Divine Abundance: Leisure, the Basis of Academic Culture

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> The fundamental human questions - how to live and how to die - thus appear to be excluded from the context of rationality and are left to the sphere of subjectivity. Consequently, the issue that brought universities into being - the question of the true and the good - in the end disappears to be replaced by the question of feasibility. This then is the great challenge to Catholic Universities: to impart knowledge in the perspective of true rationality, different from that of today which largely prevails, in accordance with a reason open to the question of the truth and to the great values inscribed in being itself, hence, open to the transcendent, to God.[1]
>
> Pope Benedict XVI

In this deeply distorted utilitarian view of knowledge described by Pope Benedict XVI, values are an imposed part of the nature of things. My book describes an alternative ontology, one in which being is not neutral but always already oriented toward communion with God and others. As Augustine famously states, « [Y]ou have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you ». So understood, being and communion are convertible: being is «always being-with »[2]. This ontology enables us to understand why leisure is the basis of academic culture. As Josef Pieper emphasizes, leisure flows from the conviction that being is not our own; intrinsic to all being is the reality of gift. Genuine leisure, far from being mere vacation or entertainment, opens us to a Divine abundance, and thus to a truth, beauty and goodness not our own.

Chapter 1: Academic stories that hold us captive

In this chapter, I identify the four dominant stories that diminish the modern academy: 1) secularization, 2) disenchantment, 3) excellence and 4) diversity. I analyze each of these in turn in order to show how they are ultimately stories of scarcity, and thus unable fully to embrace the true purpose of education.

A founding myth of the secularization story is the famous clash between Galileo and the church. As is well known, Galileo's discovery that the earth rotates around the sun was in conflict with the long held conviction that the earth stood still. In the familiar account, the church silences Galileo, the hero, who defended truth against a slow and dogmatic authority. The moral of this plot is that a benighted church must, at best, stay in a religious sphere and not impede the

[1] Pope Benedict XVI, « Address at the Inauguration of the Academic Year at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart ».
[2] Schindler, *Ordering Love, Liberal Societies and the Memory of God*, 446.

quest for real knowledge[3]. What this secularization story fails to see is that the invention of secular space itself relies upon prior faith convictions. The more basic question is not « secular or religious? » but «which theological convictions are in fact already shaping the academy? ». The secularization story ultimately relies upon a dualism between the spiritual and the material, placing the spiritual in a sphere separate from the world of politics, science, and academics and so forth.

The second story, the story of disenchantment, regards miracles and religious rituals as primitive, unenlightened phenomena or worse, mere superstition or myth. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of modern liberal protestant theology, embodied this story in his quest to speak to the cultured despisers of religion of his day. To provide a « rational » account of faith, he developed an understanding of religion as an awareness of absolute dependence on a larger whole. The scientists and poets, he claimed, were in fact the truly religious. Thus, to be religious is to be truly cultured. In tying religion to culture in this way, however, Schleiermacher regarded the German culture as most fully religious, thus underwriting a disturbing nationalism. The disenchantment story fails to see how some myth, even if deeply distorted, inevitably shapes the academic imagination.

The third story—academic excellence—betrays a confusion about what constitutes « excellence » in eduction. Excellence refers to outstanding research and teaching, service, and academic freedom understood as freedom from authority. This understanding defines « excellence » apart from the *qualifier* « Catholic or Protestant, British or American »[4]. The assumption is that excellence can be secured in purely procedural ways, i.e., hiring top professors, attracting the brightest students and securing lucrative grants. Such an understanding of excellence, however, underwrites a thoroughly mechanistic ontology that separates procedural facts from subjectively chosen values. The shadow good that tacitly shapes such excellence is in reality a market society where the language of choice prevails. As Adrian Pabst puts it: « the dominant language of "choice" legitimates the extension of free-market mechanisms (aided and abetted by the regulatory state) into virtually all areas of socio-economic and cultural life—

[3] For an alternative account of this popular Galileo story, see Langford, *Galileo.* Langford states that « one can still find those who use the Galileo affair to argue against the doctrinal authority of the pope and to infer that the Church was, and is, a sworn enemy of modern science and human progress », xiii. He argues, « The condemnation of Galileo was not inevitable », xv.
[4] Hesburgh, *The Challenge and Promise*, 3–4.

including education, health, the family, and sex ».[5] Such implicit academic formation—into a market society—is one where human bonds are reduced to contract and self-interest, and where concepts such as the common good become simply incomprehensible.

Finally, the story of pluralism is reflected in a university or college's belief in diversity as such. While diversity oriented toward a shared purpose is enriching, more often than not the modern university welcomes diversity for diversity's sake. Numerous Christian colleges and universities, for the sake of such anemic diversity, have interpreted their own particular tradition as a negative force. The inevitable result has been the dislocation of Christian colleges and universities from their sponsoring churches and traditions since it seems incoherent to privilege any one tradition over another. As Christian colleges and universities have embraced diversity, their allegiance has shifted from the church to the academic guild and nation.

As the philosopher George Grant rightly asks, « How can we do a proper job of education unless we have some clarity as to what education is for? »[6]. The stories above assume that the purpose of education is to abandon naïve beliefs, aim for a generic excellence or welcome uncritically a diversity of values. These stories, however, distort our academic lives by leaving no resources to embrace the Divine goodness and truth that permeate all creation.

Chapter 2: The logic of being: recovering the depth of Divine abundance

In this chapter, I argue that a more truthful understanding of the academy requires an ontology grounded in Divine abundance. I turn specifically to the thought of Aquinas as well as contemporary thinkers William H. Poteat, and David L. Schindler, all of whom describe created being—including academic being—as oriented toward a Good greater than itself.

For Aquinas created being is related to Divine being but in a way that reveals the richness of an incomprehensible dissimilarity. Aquinas' analogical use of « essence » and « existence » of both creation and God illuminates the gift of created being and the Triune source of all that is. To say that created being is both actual and potential is to say that all of creation is mysteriously grounded in the abundance of God. All cosmic being is a sign that points to an ever more

[5] Adrian Pabst, « Introduction », 19.

[6] Grant, « The Paradox of Democratic Education », 173. Grant notes that common responses to these questions include 1) teaching students how to think, 2) instilling values and 3) adjusting to the world. In response to the first, Grant argues that one must give « some view of what really matters in life ». In other words, « why is it good to think? » To the second, Grant argues that values depend on what is real. « For example, if a man believes that the struggle for animal existence is the underlying truth of all nature and history, obviously the virtue of brotherhood will not seem valuable », Grant, 175. In response to the third argument that education is essentially functional, Grant says that this turns universities into « servants of the expanding economy », Grant, 169.

generous Giver. An ontological gratuity thus marks the heart of all created being that when actualized returns the world to its Source through communion with God. Thus, the natural is not that which somehow exists in a domain apart from God; the natural is rather that which lives into the gift of being. Rightly understood, a Christian perspective is not added to an otherwise neutral being. All being is oriented toward a telos; gift, communion and love animate being from the very beginning. This is why Aquinas can say that « goodness and being are really the same… »[7]. Grounded in Divine abundance, Aquinas' ontology provides a way of seeing how such wealth might yet sustain the academy.

The contemporary philosopher William H. Poteat describes modernity as suffering from a « self-inflicted amnesia ». A « wasting disease », Poteat states, « has afflicted the human spirit, perhaps mortally, for now more than 300 years ». Thus, we have « simultaneously believed that we are gods and that we are nothing. This pitiless dialectic rends our souls from our bodies and suspends us in a lethal skepticism that at once flatters us and isolates us from our human reality…»[8]. In order to recover from this isolating amnesia, Poteat (influenced by Michael Polanyi) turns to an understanding of knowing/being as bonding. « For me to be bonded is for me to indwell an "other," sometimes prereflexively, sometimes in reflection, from within my mindbody »[9]. While we may indwell a poem, a mathematical equation, or a prayer differently, there is nothing inherently more real or superior about one of these ways of being and knowing. An ever-faithful God who creates the world through the word (*logos*) provides the analogy that enables Poteat both to describe the mindbody as bonded and to describe our speaking as always making worlds appear. As Poteat puts it, « If one's analysis of what language is and does proceeds without reference to there being speakers and hearers of language it is most unlikely that one would discover the foundation of the meaning of words in our oral/aural exchanges. This foundation, our usage, is dynamic and survives the passage of time, *an analogy of God's fidelity*, securing the assertorial weight of our <u>spoken</u> word »[10]. Our incarnate mindbody being in bringing forth worlds through speaking, dancing, drawing, gestures and so forth is analogous to God's speaking worlds into being. In some ways like Aquinas' analogy of God as fully

[7] Aquinas, *ST*, 1, 5, 1.
[8] Poteat, *Recovering the Ground*, 187.
[9] Ibid., 208. Poteat uses « mindbody » to show that any use of « mind » or « body » is always derivative. All modes of knowing, he argues, are parasitic on our embodied being in the world, which itself relies upon a tacit and omnipresent *logos*.
[10] Poteat, personal correspondence, 5.

actual/potential, so also Poteat is saying that God's words are always promised/fulfilled. To be *creatures* in God's image is analogously to bring forth worlds through faithful speech. We are free to see, for example, that petition for bread at a store is no more real than « give us this day our daily bread, » though the reality may be of a different kind. This is not relativism but an affirmation of creation's goodness, a goodness logically dependent on God's fidelity.

Finally, I turn to David L. Schindler who states that modernity, while no doubt contributing to the good in many ways, has nonetheless grown accustomed to a distorted anthropocentrism. The problem is not that we have simply focused on humans, « but that we have done so while forgetting being and God…». Such forgetfulness « helps to bring about the forgetfulness of our own *creatureliness* and that of all other *cosmic entities* »[11]. In contrast to the assumption that being is essentially neutral—a tree, for example, is basically roots, leaves and branches—Schindler claims that being and communion are convertible. If being is intrinsically oriented toward communion, ultimately with God, then no act of knowing can be entirely neutral with respect to God. « Every methodical inquiry will therefore of necessity involve an *abstraction* of some sort from God, in a manner that carries *some definite sense of openness or closure to God* »[12].

Aquinas, Poteat, and Schindler share in common a criticism of any dualism that separates being from purpose, mind from body or nature from grace: all of which leave the academy adrift in a sea of unending interpretation and unable to speak of purpose. Each of our thinkers describes, albeit in different ways, an understanding of being as both created and oriented toward God. Being and goodness (Aquinas), being and *logos* (Poteat), and being and communion/love (Schindler) are convertible. To be is to be oriented toward the One who is the abundant source of all that is. Such an ontology sees the world's destiny, as Augustine rightly understood, as resting in God.

Chapter 3: Leisure in the academy

Leisure, as the basis of academic culture, orients the academy toward its true end. Common understandings of leisure today see it as vacation or as useful for rest in order to work better and be more productive. In *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, however, Josef Pieper makes the astonishing claim that « no one who looks to leisure simply to restore his working powers will

[11] Schindler, *Ordering Love*, 5, my emphasis.
[12] Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 217.

ever discover the fruit of leisure… »[13]. In fact, busyness is a symptom of a lack of true leisure. Pieper rather states that the deepest spring that feeds leisure is divine worship. Whereas work understood as purely human effort results from and produces scarcity (a refusal to be before God and thus alienation from God), leisure produces wealth understood as receiving our lives as gift and communion with God. Since leisure rooted in worship makes true work possible, it lies at the heart of an authentic academic culture[14].

In the academy and dominant culture today, the inability to practice true leisure is a function not only of distorted beliefs but also of « untaught bodies »[15]. To learn how to practice leisure well, it is necessary to learn renewed habits of speaking and bodily being. I look at two practices in particular: singing and Eucharistic feasting. These might seem odd practices to consider since they are typically associated, at best, with the extracurricular sphere of the academy. Augustine, however, in his classical treatment of music in *De Musica*, states that God *is* music: a divine relation, harmony and unity. God extends this harmony to all of creation, most fully through the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14). Music and singing are not mere extra-curricular activities but crucial to the harmony of being itself: « the culture of singing is also the culture of being »[16]. Attending to the polyphony of creation enables us to listen for harmony in the midst of distinctive voices, different ways of knowing and divergent kinds of knowledges. What makes these differences harmonious is that they are, in the final analysis, evoked by God. This is not to deny possible conflict and discord but rather to say that a musically formed academic culture lives in gratitude, attuned to seeking harmony in all of its endeavors.

In the eucharist, most fully, participants are trained to see that communion is not something added to being. Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann describes original sin as ceasing to see one's whole life in dependence on « the whole world as a sacrament of communion with God…The only real fall of man is his non-eucharistic life in a non-eucharistic world »[17]. To learn the grammar of authentic leisure through eucharistic feasting is to

[13] Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, 31.
[14] As Pieper observes, we see this connection etymologically in the fact that in Greek, leisure is *skole* and in Latin, it is *scola*. Pieper, *Leisure*, 2,
[15] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion,* Asad states that « the inability to enter into communion with God becomes a function of untaught bodies », 77.
[16] Pope Benedict XVI, « Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI ». Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes, with Romano Gaurdini, that « the liturgy it is not a question of *doing* something but of *being* something », in Benedict, *Unity*, 33.
[17] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 7.

learn that academic being, like all being, is inherently oriented toward communion: thus toward gift, reception and gratitude.

One could object that these practices do not belong in the academy; they are irrelevant in the real world of research, labs, learning, teaching and so forth. But this is exactly the point at stake. How do we understand, see and receive the real world? The logic of faithful singing and the grammar of eucharistic feasting form participants to see the real world, including the academic world, as ultimately a one of Divine harmony and abundance.

Chapter 4: A place of plenitude: leisure and academic space

At conferences on Christian identity and higher education, it is not uncommon to hear participants use « we » when speaking of the academy, and « church » when referring to an entity that lies elsewhere in an entirely different space. The quandary is how to relate them. This same division between the academy and the church is internal to the academy itself when, for example, theology is seen as irrelevant to the study of economics. It will be tempting to fit leisure into this dominant spatial pattern. Leisure grounded in communion, contemplation and ultimately Divine worship could easily seem to belong outside of the academic core of the institution. I challenge this assumption, however, by arguing that leisure is not one *space* among others, but a *place* that pertains to the whole academy.

The virtue *studiositas* can foster the recovery of leisure as a place in this sense. The early church fathers and Christians up through the Renaissance made a distinction between the vice of *curiositas* and the virtue *studiositas*. Both of these habits seek knowledge, but do so for different purposes. *Curiositas* is an appetite for owning new knowledge; it seeks novelty and « ideally what no one knows »[18]. For *studiositas*, by contrast, novelty is impossible « because anything that can be known by any one of us is already known to God and has been given to us as unmerited gift »[19]. *Studiositas* is a virtue that trains a person and the academy more broadly to see all knowing as embedded in a larger whole: a « world of gift and participation to which the proper response is one of gratitude and delight »[20]. *Studiositas* thus places one before a Divine generosity that a person dominated by *curiositas* cannot see or even imagine. As a collective virtue, *studiositas* enables an institution to *resist* divorcing study from prayer, faith from

[18] Paul Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite, A Theological Grammar*, 22.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Griffiths, Lecture, my emphasis.

knowledge, or the academy from the church. Some might regard *studiositas* as a kind of sentimental gesture, interpreting it as simply an optional inward disposition, separate from the real work of study, learning and research. *Studiositas*, however, provides room to see how Divine wisdom can shape not only our pursuit of knowledge but also, more profoundly, a whole way of life together.

Chapter 5: A different rhythm: leisure and academic time

The turn to leisure as both a practice and a way of being not only reconfigures how we think about academic space, it also transforms how we imagine and live in academic time. Understood rightly, the key question is not « whether or not liturgy? » but « which liturgy? ». Most academic liturgies are driven by productivity and competition—market time—such that leisure seems at best taking a break or at worst merely a waste of time. James K.A. Smith describes, for example, how the typically raucous ritual of initiation known as « frosh week » (for first year students) is merely the mirror image of time as productivity. Such « leisure » prepares students for the real time of hard work. Yet, as Pieper emphasizes, this liturgical cycle of vacation and productivity in actuality produces great scarcity: a turning away from the deeper springs of true being.

In contrast to such scarcity, I describe an alternative understanding of time as abundant: time is a participation in the heights and depths of Divine plenitude. To talk about time in terms of such plenitude might sound odd, especially in the academy. Yet no college of university is ever lives in purely neutral time. A Trinitarian theology makes possible an understanding of time of intrinsically participatory, and of freedom as gift and response.

In this light, my analysis considers how the power of the Daily Office, or daily communal prayer, draws an institution into time as watchfulness, receptivity and doxology. It enables an institution to remember and to participate in God's memory, a participation marked by a contemplative receiving and active giving in all our endeavors. As such, it provides a path toward hope in the midst of modern fragmentation.

Chapter 6: Making leisure more possible

If it is true that we can only live in the word we have learned to say,[21] then how do we learn habits of speech that open us more fully to seeing leisure as the true basis of academic

[21] Stanley Hauerwas emphasizes throughout his writings that you can only live in the world you can see, and you can only see the world you have learned to say. Both Iris Murdoch and Ludwig Wittgenstein have influenced

culture? In this concluding chapter, I turn to two additional practices that make faithful speech and leisure more possible: the habit or virtue of paying attention as described by Simone Weil and the practice of friendship as sacred knowing.

First, however, I analyze how *acedia* or sloth is an academic vice that obscures true leisure. While a symptom of *acedia* may be laziness, more relevant to the modern academy are the symptoms of busyness and non-stop work. A person or institution suffering from *acedia* is unable to rest in being and knowing as gift, ultimately from God. Specific symptoms of *acedia* in the modern academy are boredom and neglect. R.J. Snell describes a modern malaise characterized by « ontological boredom ». Before a « vast array of numbingly indifferent choices » such a culture denies « transcendental beauty, goodness and truth in the mediation of particular finite forms »[22]. To Snell's insightful diagnosis of boredom as a collective symptom of modern *acedia*, I also turn to neglect as a symptom of *acedia* in the modern academy. Neglect is a sluggishness toward the Divine good or even ignoring it altogether as when a teacher of science or poetry fails to consider the relation of poetic or scientific beauty to final beauty.

In contrast to such vice, Simone Weil argues that study understood as paying attention is a road to sanctity; studying poetic or scientific beauty can be a path to discovering final beauty. On Weil's understanding, one does not study merely to secure an extrinsic goal; one studies to become a particular kind of person. Even paying attention to failure enables one to grow in humility, becoming more fully receptive to others and thus to knowing as gift. Weil thus makes the surprising claim, « Every school exercise, thought of in this way, is like a sacrament »[23]. If a sacrament, broadly defined, is a visible means of an invisible grace, then Weil is arguing that study can be a visible means of grace. By training the habit of attention, study can draw one towards the love of God and neighbor. Weil's analysis implies that just as prayer and study cannot be separated so neither can leisure and the academy. Both are ways of becoming a certain kind of person or institution. Apart from certain virtues—humility and love—our study will disfigure our being. In our study and learning, we are not masters of a machine, or of a cosmos that is dumb and blind. We are rather « humble slaves, » waiting on Another.

Hauerwas on this point. Wittgenstein, for example, emphasizes that learning a language is learning a form of life. Hauerwas cites Murdoch in *The Sovereignty of the Good*: « I can only choose within the world I can *see*, in the moral sense of "see" which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort », Hauerwas, « Murdochian Muddles », 190.

[22] Snell, *Acedia and Its Discontents*, 71.

[23] Weil, *Waiting on God*, 57.

To say leisure is the basis of academic culture is also to see the necessity of friendship as the way to Wisdom. Such friendship is not mere personal preference but rather participates in the logic of cosmic love as constitutive of all created being. Samuel Kimbriel, in his analysis of friendship as sacred knowing, contrasts the disengaged self with the porous self. Whereas the modern disengaged self believes he can acquire knowledge on his own through self-mastery, the porous self receives knowing as always a gift of communion (friendship) with God and others. It is in fact impossible for humanity to exist in any kind of « autonomous or "self-constituted" fashion apart from God »[24]. The modern disengaged academy is in many ways an image of the isolated self writ large. Such disengagement undermines the truth of the academy as porous toward love and wisdom[25]. The practice and politics of friendship shaped ultimately by the economy of Divine love is an alternative to the politics of the disengaged self that severs friendship from knowing.

Rightly understood, the challenge today is not how to get God back into the academy. It is rather how to become persons capable of seeking and listening to God in all places. This would be an impossible task if it were not for the gift of friendship, most fully the Friendship of God. Such Divine Friendship is not intended to reduce God to a buddy or a pastime. Rather Divine Friendship identifies how God, the source of all that is, desires communion with all of creation. It is only in light of this cosmic logic that leisure as the basis of academic culture makes sense. Such Divine Abundance opens the academy up to a Mystery so rich, so illuminating, and so profound that it exceeds human understanding even as it is the beginning of wisdom.

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[24] Kimbriel, *Friendship as Sacred Knowing*, 81.
[25] Kimbriel nonetheless emphasizes that even in ignorance, the Inner Teacher haunts human souls for whom to « exist at all is to exist as a moment in a broader movement of love . . . » ibid., 168.

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