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# TEACHING: PROFESSION OR VOCATION?

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*Underneath teaching there lies a conceptual framework through which we view its role and purpose. Different frameworks vary in outlook and imply contrasting attitudes and values. Which one we adopt impacts on what and how we teach. This study explores what it means to think of teaching as a profession versus a vocation. Its focus is restricted to teaching at the university level, but the analysis can be applied to other aspects of an academic career. The issue is of particular interest in relation to the Christian or Catholic identity of denominational colleges and universities. The intent is to show how the conceptual framework of a profession versus a vocation implies a number of contrasting attitudes and values towards teaching. Although these contrasts need not be incompatible, they are in dialectical tension within academic institutions: excess of one highlights absence of the other. Finally, the study suggests that teaching as a vocation more directly promotes a distinctively Christian or Catholic identity in denominational institutions of higher education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Is teaching a profession or a vocation? The question implies different ways of thinking about teaching. There are other ways to think about teaching, as art for instance (Barrell, 1995); or the contrast Bosetti (1995) draws between filling-a-pail philosophy and lighting-a-fire philosophy of teaching.

This essay focuses on teaching at the post-secondary level, for “the way we think of teaching has an influence on the way in which we teach” (Hare, 1993, p. 101). How we think about teaching, what it is and what it ought to be, amounts to a conceptual framework, a set of fundamental beliefs within which we understand and come to give meaning to what we do (Brookfield, 1990; Taylor, 1989). Different conceptual frameworks also imply different values and priorities; they incorporate “a crucial set of qualitative distinctions”; within a framework we operate “with the sense that some action, or mode of life, or mode of feeling is incomparably higher than the others which are more readily available to us” (Taylor, 1989, p. 19). Whether we think of teaching as a profession or think of it as a vocation does make a dif-

ference in how we deal with students, what we do in the classroom and beyond, how we interact with colleagues, what commitments we are willing to make, what expectations can be reasonably imposed, what career goals we might set, by what standards we should measure success, and how we view our relationship with the institution in which we work.

Although this discussion is specific to teaching in the context of higher education, the same question can be asked of other components, such as research or administration, and of an academic career in general. Indeed, against the background of Weber's (1980) notable discussion of an academic career, Schwehn (1993) has taken up the issue of an academic vocation in the modern university. However, despite much that is of interest, Schwehn takes the concept of a vocation for granted. That is, Schwehn describes the content of an academic vocation, what is, or ought to be, included; our focus here explores in what sense or why teaching is, or should be, a vocation. Thus, contrasting the conceptual framework of a profession with that of a vocation serves to give theoretical clarity on the one hand and practical direction on the other.

The issue is of particular interest – though not exclusively so – in the context of Christian and Catholic education. In North America, at least, Catholic higher education has undergone a process of laicization in the second half of the 20th century resulting in leadership and control under lay persons (Gallin, 1996, 2000; Higgins & Letson, 2002; McConica, 1990). Prior to the 1960s, there was no debate about the identity, nature, and mission of Catholic colleges and universities in the mind of the Church community. It was taken for granted because religious orders had founded most of these institutions, exercised direct control in their governance, and provided personnel to fill administrative and faculty positions (Attridge, 1994; Gallin, 1996, 2000; Gleason, 1994). Not only did clergy and members of religious orders give financial support by way of contributed salaries, they also bestowed an identity and ethos on the institution that marked them as distinctively Catholic. As institutions came to rely less on religious orders and more on lay persons as trustees, administrative personnel, and faculty, they brought with them, alongside their areas of expertise, a different cultural ethos and outlook (Gallin, 2000; Gleason, 1994). As Greeley (1967) noted, "The norms, values and administrative styles governing a religious community, however proper (or improper) they may be for the community, are simply not appropriate for a higher educational institution in American society" (p. 372). Consequently, Gallin (1992) notes that "with a more diverse student body, a decline in the number of religious, and the visible changes in discipline and social mores on campuses, the general public, as well as the various constituencies, found it hard to know what made the university 'Catholic'" (p. 1). The Catholic identity of colleges and universities remains

an issue of concern (Gleason, 1992; Hesburgh, 1994; Higgins & Letson, 2002; McConica, 1990). The question whether a teaching career should be properly viewed as a profession or a vocation contributes to the issue of Catholic identity by reflecting on the role of faculty within a Catholic college or university.

Other denominational institutions may not have experienced the rapid and sometimes drastic changes that challenged Catholic colleges and universities. Nevertheless, these institutions have also experienced the pressures of secularization (Burtchaell, 1998; Marsden, 1994), thereby raising questions concerning Christian identity (Holmes, 2001; Marsden, 1992). For if Christian institutions claim to be different from their secular counterparts, then their *raison d'être* is to be distinctively Christian, in academic programs as well as overall ambience (Holmes, 1987, 2001; Pazmiño, 1997). If so, we could expect some difference in approach toward academics in general and toward teaching in particular. Hence, questions arise within a denominational context, whether Christian or Catholic, concerning the role of faculty in their teaching as well as in their research or administrative capacities. The issue of profession versus vocation, in part, helps to address these questions by clarifying what faculty are, and should be, about.

This essay will address four distinct, but related issues: (a) the conceptual framework of a profession; (b) the conceptual framework of a vocation; (c) the conflict or compatibility between these contrasting conceptual frameworks; and (d) reflections on the day-to-day activity of teaching and on the issue of Christian or Catholic identity in light of these conceptual frameworks.

## TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

Although it is commonly taken for granted that teaching in particular and academics in general are professions, in what sense they are is not always made clear (Farber & Bousfield, 1958; Gilliss, 1995; Myers & Myers, 1995; Woodring, 1960). The Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, refers to the "professional competence" of university faculty, urging an integration of academic disciplines with Christian wisdom (John Paul II, 1990, §22). Other Church documents acknowledge the professional status, professional activity, professional preparation, and professional formation of lay teachers in Catholic schools that presumably include higher education (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977, 1982, 1988). However, nowhere in these documents is there an explicit characterization of what the professionalism of teachers might involve.

There are two contexts that help to clarify the meaning of "profession" and "professional" in their application to teaching: one is in reference to such recognized professions as medicine and law; the other is in the contrast we

make between a professional and an amateur in such fields as entertainment and sport.

Sociological theorists have sought to identify a profession and its membership either in terms of their social function or in terms of their collective action (Macdonald, 1995). The former functionalist approach, advanced by Light (1974) and applied to academics by Dill (1982), looks for distinctive traits inherent to a profession, whereas the latter interactionist approach, advanced by Larson (1977) and modified by Macdonald (1995), considers how occupations become professions. Either approach, however, implies a common, general conception. In this view, a profession is an organized group of individuals that acquires a monopoly over specialized knowledge and skills that are of acknowledged social benefit. Whether the monopoly is simply assumed, as on a functionalist account, or gradually acquired, as on an interactionist account, expertise and knowledge form the basis of professional work. The level of expertise and standards of performance – a professional ethics – are set and maintained by members of the profession. Consequently, professionals in this sense claim autonomy, together with an accountability, toward the designated work of the profession. Because of the standards and ethical guidelines under which their work is performed, members of a profession also claim, by entitlement and right, remuneration for their work, a fee for service.

In the case of such recognized professions as medicine, law, or engineering, the label has become a legal designation. These professions are self-regulated by organizations, which are themselves authorized by law to do so. That is, the knowledge-base of a profession is “certified and credentialed,” usually by way of degrees, diplomas or certificates “from establishments or organizations whose standing is widely known and understood” (Macdonald, 1995, p. 161). Standard professions entail a licensing or certification procedure. Those who enter the profession can do so only by demonstrating the level of expertise and skill required to obtain certification. Those who wish to stay within the profession can do so only by maintaining a sufficient level of expertise and skill to keep certification. However, certification or a license to practice goes together with liability, usually recognized legally as well. In other words, a level of competence goes hand in hand with accountability on the part of the practitioner. The physician stands behind the medical treatment she prescribes (albeit within a range of probability). The engineer guarantees the soundness of the structures he builds (barring an unforeseen act of God). And if the treatment should fail or the structure should collapse, there is the recourse of a malpractice complaint to the governing body or the courts. Thus, a designated profession implies a set of standards that regulates the activities of the profession. The standards are stipulated, implemented, and enforced by those organizations that govern the professions.

The concept of a profession that emerges from a legal and sociological standpoint can be characterized in terms of expertise, governance, autonomy, and accountability. These are traits of a profession in a functionalist view. They are the results or intended outcomes of a process of professionalization on an interactionist account.

However, it is not obvious that teaching fits this legal and sociological conception of a profession. True, at the K-12 level, there are teacher associations that govern a certification procedure and the conduct of teachers. Emphasis on professional work of teachers at the primary or secondary level tends to focus on autonomy and independence in determining teaching practices (Gambell, 1995; Henderson, 1992) and even on rights in curriculum development and delivery (Chan, 1995). Concerns over “deprofessionalization” likewise center on the loss of autonomy amidst increasingly bureaucratic institutions (Gilliss, 1995; Runté, 1995). However, at the college or university level, there is neither a formal certification procedure for teaching nor any formal association that regulates standards of teaching practices or that governs teaching conduct. The regulation of teaching activity tends to be, by and large, through institutional procedures, rather than through professional bodies as in the case of either medical or legal practice. Despite significant faculty autonomy in curriculum and pedagogy, it is still the institution that determines what courses faculty teach and which students they teach. Unlike other professions in which practitioners can choose, or refuse, to take on clients, teachers have students chosen for them through assigned courses.

Indeed, in a sociological analysis, Light (1974) differentiated research activity from teaching activity, noted that the scholarly work of research is also pursued outside of university settings, and thus distinguished a scholarly profession from an academic profession. A scholarly profession “is an occupation with the attributes of a profession whose core activity is the advancement of knowledge”; an academic profession “is that subset of a scholarly profession with academic appointments at institutions of higher education” (p. 11). Several consequences emerge from this characterization. One consequence, as Dill (1982) noted, is that teaching and administrative duties “are not core activities for the academic professional, but institutional activities or expectations” (p. 258). Apparently, for Light (1974) the advancement of knowledge does not include the dissemination of knowledge: “If scholarship is the [academic] profession’s core activity, then teaching undergraduates is not” (p. 14). But even if we allow the inclusion of teaching within the core activities of an academic professional, another consequence is that there is no single academic profession; rather, the academic profession of faculty is discipline specific (Light, 1974). Where faculty do share in the characteristics of a profession – that is, expertise, governance, autonomy, and accountability – is in their academic specializations such as

philosophy or sociology or literature. At the college or university level, faculty are more inclined to identify themselves in terms of their academic discipline. They are more likely to say "I am a philosopher" or "I teach philosophy" than to refer simply to teaching or research as their career (Light, 1974). Schwehn (1993) recounts the "combination of mild alarm and studied astonishment" he received upon noting that he lists "college teacher" under occupation on his tax form, unlike the label of sociologist, psychologist, or historian used by his colleagues (pp. vii-viii).

Thus to think of teaching as a profession along the lines of such standard professions as medicine, law, or engineering remains problematic. Although those in the so-called teaching profession may wish for the ideals of independence and self-governance, the analogy with other professions falters. There is a semblance of independence and self-governance within an area of academic specialization and within the research component of an academic career, but not so with respect to a teaching role *per se* nor with respect to the administrative functions of an academic career. The life and culture of an academic at the university level, or of a teacher at any level, are markedly and professionally different from that of physicians, lawyers, or engineers (Henderson, 1992; Light, 1974; Ryan & Cooper, 1995). Hence, some question whether the concept of a profession is applicable to education at all (Runté, 1995), but they do so in comparison to the standard professions of medicine, law, or engineering.

However, another way to elucidate the concept is in terms of the contrast between a professional and an amateur. One association with the term "professional" is simply that of remuneration for an activity; another is that of a highly developed skill or function. The first is the fact that professionals receive pay for what they do, whereas amateurs do not. The second, and more significant, contrast is that being a professional conveys the connotation, not only of a high level, but of a consistent level, of performance. Professional athletes or professional entertainers, for instance, can be counted on to perform in diverse, and sometimes adverse, circumstances; they can, and often do, perform regardless of personal mood, motivation, or even injury. Neither the expectations nor the level of performance of a professional is demanded of an amateur. The contrast is aptly conveyed by such expressions as "She is such a professional" or "He is just an amateur." What is implied here is a certain standard of performance that is, or ought to be, met by a professional but need not be met by an amateur.

This sense of professional is akin to the Greek concept of excellence or virtue, a developed capability to perform well under any circumstance. In the words of Aristotle,

every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it

is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well; e.g., the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work good; for it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well....Therefore, if this is true in every case, the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well. (1970, II.6, 1106a, 15-24)

In a similar vein, Gordon (1995) alluded to "virtues" and "virtue-like qualities" that are "at the heart of good teaching" (p. 62). And with allusions to Plato, Schwehn (1993) argued that an "interdependence of moral and intellectual virtues" (p. 47) is indispensable, not only for minimally effective learning and teaching but for doing such activities well. For the Greeks, the virtue of an athlete rendered him into a good athlete and the virtue of a soldier rendered him into a good soldier. As a result, a good athlete is also good at his sport and a good soldier is good at his assigned tasks. In the ancient Greek culture, virtue surpassed mediocrity in the same way that a professional actor in our culture surpasses an amateur actor or that a professional athlete surpasses an amateur athlete.

The concept of a professional and its related professional activity in contrast with amateur status would seem a better fit for teaching and its range of activities than the earlier comparison with standard professions. The implied contrast can apply to an academic career in general and to all of its conventional components: teaching, research or administration. In an allusion to the contrast, McCluskey (1967) listed "amateurish administration" (p. 415) among problems facing Catholic higher education in the 1960s. Ramsden (1992) lamented that "for too long we have relied in higher education on teaching that is essentially an amateur affair," recommending instead "a professional approach to teaching" that, like other professions, employs "theoretical knowledge on which to base their activities" (p. 8). Similarly, the contrast is implied in the increasing recognition of professional preparation for college or university level teaching (Attridge, 1994), in the developing excellence of universities because of "the professionalization of the faculty" (Lent, 1994, p. 151) or in on-going professional development of teachers (Chan, 1995; Gambell, 1995; Gilliss, 1995; Schaub, 2000; Traviss, 2000). Thus if academics are professionals in this sense, then they claim an expertise or excellence at what they do and for which they should get paid. As professionals, they are good at teaching or research or administration because of their acquired skill or expertise.

But it might still be objected that the expertise or excellence of teaching is discipline specific; teaching is always qualified by what is being taught. Someone could be considered a professional philosopher and even be good at teaching philosophy but that is not to say that he is a professional teacher as such nor that he is good at teaching *per se*. However, skill or expertise in



teaching is not only discipline specific. There is admittedly more to teaching than expert knowledge of a subject matter. Although there is an interconnection, there is also a difference between subject matter and pedagogy, between what is taught and how it is taught, and between curriculum and instruction. Effective teaching requires a certain level of pedagogical expertise, what Ramsden (1992) calls "a body of didactic knowledge" and which constitutes "the professional authority of the academic-as-teacher" (p. 9). Teaching demands a competent and consistent level of skills and functions. Because of this competence, teachers legitimately claim independence in how they teach, if not also in what they teach, and justifiably seek remuneration for their teaching work.

Thus, on the concept of a professional in contrast with an amateur, teaching in general, as well as the more specialized teaching of specific academic disciplines, can be understood to comprise a professional activity, the individual to be a professional, and the field to be a profession.

On either of the two analyses, of considering standard professions or of noting a contrast between professional and amateur status, common aspects emerge that are central to the conceptual framework of professional activity. These are a commitment to standards and accountability in terms of those standards. In the case of teaching, it implies a commitment to some standards that do and should govern the various skills and activities that comprise the teaching and learning process, even if the specific standards are not well defined. To think of teaching as a profession, or to think of an instructor as a professional is, on the part of an instructor, to assume the responsibility of providing consistently good teaching and, on the part of others – students, administrators, or the general public – to be entitled to expect consistently good teaching. Consequently, a main focus of conceptualizing teaching as a profession is on the standards that define good teaching.

There is a further aspect of a profession or professional activity worth noting. This is the fact that individuals usually choose to enter a profession; they select a professional career from a range of options. Their selection arises from an interest in the profession, coupled with the requisite expertise and skills.

To view teaching as a profession, then, is to acknowledge a number of factors. First, the various activities that comprise the teaching process are done for financial remuneration. As a profession, there is a financial value attached; professional teachers ought to be paid for what they do. Second, there is an expectation of a certain level of expertise. In the case of university level teaching, this expectation translates into appropriate knowledge of a subject matter. It also translates into relevant pedagogical skills and consistent performance in a whole spectrum of activities: the overall organization of a course, for instance, the preparation of specific classes, the delivery of lectures, the moderation of discussions, or, more recently, the use of var-

ious technological resources. Being professional in such activities implies doing them well, according to specified standards and in diverse circumstances regardless of personal feeling or whim. Third, there is accountability for both academic expertise as well as pedagogical skills. Students can, or ought to be able to, count on an instructors' knowledge of the subject matter to be correct and up-to-date; they should be able to expect competent instruction and fair treatment. And fourth, there is a component of choice. Individuals voluntarily enter the teaching profession from a range of options, although they may do so for a variety of personal reasons.

## TEACHING AS A VOCATION

Another framework within which teaching has been conceived is that of a vocation. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* notes, "By *vocation* [italics added], [a university of teachers and scholars] is dedicated to research, to teaching and to the education of students who freely associate with their teachers in a common love of knowledge" (John Paul II, 1990, §1). Elsewhere, again generically, Catholic schools are said to exercise "a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school" (CCE, 1982, §24); and Catholic lay teachers are said to "fulfill a specific Christian vocation and share an equally specific participation in the mission of the Church" (CCE, 1998, §19). In a broader Christian and explicitly post-secondary context, some have explored how "because of a scholarly vocation" Christian faith can be integrated into the various disciplines of the academy (Agee & Henry, 2003, p. xi). Others have acknowledged that Christian scholar-teachers should see their work as a vocation (Cunningham, 1994; Evans, 2003). Schwehn (1993) discussed how we do, and should, reconsider "our present-day conception of the academic vocation" within our secular universities (p. 22). While the label has wide currency in Christian, Catholic, and some secular contexts, the use of "vocation" also denotes an ambiguous concept.

In a generic sense, vocation refers to any career choice. In a more specific sense it connotes a calling in life that consists of distinctive roles or functions. The ambiguity is apparent in both Weber (1980), who defined the parameters of an academic calling, and Schwehn (1993), who reappropriated the term so as to redefine the focus of academic life. In its religious context, the concept of a vocation has an admittedly theological connotation, but it can be usefully understood in a non-theological sense as well. What, then, would it mean for an activity or role, such as teaching, research, or administration, to be a calling in life? To what and by whom is one called? What does the concept of vocation imply?

In clarifying the concept of a teaching vocation, let us start with two theological considerations. All Christians are said to have a general vocation to

witness to their beliefs or to evangelize their faith (CCE, 1982; Cunningham, 1994). Some Christians, however, such as ordained clergy or members of religious orders, are said to have a more particular vocation to a specific ministry of service within the Church. Likewise, teachers in Catholic schools are said to have a vocation to educate, not only in faith but also in the integration of faith and culture, and for the benefit of the faithful, society, and the Church overall (CCE, 1977, 1982, 1988, 1998). More specifically, Catholic school teachers are called to a ministry within the church to educate "for the integral formation of the human person" (CCE, 1982, §24) and to develop the whole person in all their capacities (CCE, 1977, 1982, 1998). In a Catholic university, the vocation of a scholar-teacher has a Christian inspiration that enables the institution "to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research and to evaluate the attainment of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person" (John Paul II, 1990, §7). Within other Christian denominational settings, some have stressed a similar integration of faith and learning, and of faith and life, as the mandate of a teaching vocation (Holmes, 1987; Hughes, 2003; Pazmiño, 1997).

In its theological sense, a vocation is an inner call that arises from one's own faith experience. It is experienced as an invitation from God, an exhortation from the person of Christ that expects a response. It imposes a role or a task directed toward the Church community, a task that in the case of teachers takes on a specific dimension not only to educate in skills or learning but also in faith.

The two aspects of call and service that emerge from a theological meaning carry over to a non-theological meaning of vocation. A vocation to a lifestyle, a career, or a social role can be understood to constitute an inner call, an imperative that imposes itself. To claim, for instance, that someone feels called to be a parent or an artist has an element of moral obligation. In this view, it is not that an individual particularly wants to be a parent or seeks to become an artist. It is, rather, that he feels impelled to become a parent or that she is convinced she should become an artist. Nevertheless, whether we respond to such a call, whether we carry out the perceived obligation, is a matter of intentional choice. Since a calling in life, if it is consciously experienced at all, is unique to each individual, one's response likewise engages one deeply and personally, both in making the choice of acceptance, or rejection, and in taking full responsibility for it.

We can further elucidate the sense of call in terms of Marcel's analysis of presence and gift. Marcel viewed human existence as an inner being or presence we encounter. The encounter offers a choice to accept or refuse one's own unique being and purpose (Marcel, 1973a, 1982a, 1982b). Marcel does not use the term vocation, although he appropriates such other theological terms as mystery and incarnation in non-theological meanings (Marcel,

1973a, 1982b). However, since an encounter with being and the fundamental choice it imposes amounts to an inner call, Marcel implies that human life is itself a vocation, a unique call to respond to the presence of being. Elsewhere, Marcel (1973b) further elucidates this concept in terms of understanding of life as a gift, presented to each individual. But a gift needs to be accepted or acknowledged. An item presented to someone is not a gift unless it has been accepted as such. A gift expresses a deeper reality to which we bear witness. Thus a gift becomes "a gage of friendship or of love" (Marcel, 1973b, p. 101). A gift implies an interpersonal dimension; it is offered by one person and received by another. And in choosing to accept a gift we also assume a personal responsibility for the gift by way of fidelity and trust. The acceptance of a gift, just as the response to a call, engages an individual personally and interpersonally. On this analysis, the concept of a vocation can be understood – theologically and non-theologically – as an inner call, an offered gift, that originates beyond ourselves, that demands an intentional response, that solicits fidelity and trust towards whoever imposes the call or offers the gift, and for which we assume a responsibility once accepted.

Another aspect of vocation that emerges from its theological meaning is that of service. In other words, the call implies a purpose individuals are invited to fulfill. As the call comes from beyond oneself, so its task and purpose extends beyond oneself as well. Thus, for instance, when Christians are expected to witness to their beliefs, they become a model to others; their call to witness is not so much for the benefit of themselves as it is for the benefit of others. When artists respond to a creative impulse, they do so not to satisfy their own interests but to respect aesthetic ideals. In either case, a vocation – a call and its response – not only acknowledges others but also is directed toward others and for that reason implies a kind of service. A vocation is inherently altruistic and interpersonal. Not only does a call or gift implied in the concept of a vocation have its origin in someone else, the direction of a vocation is toward service of someone else.

To view teaching as a vocation, then, is to acknowledge a call to serve others through the means of education and learning, be it at a primary, secondary, or post-secondary level. Such a calling may, in turn, be grounded within a religious worldview, as coming from God and forming part of a divine plan for one's particular life, but it need not be. A teaching vocation can also be grounded in a humanistic worldview, in which a call to teach can be understood to originate from those in need of teaching services. The point is that in the conceptual framework of vocation, we do not merely choose teaching from among a range of alternative careers that may suit our personal interests. Rather, we assume a teaching role and whatever is involved in fulfilling it out of a sense of duty. The role itself, moreover, is directed toward others, because it is after all their learning that is the purpose of edu-

cation. If we were to ask why we are called to teach, an obvious answer would be so that others could learn. Understood as a call and a service, the function of teaching would engage an individual in two distinct ways: personally in its various activities as an obligation more than a desire and interpersonally in acknowledging those who offer the call and those who are the recipients of its service.

Consequently, the focus of conceptualizing teaching as a vocation is more on students for whom teaching activities are carried out than it is on the teacher who performs these activities or on the institution that supports the teaching function. A similar analysis can apply to other components of an academic career: research and administration. To conceptualize these as a vocation would be to consider them as an obligation and a service toward those who would benefit from the research or to whom administrative functions are directed.

## **PROFESSION OR VOCATION?**

Are the conceptual frameworks of a profession incompatible with that of a vocation? Does one necessarily preclude the other? At first glance it might appear that they pose exclusive alternatives: teaching is either a profession or a vocation. However, they need not be exclusive of each other. It seems perfectly conceivable to consider a teaching career one's vocation in life and yet pursue it professionally or to insist that one feels called to the teaching profession and yet consider it one's duty to serve. Indeed, it is often recommended that Christian teachers view their role as more than a profession, that they view it as a vocation as well (Agee & Henry, 2003; CCE, 1982; Marty, 2003). Nevertheless, there are opposing elements within each conceptual framework that lead to inevitable tensions, tensions that are also evident within academic life for other reasons (Dill, 1982; Evans, 2003; Schwehn, 1993).

These contrasting views look in different directions; they filter a role or activity in different ways. As the above analysis demonstrates, the conceptual framework of profession views a role or activity in terms of expertise, governance, autonomy, and accountability. Viewing the same role or activity through the conceptual lens of a vocation focuses on response to a call, service to others, and an assumed responsibility for both. The framework of a profession tends to include payment for an activity, whereas the framework of a vocation tends to ignore it, although remuneration need not be attached to professional expertise nor overlooked for a vocation's work of service.

Because of its focus on expertise and autonomy, the framework of a profession implies a determinate set of objectives and standards which one chooses to adopt. Consequently, to think of teaching in these terms is to dwell on the role of teaching itself. It is to view it in quasi-objective and

impersonal terms, to see it comprised of a range of activities that an individual does and that someone can certainly strive to do well. But in the end it is the range of activities and the standards applied to them that define a profession. Governance and accountability are directed toward maintenance of the standards of professional activity. The concept of a profession also tends to view an activity in self-serving or self-interested terms, even though the activity is directed toward the benefit of others (Macdonald, 1995).

The framework of a vocation, on the other hand, implies a personal commitment because of its focus on a call and its aspect of service. Consequently, to think of teaching in these terms is to look beyond the role of teaching itself to those engaged in and by the role. It is to view it in subjective and interpersonal terms. In the end, it is students who give shape to the vocation of teaching; they are the purpose behind the call and the recipients of a commitment to it. The responsibility assumed by a teaching vocation is directed toward students or to whoever is conceived to present a call to teach. The concept of a vocation has an inherently altruistic focus.

In bold relief, the two conceptual frameworks imply a contrast between standards and students, between an impersonal and an interpersonal approach, between an objective and a subjective outlook, between an altruistic and a self-interested focus, between an activity for which remuneration is an expectation and an activity for which payment may be gratuitous. Sketched in this way, the contrast leads to a shift in focus in which the implications of one conceptual framework are held at the expense of the other. The shift in focus corresponds to a shift in values, to what is perceived to be important and worthwhile in the educational enterprise.

Such a shift is, in part, historically illustrated in the evolution of Catholic higher education. When Catholic colleges and universities were predominantly staffed and administered by religious orders, teaching or administration formed part of their vocation of mission and service to the church. Within such an academic community, teachers cared not only for the intellectual development of their students but for their character formation, moral growth, and faith commitments as well (Burrell, 1994; Gallin, 2000). The Catholic identity of institutions was intimately linked to the teaching vocation of vowed religious. Priests, sisters, and brothers lived out their vocation in an academic apostolate (CCE, 1998; Gallin, 1996; John Paul II, 1990). While there was admittedly significant value and benefit in such institutions, they tended to be criticized for mediocrity in their academic programs and research orientation (Attridge, 1994; Edwards, 1999; Gleason, 1994; Lent, 1994) and lack of professionalism in administrative procedures and hiring practices (Edwards, 1999; Gallin, 1996, 2000). On the other hand, the increase of lay persons within Catholic colleges and universities brought with it a professionalization of faculty that included an increasing focus on

academic standards and a greater emphasis on research, not to mention the expectation of salaries in line with professional expertise (Edwards, 1999; Gallin, 2000; Lent, 1994). But this rising professionalism also came with a diminished sense, if not loss, of Catholic identity, community, and the moral and faith development of students. The “quality and Catholic commitment of lay persons” came into question (Gallin, 1996, p. 12); the

difficulty of assuring Catholic identity in an environment where it is almost impossible to attract and retain a critical mass of qualified staff who are familiar with and supportive of the social, theological, institutional, and (or) educational aspirations of the Catholic tradition (Higgins & Letson, 2002, p. 166)

became an issue.

The shift in focus and values implied by the framework of a profession versus a vocation still operates today in teaching-related activities. It manifests itself most noticeably whenever we replace individual students with standards of performance or when we deal with students anonymously rather than personally. The more we insist on standards of performance, be it on the part of instructors or on the part of students, the less, it seems, we pay attention to the individual circumstances surrounding both the instructor and the student. Conversely, the more personally concerned we become about students and their learning, the less significant we take general standards of evaluation to be. This difference in underlying values frequently emerges in discussions about grading, whether grades are to be assigned on the basis of some pre-established distribution (or curve) or on the basis of individual student performance. The former tends to be driven by a need for uniform standards and academic integrity, often reinforced by institutional concerns over inflated grades and academic standings – hallmarks of viewing the marking task of teachers through the framework of a profession. The latter, individual-student-approach, tends to be driven by a different set of values that emerges from the framework of a vocation: an assessment of performance on its own merits, acknowledgement of student individuality in learning, recognition of personal circumstances that may impact learning, and the like.

Similarly, a shift in attitude and values can be seen in our approach to other aspects of an academic career. Suitable preparation for a teaching profession suggests effective means for acquiring the knowledge base and skills needed for teaching; preparation for a teaching vocation, by contrast, would look more at character formation, instilling habits and traits needed to fulfill the call to teach (CCE, 1982; John Paul II, 1990). While the need for faith formation has been urged for teachers at the primary and secondary level of Catholic schools (Mulligan, 1990, 1994, 1999; Traviss, 2000), it does not seem to have filtered to the level of Catholic higher education with equal urgency.

Evaluation of teaching performance or success in a teaching career

would, likewise, differ on each framework. Under the concept of a profession, we would look to performance indicators on the part of teachers, to what they have taught (curriculum) and how they have taught (instruction). Under the concept of a vocation, instead, we would look to the impact on students, on what they have learned and how they have otherwise benefited from the teaching. Despite advocating multiple means of measurements and the importance of student input in assessing good teaching, Ramsden's endorsement (1992) of "professional competence," "accountability," and "minimal standards of acceptable professional behaviour" (p. 234) comes out of a view of teaching as a professional activity. In contrast, eschewing any attempts at a standardized model of skillful teaching, Brookfield (1990) focuses on interpersonal aspects and the individual context of both instructor and student that are in line with a view of teaching as a vocation.

Once we recognize the values implicit in these contrasting conceptual frameworks, we are in a position to appreciate the significance of both. Even though there is a tension between them, as there is with other conflicting values, we can move from one to the other and thus attempt to keep both in balance. As we drift toward one set of values, we are reminded of the other set. For instance, we may strive to deal with students personally and individually, because we view our teaching as a vocation; and yet we can be reminded of the need for objectivity and impartiality, because we also seek to apply professional standards to our teaching. We can put in time, extensive time, to develop computer resources so as to enhance the delivery of a course, in line with current expectations for effective teaching and yet recognize that we also need time to be available to students so as to address their particular academic concerns, in line with the aspect of service.

Although the contrast implied here, between an impersonal approach sketched by the concept of a profession and a personal approach sketched by the concept of a vocation, apparently imposes an either-or position, it is possible that they present a both-and situation, but in dialectical tension in the manner in which Buber (1970) developed an interrelation between the impersonal realm of "I-It" and the personal realm of "I-Thou." While these do not occur simultaneously, the impersonal "I-It" becomes an occasion to reveal the personal "I-Thou" and the conscious presence of the "I-Thou" realm inevitably reverts to the experience of the "I-It" realm. Analogously for the conceptions of teaching profession and teaching vocation, neither one takes precedence over the other; both are needed. But excessive focus on one highlights absence of the other. The more we dwell on what is implied by being professional in our teaching, the more we miss the personal, moral and even spiritual dimensions in our teaching implied by a vocation. Conversely, the more we stress what is implied by an academic vocation, the more we risk overlooking the demands of professional excellence.



## INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

What relevance does either conceptual framework have to the question of Christian or Catholic identity? The Christian or Catholic identity of any institution depends on how it manifests among its members a life of faith to live out Gospel values. These values include among others community, service, faith development, and spiritual growth. The conceptual framework of teaching as a vocation gives priority to such values: in its service orientation, its interpersonal dimension, its focus on individuals in their uniqueness and wholeness. Teaching out of this conceptual framework, then, would be in line with the *raison d'être* of a Christian or Catholic institution of higher education so understood (Holmes, 1987, 2001; John Paul II, 1990). Burrell (1994) explicitly linked the two in that the quest for Catholic identity calls on "all who see their life as a gift, their work as a call rather than a career, and our relation to the world as conservation rather than exploitation" (p. 43).

However, if Schwehn (1993) is right that those virtues which enter into thoughtful and truthful inquiry not only were nourished in earlier religious tradition but still are best instilled and transmitted "by religious affection" (p. 57), then Christian or Catholic institutions, in turn, strengthen a sense of vocation in academic work. A study by Smith and Badley (1998), dealing with vitality among professors in denominational colleges and seminaries, corroborates an interdependence between a sense of vocation in teaching and a Christian ambience. For the authors found that

without exception, those functioning with vitality in the classroom in late-career are individuals with a clear call to teach. They love teaching; they love students....They were committed to teaching the students in their respective schools. That was their focus and commitment....They teach as individuals with a clear sense of divine call; they work in the classroom as a direct response to a divine imperative. And for our participants, a deep spirituality nurtures this sense of call. (p. 175)

The one feeds off the other: a Christian identity supports a vocational and spiritual orientation, whereas a vocational orientation in the sense of a divine call acknowledges a Christian identity.

Nevertheless, insofar as Christian or Catholic colleges and universities are academic institutions, the conceptual framework of teaching profession should not be excluded. This framework promotes academic competence and excellence in teaching, as it does in research, that are of an importance comparable to religious identity. As Lent (1994) concluded, "Only in such a community, constantly challenged by the twin demands of academic excellence and faithfulness to the gospel, can generations of young Christian minds be formed to engage and leaven the world" (p. 145).

Some might object that the conceptualization of teaching as a vocation suits only a denominational academic setting but not a public university. But behind the objection seems to be the assumption that profession is an admittedly secular concept, whereas vocation is a typically religious one. But, we have seen vocation need not be understood religiously or theologically; neither service nor call is the reserve of the religiously-minded. And even if the concept is taken in a religious theological sense, it can still apply in a secular academic setting – unless we are obliged to check faith-commitments at the gates of academia.

## CONCLUSION

The conceptual framework of profession versus vocation shapes attitudes toward the teaching enterprise, what we perceive to be its function and importance. Our attitude toward value priorities, in turn, affects teaching strategies and dealings with students. We have alluded to a number of instances in which what we do, and how we do so, depends on whether we conceptualize teaching as a profession or a vocation. While there is an apparent conflict between the values implied by either conceptual framework, they are not inherently incompatible but manifest a dialectical tension. Although the implications of each framework are equally important, it is the concept of teaching as a vocation that lends itself to a distinctively Christian or Catholic identity in denominational institutions of higher education.

The challenge is, on the one hand, to elevate a teaching vocation with the values of professional status and, on the other, to imbue the teaching profession with the values of a vocation. The history of Catholic education in the 20th century illustrated the first challenge. Currently, we seem to be faced with an increasing professional focus toward teaching and academics. Is that also at a loss of other values?

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