

## My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 48

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Even good ideas can metastasize. And even a worthy vision can lead us astray. The Community Based Service Learning Program ("CBSL") provided our seniors with the opportunity to research a significant community or social issue, conceive a plan to personally address it, and spend a significant number of school hours implementing their vision of service. For some, the opportunity involved creating their own nonprofit. For others, it meant joining an existing service organization. For everyone, it resulted in improved research and writing skills, an expansion of horizons, and the consequent awakening of a more developed sense of social obligation.

As a mentor for the Vietnam Project, the Zimbabwe Project, and Guide Dogs for the Blind Puppy Raisers, I busied myself with helping students conceptualize their service and implement their ideas. On a personal level, I found the work rewarding. My students never failed to inspire and amaze me. I still retain close ties with the students who accompanied me to Vietnam, or who raised a Guide Dog puppy. While I was able to go for several years, our student service trip to Zimbabwe was postponed, then canceled, due to political unrest and a cholera outbreak. However, we still managed to send containers of medical supplies to Chidamoyo Christian Hospital and text books to Dandawa High School. And we too, remain close. (Each morning I still text many of my former students and mentees a daily quote from Kim Dodge's "Luminary Quotes.") The actual service work comprised only a portion of the effort required of the students. The research, writing, and presentation of the project consumed much of the students time and effort, and mine as well. Teachers and mentors reviewed and critiqued their research, and edited their writing, a time-consuming exercise.

An added benefit was that Father Scold did not like CBSL and the added work requirements placed upon him. Thus, he failed to follow through on many assignments the students needed to complete for their

CBSL, which burdened other members in the Theology and English Departments who had to pick up the slack. He also objected to the intrusion of the CBSL requirements into his curriculum. Initially, I could scarcely summon an ounce of sympathy for his complaints. His theology classes tended to offend or anesthetize more than intrigue students and I really considered his pedagogical approach a stumbling block to the faith of my young men and women. Abraham Joshua Heschel perfectly expressed the issue in the opening paragraphs of his work "God in Search of Man." His analysis is worthy of an extended quotation:

"It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion - its message becomes meaningless.

Religion is the answer to man's ultimate questions. The moment we become oblivious to ultimate questions, religion becomes irrelevant, and its crisis sets in." (3) (*Italics in the original*)

Heschel's indictment of religious morbidity transcends denominational lines. Tedious certainty is an age-old problem for the transmission of tradition. The prerequisite for true religion, the very origin of worship, is wonder, as True Father often reminded us.

On the other hand, CBSL could slip into another sort of tediousness. As students researched their issues, they sometimes became ideologically driven and narrowly certain, mirroring their faculty mentors' strong political convictions. Rather than the students pursuing honest inquiry, they closed their minds and parroted the party line with passionate intensity. While it is good for students to be energized in the cause of serving others, a certain humility of perspective is required. In Principled terms, the student's project must be kept in its "proper position" in relation to its educational purpose.

As with the students, so with CBSL itself. As CBSL became more successful, the requirements began to more deeply extend into the sophomore year. As a strong advocate for the program, I readily included service and research assignments in my curriculum. However, the program metastasized. Possibly it was karma for my dismissal of Father Scold's discomfort over CBSL's intrusion into his curriculum.

The curriculum I had developed for sophomore English over the years had become well honed, tight. Everything fit into the broader purpose of awakening my students to their original minds, cultivating wonder, and engaging them in the intergenerational search for meaning. So, when CBSL began to consume more time and displace significant aspects of my curriculum, I resisted. I felt the content of the classical literature I taught was as important as the reading, research, and writing skills the students acquired in class, and the service they performed outside of class.

I cannot say for certain, but my recalcitrance may have led the Department Chair and my old friend, the strongest proponent of CBSL, to suggest I surrender my sophomores and teach juniors or seniors.

Shortly thereafter, walking between classes, I decided to retire.