, The Odyssey, The Oresteia, and The Aeneid are read. Through these works not only are students able to become familiar with these seminal pieces of literature which have stood the test of time and have inspired countless authors and artists over the centuries, but they are also able to examine the notions of suffering, war, justice, fate vs. free will, providence, family issues, and the other realities of the human condition. Reminiscent of Horace's laudatory assessment of Homer, there
is a very beautiful passage in the ninth book of *The Iliad*, where Phoenix reminds Achilles that unchecked rage and relentless hatred lead to destruction. In addressing the hero, Phoenix says:

We do have Prayers, you know, Prayers for forgiveness,
Daughters of mighty Zeus . . . and they limp and halt,
they're all wrinkled, drawn, they squint to the side,
can't look you in the eyes, and always bent on duty,
trudging after Ruin, maddening, blinding Ruin.
But Ruin is strong and swift—
She outstrips them all by far, stealing a march,
leaping over the whole wide earth to bring mankind to grief.
And the Prayers trail after, trying to heal the wounds.
And then, if a man reveres these daughters of Zeus
as they draw near him, they will help him greatly
and listen to his appeals. But if one denies them,
turns away, stiff-necked and harsh—off they go
to the son of Cronus, Zeus, and pray that Ruin
will strike the man down, crazed and blinded
until he's paid the price.

    Relent, Achilles—you too!
See that honor attend these good daughters of Zeus,
honor that sways the minds of others, even heroes. (Fagles translation)

This metaphor of forgiveness always elicits a discussion on the role of forgiveness in the life of a Christian. Homer poetically draws students in to take a hard look at their own lives and to ponder anew those words which they have prayed so many times in the Lord's Prayer—words whose force familiarity may have blunted over time.

One of my favorite characters in all of literature is Aeneas, the eponymous hero of Vergil's *Aeneid*, upon whom T. S. Eliot bestowed the title, "the classic of all Europe." Aeneas, the son of Venus and second only to Hector as the greatest warrior of Troy, is directed by the gods to flee a falling Troy, and to take the city's sacred objects and household god with him. Aeneas has no choice but to follow his destiny, which will take him to Italy, where he will found a new city and establish the gods of Troy. The journey is made even more arduous because Aeneas suffers long
and unjustly at the hands of a capricious and vengeful Juno. In spite of his fears and his
desperation and his desire to quit, Aeneas still perseveres. It is his dutiful devotion (pietas)
which enables him to continue to carry out the will of the gods for his life through extremely
trying circumstances. Indeed, Aeneas recognizes that subjugating his own desires and short-term
gratification is necessary to realizing his destiny and to securing a future for his descendants, the
Romans. Because Aeneas is a different kind of hero who acts not for his own glory but for the
glory of a people yet to be born, a hero who acts in response to the call of the gods upon his life,
a hero who acts in such a way that his epithet is "pious," he is often viewed as a "pre-Christian"
or "Christianly" hero, and offers students a model of faithful obedience to divine will. The
questions which would have found a home in the heart of Aeneas are the same ones my students
struggle with today: Does my life have meaning or a purpose? What does my future hold? Why
am I suffering; when will it end? What good can possibly come from my suffering? How do I
reconcile my desires and what I perceive to be God's will for my life? Why should I keep
trying? Indeed, by looking at Aeneas and the other characters in the epic, students are invited in
a non-threatening way to examine their own condition. Indeed, was this not the experience of
Saint Augustine when he laments in The Confessions:

  For what more miserable than a miserable being who commiserates not himself; weeping
the death of Dido for love to Aeneas, but weeping not his own death for want of love to Thee,
O God. Thou light of my heart, Thou bread of my inmost soul, Thou Power who givest
vigour to my mind, who quickenest my thoughts, I loved thee not. I committed fornication
against Thee, and all around me thus fornicating there echoed, "Well done! well done!" for
the friendship of this world is fornication against Thee; and "Well done! well done!" echoes
on till one is ashamed not to be thus a man. And for all this I wept not, I who wept for Dido
slain, and "seeking by the sword a stroke and wound extreme," myself seeking the while a
worse extreme, the extremest and lowest of Thy creatures, having forsaken Thee, earth
passing into the earth.

  My Classical Mythology course is yet another avenue for the integration of faith and learning.
Not only does the course lay an extremely important foundation for the literary, artistic, and
cultural framework of Western civilization, both historically and currently (one only has to consider the number of mythological allusions which find their way into productions and ads churned out by Hollywood and Madison Avenue ), but it also sheds light on some of the difficulties those early Christians faced in practicing a monotheistic faith in a polytheistic climate. We compare the Genesis creation and the creation myths of Hesiod and Ovid, as well as the account of the flood in Genesis 6-9 and the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha. Students "get it" when Paul was called Hermes and Barnabas Zeus at Lystra, and how the myth of Philemon and Baucis relates to this episode in Acts; they know who Artemis of the Ephesians was; they see how easily the issues and questions Paul dealt with at Corinth could have arisen in a city where the worship of Aphrodite and Apollo was prominent, and whose reputation and its citizens became proverbial of debauchery and licentiousness; and they reel with delight when it hits them that Prince Caspian (a work which many have read several times) contains a description of a Dionysiac procession.

The author of Prince Caspian also makes an "appearance" in the introductory lecture in mythology class when I share these thoughts on the subject of mythology from his Reflections on the Psalms: "The resemblance of Adonis to Christ is therefore not accidental; it is the resemblance we expect to find between a counterfeit and the real thing, between a parody and the original, between imitation pearls and pearls.' Other Christians who think, as I do, that in mythology divine and diabolical and human elements (the desire for a good story), all play a part, would say: "It is not accidental. In the sequence of night and day, in the annual death and rebirth of the crops, in the myths which these processes gave rise to, in the strong, if half-articulate, feeling (embodied in many Pagan 'Mysteries') that man himself must undergo some sort of death if he would truly live, there is already a likeness permitted by God to that truth on
which all depends. The resemblance between these myths and the Christian truth is no more accidental than the resemblance between the sun and the sun's reflection in a pond, or that between a historical fact and the somewhat garbled version of it which lives on in popular report, or between the trees and hills of the real world and the trees and hills in our dreams."

The Anglican priest and Oxford professor of poetry John Keble put it this way, "Thoughts beyond their thoughts to those high bards were given." Therefore, when my students study the great works of those writers of ancient Greece and Rome, either in the original languages or in translation, they are like the people of Israel making use of the treasures of Egypt in order to worship God. As Saint Augustine declares in the second book of *On Christian Teaching*, "A person who is a good and true Christian should realize that truth belongs to his Lord, wherever it is found, gathering it and acknowledging it even in pagan literature. . . ."

I mentioned in the beginning of this paper that my efforts to integrate faith and learning involve more than what I do with course content. There is also a strong relational dimension, which exists *both* inside and outside of the classroom, as I illustrate below.

As long as I can remember, I have had a strong interest in antiquity, especially ancient Greece and Rome. Being enthralled by things classical, I was encouraged by my fourth-grade teacher to read *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. For all I know I may have read abridged versions of the epics or a retelling of those poems for children. Regardless, I read those stories and was captivated by them, and that feeling has never left me. What strikes me most about all of this is that God must have placed this interest, or better, this passion in my heart and used a teacher to kindle it. Years later when I was a sophomore in college, I had a professor who not only recognized my passion but also saw my potential, and he encouraged me to head down the road which has brought me to Asbury. Although other individuals and circumstances played no small part in shaping and
preparing me for teaching, I have no doubt that God nudged a fourth-grade teacher and a state university professor to invest themselves in me in such a way as to have an extremely significant impact on my life. My fourth-grade teacher passed away several years ago, but I am still in regular contact with that professor, even getting together with him for breakfast once or twice a year for the past 30 years.

Today, I am a professor, and God has brought students into my life for this very special season of their lives. For whatever reason, God in his infinite wisdom has chosen for our paths to cross. My faith response to his working in my life to bring me to this point is to invest myself in these young adults, in order to give them the best academic preparation possible and to assist them not only in discovering who they are but also in pursuing God's best for their lives. Such an investment requires more than just the mere exercise of my human will and effort; it demands my reliance on God if I am to be for my students what they deserve and need. In this way my actions and attitudes as a faculty member become an incarnate expression of my faith in God and his call upon my life. The following are some examples of this expression.

In the classroom I create a comfortable and positive learning environment, where every student is affirmed and no question is "stupid"; where it is okay to make mistakes and to laugh and to have fun; where enthusiasm and passion are the norm. On the first day of classes, I promise my students that I will always give my best to them, and that I am willing to do whatever is in my power to do to help them learn, if they desire my help. I make sure that I know every student by name by the third or fourth class session. And when I receive my class rosters at the beginning of the semester, I pray for my students even before I step into the classroom. I try to improve each course every time I teach it by revising lectures or creating new handouts or taking a different approach in order to make it "click" for the students. Above all, I
try to keep in mind what it is like to be a student, so I make a practice of returning graded assignments, quizzes, and exams at the very next class session. Likewise, although I have in mind the amount of material I would like to cover in the course of a semester, I never allow that to dictate the pace at which we move through the material, leading students on a "forced march," if you will; rather, I try to be sensitive to the needs of the class as a whole and make adjustments accordingly.

Outside of class I spend a great deal of time listening to and talking with students. I have a steady stream of students who stop by my office daily to ask for assistance with the course material, to seek advice and counsel, or simply to visit. Students are very open and honest with me as they share their struggles or celebrate their victories. I send a lot of emails and cards expressing my concerns over their struggles, my condolences at their losses, my pride on their achievements, and my encouragement for their perseverance. I also am happy to write recommendation letters for students, averaging 30-40 such references per academic year (and nearly 60 for a couple of those years I served as Class Advisor of the Unashamed Class). I want students to know that my desire to see them succeed is not restricted to the four walls of a classroom, and that I am in their corner pulling for them in all areas of their lives.

I bring this reflection on faith and learning to its conclusion with this story. Toward the end of 2002, a movie came out called, "The Emperor's Club." It tells the story of a certain teacher of classical antiquity at a boy's preparatory school, whose life had a profound and lasting impact on his students. Although the passionate classicist Mr. Hundert failed to reach one student in particular, who was both troubled and troubling, he did have a positive and transformative influence on the other boys of that class. Some twenty-five years later at a reunion Mr. Hundert's former pupils present him with a plaque on which are inscribed these words: "A great teacher
has little external history to record. His life goes over into other lives. These men are pillars in
the intimate structure of our schools, they are more essential than its stones or beams. And they
will continue to be a kindling force and revealing power in our lives."

A life going over into other lives. Mr. Hundert rightly understood his vocation as a teacher as
more than simply getting his boys to understand the causes of the Peloponnesian War or to recite
the list of Roman emperors in order. Mr. Hundert incarnated for his students the truth he found
in the lives and writings of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Julius Caesar—men who, according to
Hundert, "... exemplified the highest standards of statesmanship, civic virtue, character,
conviction."

My life going over into my students' lives? That is my hope and desire. I am aware that how
I treat my students, how I connect with them, how I incarnate Christ for them both in and out of
class will have more of a transformative effect on the young persons whom God places in my
sphere of influence than anything I could possibly say about the Greeks and Romans. I think that
students are more concerned about who I am for them than what I say to them, a reality I have
been reminded of on a number of occasions during my time at Asbury: when students write me
notes of appreciation; when they remember me with gifts and souvenirs from their travels; when
they so generously and lovingly make a long-time dream of visiting Rome come true; or when
they just want to get together for a cup of coffee.

At the 2005 Senior Chapel I was named an honorary member of the Vessel Class. I received
a small hand-blown amphora—a symbol of the class—as a tangible expression of the honor.
That cobalt blue vase displayed on a bookshelf in my office serves as an ever-present reminder
that God wants to use me as a vessel of his grace to be poured out on those students he sends to
me.
Although I have been at Asbury for some time now, I can still remember the sense of fulfillment I experienced when I walked into class on my first day. I still have those moments when I smile to think that God led me to Asbury, and I am so grateful for the privilege of being able to live out my vocation on this campus. I am quick to recognize just how blessed I am to have the opportunity of sharing my passion for classics with truly wonderful students at a Christian liberal arts university. It is a blessing which I do not take lightly. I acknowledge that it is a gift from God, an expression of his grace. So it is that each interaction I have with my students has the potential of becoming an integration of faith and learning.