

Vocations – Wherefrom?

October 2, 2010

After following over tens of years a variety of part-time and full-time courses in the Humanities at two universities in major cities of an “advanced” Western nation, Robert (as I will call him) finds himself in substantial agreement with the criticism of modern universities that appeared in a recent “Eleison Comments” (EC 158), but he has an interesting objection that goes one, or two, steps further. Let us begin with his live experience of today’s university “system.”

A few years ago, after seemingly endless years of study, Robert did finally obtain his Doctorate in history, but only just, and in such a way as to disqualify him from ever getting a job as a university professor. The politically correct system, he says, had successfully defended itself from his “extreme right” ideas. “The integrist had been muzzled, democracy had been saved. The imbecile had thrown himself in front of the steamroller, and he had been duly crushed, as easily as Winston in George Orwell’s famous novel, “1984.”

“Given my experience,” he writes, “I would recommend no youngster to study Humanities at any University, still less my own children. Let them rather choose some manual trade or advanced technical training, the ideal being to work for oneself, in the country or at most in a small town, so as to avoid today’s enslavement to salary.” Had he his life to live over again, he says, that is what he would do, because as a Catholic intellectual he feels that his action has been limited to giving witness.

However, Robert has a serious objection to this solution of preferring some manual trade or advanced technical training. In brief, engineers may be better paid than philosophers, but the clip-clear nature of their work – on-off, zero-one – will disincline them to take any interest in the human, all too

human, complications of religion or politics. Ideally, one might be a technician by day and a poet by night, but in reality it is difficult to lead a life divided between such opposites, says Robert, and a man will normally lose interest in one or the other.

He observes the same tension within the Society of St Pius X school in his part of the world. In theory the Humanities there have pride of place, but in practice boys and staff tend to go for the Sciences because of the better job openings. The youngsters coming out of the school are correspondingly less well equipped to understand in depth the problems of the Conciliar Church or the modern world, as it seems to Robert. End of his testimony.

The problem is grave. For instance, the SSPX schools are under pressure to incline towards the sciences, but future priests surely need rather a good formation in the Humanities, because souls do not function on clip-clear one-zero, on-off. Yet if vocations do not come from the SSPX's own schools, where will they come from? How are things spiritual to be protected in a whole world giving itself over to things material? How are boys' souls to be oriented towards the priesthood? I have observed that what is decisive in many cases is their father taking his religion seriously. Read in the Old Testament the book of Tobias (neither long nor difficult to understand) to see how God rewards fathers through their sons.

Kyrie eleison.