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Progressive Higher Education: Through Homogeneity to Ideal Diversity

Progressivism reigns in U.S. higher education. This is true of both public and private education, including religiously affiliated institutions. With Catholic institutions, there are 210 schools which award baccalaureate and graduate degrees,¹ but only about 9% of them could be called “traditionally Catholic,” and, thereby, not entirely under the rule of Progressivism.²

Progressivism is a multifaceted ideology encompassing economic collectivism, multicultural utopianism, constructivism, and moral and epistemological relativism. This essay, however, will not offer a critique of those facets as that already has been done at this Future of Western Civilization International Congress series. The papers are, “Diversity within United States’ Culture and Politics” (2011),³ and “Philosophical Reflections on the ‘New Progressivism’ in Education” (2013).⁴ This

¹ This 2016 statistic is based on the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, <https://www.accunet.org/14a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3797>. Accessed 21 April 2017.

² This figure is based on Cardinal Newman Society’s, “Recommended Colleges,” <https://cardinalnewmansociety.org/recommended-colleges/>. Accessed 21 April 2017.

³ Thomas Michaud, “Roznorodność w kulturze: polityce Stanów Zjednoczonych,” in *Emigracja I cywilizacje*, Człowiek w Kulturze, 23 (2013), pp. 63-73

⁴ T. Michaud, “Filozoficzne refleksje nt. ‘Nowego Progressywizmu’ w edukacji,” publication forthcoming in Człowiek w Kulturze.

focus, then, will be an extended axiological analysis of the Progressive dedication to, or perhaps obsession with, diversity.

Progressive “diversity” in higher education is a mere shibboleth, a value-laden ideological catchword that inspires the loyalists but actually lacks substantial meaning. The diversity to which Progressives are devoted denotes their ideal of a university, and society in general, committed to multiculturalism with total equality as the supreme value. Such equality requires a reformation to eliminate the oppression of the victimized, those groups that have been oppressed because of their ethnicity, religion, race, gender and sexual identity. And, of course, this reformation for equal justice is only possible by conforming fully to all facets of the ideology of Progressivism. Progressive “ideal diversity” cannot and does not tolerate any opposition from those who are deemed ‘oppressors.’ The ideas, the philosophies, the teachings, the political votes, and even the very presence of oppressors within Progressive educational institutions and society at large, must be suppressed, eliminated, if the reformation is to win its cause for equal justice. Only unadulterated purity, undifferentiated homogeneity, can achieve the realization of the Progressives’ ideological utopia.

This critical analysis of Progressive axiology proceeds by: 1) Citing and commenting on a number of recent incidents at higher education institutions, both at public and Catholic schools; 2) Examining in detail the Progressive axiology and its consequences; and finally, 3) Offering some remarks on what the future could hold for Catholic higher education within the reign of Progressivism.

Diversity Disturbances

The Progressives’ zeal to achieve their ideal diversity through ideological conformity and suppressing the oppressors is causing grave consternation about the interchange of ideas and free speech in higher education. It has also led to questions regarding the maturity of university students, faculty and administrators who are fully supportive

of some bizarre demonstrations and raucous, even riotous, uprisings on campuses.

Progressives, however, appear to be indifferent to any criticism. They, especially the students, self-identify as mature, serious persons who are morally enlightened. To borrow some terms from Aristotle but use them in rather satirical ways, the Progressives believe firmly that they are the *spoudaioi*, the moral exemplars. Their values and beliefs are beyond the good and evil of the bourgeois masses. Those who disagree with, criticize or oppose them are the deplorables, the *phauloi* who are afflicted with a low or base morality. The *phauloi* must not challenge but always defer to the *spoudaioi*, and if they don't, they must be silenced. On too many campuses, the Progressive *spoudaioi* have stifled, even anathematized, free intellectual discourse and authentic inquiry for truth.

The campus disturbances urged by the Progressives are widespread. They include:

- Southern Illinois University hosted a month-long series of student “nap-ins” to help guide them on their “internal journey to diversity.” There are four two-hour nap sessions in which students can dream about diversity, and then upon waking, write about their dreams on a shared scroll.⁵ Progressives, apparently, are not deterred that their ideal, utopian diversity belongs in a dream-world, even if might be nothing more than a pipe-dream.
- Cornell University held a “cry-in” for students who were terrified by the election of President Donald Trump. Cornell staff provided the weeping and wailing students with tissues and hot chocolate to comfort them in their sorrow.⁶ The University of Kansas announced to students that they can visit therapy dogs every other Wednesday for consolation over the horrible Trump victory. The Progressive

⁵ Reported by Anthony Gockowski at: <https://campusesform.org/?ID=8896>. Accessed 24 April, 2017.

⁶ Reported by John Hayward at: <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2016/11/16/5-most-absurd-way-the-left-has-responded-to-the-2016-election/>. Accessed 10 March, 2017.

spoudaioi evidently believe that their public grief disturbances should be a moral exemplar for all.⁷

- At Pierce College in Los Angeles a student was told to stop handing out free copies of a Spanish-language edition of the U.S. Constitution. He was instructed to apply for a permit to distribute the pocket Constitution in the “free speech zone” only. And, if he did not comply, he would be asked to leave campus. Progressive control of campus speech must be absolute, even if it regards distributing the very document that establishes the law protecting free speech.⁸
- The disturbance at elite Middlebury College is perhaps the most extreme example of a Progressive war on free speech through a suppression of a diversity of ideas. The enemy was the noted conservative social scientist Charles Murray, author of The Bell Curve about groups’ IQs and Coming Apart about the struggles of the white working class from 1960-2010.irate student protestors prevented the start of Murray’s talk by yelling and slamming furniture. Murray was moved to another venue. His talk was delivered, although the ending discussion with Professor Allison Stanger, who was to debate Murray, had to be moved to yet another room for a live-streamed presentation. When protestors found that room, they pounded on the windows and pulled fire alarms. Murray and Stanger exited at the end of the live-stream but were assailed by the protestors who shoved and grabbed Stanger, pounded on their car and obstructed its departure. Stanger went to the hospital and wrote later that she feared for her life.⁹ The speech thuggery of the Middlebury pro-

⁷ Reported November 11, 2016 at: <http://breaking911.com/colleges-offer-hot-chocolate-therapy-dogs-play-doh-students-trump-victory/>. Accessed 11 March, 2017.

⁸ Reported by Sheriff David Clarke, Jr. at: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/david-clarke/2017/03/college-students-banned-handing-constitution-unless-free-speech-zone/>. Accessed 1 April, 2017.

⁹ This brief account of the Middlebury College disturbance is based on the editorials: Rich Lowry, “It Will Go Down As ‘Battle of Middlebury College,’” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 3-11-17; Laura Hollis, “The Left’s Revolutions Always Turn Out Like This,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 3-14-17; Thomas Sowell, “Real Lessons of Middlebury,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 3/15/17.

testors is consistent with their “beyond good and evil” values and their objective to silence and eliminate the opposition.

In spite of Pope Francis’s warnings and admonitions about Progressivism, most Catholic universities have let themselves become as subordinate to the Progressive reign as any other school. In 2013, Pope Francis sharply denounced the “hegemonic uniformity” of “the single line of thought” spawned by a “spirit of adolescent progressivism”: it is a worldliness that will negotiate everything, even the faith. With such immaturity, the mentality is that “any move forward and any choice is better than remaining within the routine of fidelity.”¹⁰ Catholic universities, nonetheless, are negotiating their faith and values to show that they too are worthy of being morally enlightened Progressive *spoudaioi*.

- A student government representative at Catholic Duquesne University urged the University to withdraw its plans to invite the popular fast-food restaurant, Chik-fil-A, to open a franchise on campus. Students were upset that the restaurant chain’s CEO has publicly supported traditional marriage, although the chain’s policy and practice on serving customers and hiring employees upholds non-discrimination. The Progressive students can’t allow a genuine diversity of moral values, even when the value conforms to the Catholicism of the university they have chosen to attend.¹¹
- A College Republican student group at the Vincentian DePaul University was prohibited to advertise a meeting with a flier that read, “Unborn Lives Matter.” DePaul’s President Rev. Dennis Holtschneider stated that the poster was an example of “bigotry that occurs under the cover of free speech.” Rev. Holtschneider clearly believed that the conservative students’ flier intended to wound the “Black

¹⁰ Pope Francis made the remarks in his daily homily, 18 November, 2013. See: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Pope-God-save-us-from-the-hegemonic-uniformity/%E2%80%9D-of-the-one-live-of-thought-fruit-of-the-world-that-regoliates-everything-even-faith/>. Accessed 28 March, 2017.

¹¹ Reported at: <http://www.wtae.com/article/donald-trump-jr-mocks-duquesne-university-students-concern-over-chick-fil-a/927547>. Accessed 13 April 2017.

Lives Matter” group on campus. Rev. Holtschneider explained that De Paul does allow diverse thought on campus, as long as it isn’t “meant to cause distress.” Within the blinkered ideological absolutism of regnant Progressivism, there is not the slightest cognizance of the wicked irony that a Catholic university censors students who seek to promote the moral values of Catholicism itself.¹²

- Student protestors at Notre Dame University oppose the University’s invitation to U. S. Vice President Mike Pence, a native and former governor of Notre Dame’s state of Indiana, to be the 2017 graduation commencement speaker. As a student leader said, she and her peers felt “unsafe” and threatened “by someone who openly is offensive but also demeaning of their humanity and of their life and of their identity.” In 2016 Notre Dame awarded then VP Joe Biden, a Progressive Catholic, the Laetare Medal for outstanding service to the Catholic Church and society. Progressive students now, however, can’t even abide the presence of a public official like Pence whose values do not conform. It disturbingly recalls Robespierre’s Reign of Terror and his Committee for Public Safety: Notre Dame Progressives basically want Mike Pence banned because he presents a public safety hazard.¹³
- In October 2014 a philosophy class, Theory of Ethics, at Marquette University became the scene of a Progressive LGBT diversity disturbance. An undergraduate student talked to the instructor after class expressing his view that same-sex married couples should not be allowed to adopt children. He did so because he wanted to explore the issue of children’s rights to a mother and father, and because the instructor had not allowed a discussion of the issue in class. During the one-on-one discussion with the student, the instructor apparently became frustrated proclaiming, “In this class, homophobic comments, racist comments, will not be tolerated,” and

¹² N. Hahn, “What Passes for ‘free’ speech on a Catholic campus,” *The Detroit News*, October 24, 2016.

¹³ M. Malkin, “Inciting Violence on Campus,” *Wheeling Sunday News-Register*, April 16, 2017.

then invited the student to drop the class.¹⁴ This disturbance has since escalated into a major case, with the suspension of a traditionally Catholic Marquette professor who advocated on behalf of the student. National Catholic and conservative foundations became involved and a court case is still pending. When it comes to their diversity agenda, the Progressive academy will not let Catholicism, philosophical integrity, or the best interests of students hinder their cause.

- As a final instance of a diversity disturbance, it is important to show that U.S. Catholic universities are far from alone in their Progressive obeisance. In March 2017, at the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL) in Belgium, a philosophy lecturer was suspended by the administration for distributing a pro-life paper to his students. The lecturer indicated that he says to his class “repeatedly that no one should feel forced to agree with me.” He lamented that, “I did my job, and I’m now under a disciplinary procedure which doesn’t make any sense to me.” In a press release, the University justified its action by claiming, “. . . in the spirit of the Act decriminalizing abortion voted in 1990 [in Belgium], it (UCL) respects the autonomy of women to make this choice, in the circumstances specified by the legislature.”¹⁵ The Progressive Caesars obviously believe that the morality of their ideology is due everything academic, and all teaching, values, and student learning must be rendered unto the Caesars.

¹⁴ This account of the Marquette disturbance draws from: Robert Oscar Lopez, “Catholic Higher Education in Ruins,” 15 December, 2014, *Religion in the Public Square* at www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2014/12/14192/. Accessed 13 April, 2017.

¹⁵ Reported by Miciah Bilger, “This Catholic University has Suspended Pro-Life Lecturer for Opposing Abortion,” March 31, 2017, at: <http://www.lifenews.com/category/international/>. Accessed 13 April, 2017.

The Transvaluation of All Values

Friedrich Nietzsche's transvaluation of all values called for a reassessment of bourgeois Christianity since, among other ills, it repressed sexuality, and promoted the weaknesses of humility and piety. Within higher education, Progressives are prosecuting a transvaluation with their ideal diversity as a principal value. In Progressive axiology, equality is the supreme value. Social justice is their end and selective tolerance is a means for achieving egalitarian diversity. Their tolerance is selective because what opposes their agenda is unjust and not to be tolerated. Their ideal diversity, for example, prizes free speech only insofar as it does not cause any distress within the ideological homogeneity of their diversity safe zones.

This Progressive axiology is clearly articulated by Lynn Pasquerella, President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU). The AACU is a highly influential organization which in many ways contributes to establishing the guiding principles for government funding, student grants and loans, and accreditation of colleges and universities by national organizations. This accreditation aspect is very important as without accreditation, no institution can receive government funding for student grants and loans.

In her statement of April 4, 2017, "Free Expression, Liberal Education and Inclusive Excellence,"¹⁶ Pasquerella identifies the Progressive academic mission of the transvaluation of the historically oppressive U.S. society. As she states,

... if we fail to help our students connect their education to broader societal issues, in ways that inspire them to lead change in a society still challenged by profound inequities, we abnegate our responsibility to promote engaged citizenship, cultural empathy, pluralism, and diversity as the foundation for our nation's historic mission of educating for democracy.

¹⁶ L. Pasquerella, "Free Expression, Liberal Education and Inclusive Excellence," April 4, 2017, at: <http://www.aacu.org/about/statements/2017/free-expression>. Accessed 17 April, 2017. All of the following quoted material is from this document.

The AACU affirms that quality in liberal education is bound to equity, and with cultural empathy, tolerant inclusivity, and sensitivity to universal victimization, higher education must realize that:

None of today's students arrives on college and university campuses devoid of past experiences, pain, and suffering that influence their worldviews. Redressing past and present injustices mandates aligning our expertise as teachers, scholars, researchers, and artists to rewrite the dominant narrative that consigns to the lower shelves of history the contributions of marginalized groups that have shaped American society in profound, albeit often unacknowledged, ways.

Tolerant inclusivity, a means to achieving diversity justice, is a criterion for determining the parameters of free speech and a free exchange of ideas. As Pasquerella says:

...a complex identity politics has fueled controversies over the legitimacy of "safe spaces," the disinvitation and shouting down of speakers, and a pervasive enforced illiberalism on campuses. Student support around a wide range of diversity and inclusion issues highlight the extent to which the conclusions we draw regarding whether arguments and assertions in support of limiting speech are rational and warranted depend, in part, on whose stories are being told and who is doing the speaking. They offer a counternarrative to the dominate discourse that has traditionally marginalized the voices of women, students and faculty of color, religious and ethnic minorities, and members of the LB-GTQIA¹⁷ community. . . . These protestors regard their actions as justified on the grounds of necessity and attempts to stop them as further silencing those representing the most vulnerable members of society.

To paraphrase George Orwell from Animal Farm, it appears that for the AACU, everyone on campus has free speech, but some have more free speech than others.¹⁸ Those with heightened free speech are the representatives of the vulnerable. Silencing oppressors is justified since they are merely *phauloi*, and the heroic protesting *spoudaioi* have

¹⁷ The acronym LBGTQIA stands for: Lesbian Bisexual Gay Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual.

¹⁸ G. Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Signet Classics, 1996). The famous quote is on p. 134: "All Animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

the morally superior just cause of Progressive ideal diversity. The Progressive *Reich* has been formalized, legitimized and institutionalized by the AACU.

Hoping Against Hope

The origin of this section title is Biblical from Romans 4:18. The aged, physically decrepit Abraham had been promised by God that he would become the father of many nations. For Abraham, this seemed hopeless, but he maintained his faith. Abraham “hoped against hope”¹⁹ that God’s promise would be fulfilled.

It is scandalous and grossly dispiriting that a mere 9% of U.S. Catholic universities are, in varying ways, solid in maintaining the Catholic tradition. The Catholic educational charism of moral and intellectual formation is certainly an endangered species on the brink of extinction. Is there any hope for recovery?

There is perhaps a slight ray of hope and this is emitted by U.S. governmental tradition itself. Even the AACU affirms that according to U.S. Constitutional law, private universities, such as Catholic institutions, are not bound by First Amendment free speech considerations, “except under certain specified state laws.” Private institutions can “constrain speech in classrooms, open forums and through the refusal to grant the use of their facilities. They are permitted to do so if the restrictions constitute reasonable regulations, consistent with their missions, and are deemed necessary to achieve their objectives.”²⁰

If Catholic institutions take their charism seriously they do not, by law, have to make an idol of a Progressive-styled social justice mission and can faithfully self-identify as Catholic. They can hire the faculty and administration they choose, include or exclude guest speakers according

¹⁹ The New American Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983) Romans, 4:18, p. 1216.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Note #16 above.

to their sympathies with Catholicism, require faculty to teach content consistent with Church teaching, and, unless and until there are radical revolutionary changes undermining Constitutional laws, continue to receive government funding. Again, by law, no Catholic institution has to permit administrators, faculty or speakers to spew anti-Catholic propaganda simply in order to ensure the Progressive supreme value of a so-called ‘equal balance’ of views.

In order to recover, Catholic schools will have to be open to the grace of the kind of courageous faith that empowered Abraham to hope against hope. This will not happen *en masse* with Catholic schools, but its rate of occurrence will be slow, gradualistic, one controversial issue, one Catholic institution at a time. And, believing in a teaching from *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* can help with spiritual resolve: ²¹ *Ex Corde* extols dialogue, including between faith and reason and “the gospel and culture.” But it’s the responsibility of a Catholic university to aim this dialogue toward the pursuit of truth. As Saint John Paul the Great taught, the “privileged task” of a Catholic university is “to unite . . . the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth.” Having faith that God is the fount of truth must necessarily illumine any Catholic institution’s chances of recovery.

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Summary

This essay exposes the ways in which the Progressive pursuit of ‘diversity’ in U.S. higher education is not actually diversity at all but ideological homogeneity. After citing numerous instances of diversity mongering on

²¹ The following remarks include quotes from *Ex Corde* cited in and other paraphrased material from Adam Cassandra, “Free Speech Doesn’t Require Colleges to Sponsor their Opponents,” at: <http://thefederalist.com/2016/06/01/free-speech-doesn-t-require-colleges-to-sponsor-their-opponents/>. Accessed 4 April, 2017.

campuses, an axiological analysis of Progressive diversity is offered to show clearly why and how their diversity is really uniformity. Throughout the essay, much attention is given to Progressive diversity and Catholic education, since such diversity and Progressivism in general are dealing perhaps a mortal blow to the future of Catholic higher education.

Key words: higher education, ideological homogeneity, Progressive education, Catholic education, Progressivism