The Ethical Aspect of Professional Education

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I feel highly honored for this invitation—Marquette University feels honored to have one of its deans so privileged. It evidences the friendly relations existing between Lawrence College and Marquette University and illustrates that tolerance, harmony, and good-will after all make for the greatest good.

Why our worthy toastmaster selected a lawyer to speak to ministers will always remain a conundrum. His mental processes in arriving at the selection certainly would be hard to follow. The physical law, perhaps, that like repels and unlike attracts in some degree influenced the selection. Yet a minister is like a lawyer in many respects. Both earn their living by talking, both are concerned directly with the pursuit of truth and the ultimate triumph of truth. However, the popular idea of a lawyer and a minister is that they are the very opposites and have nothing in common unless it be that the minister reforms the lawyer. They even by popular opinion have refused to bury a lawyer and an honest man in the same grave. But, be that as it may, the courts and lawyers are ever ready and equally zealous in protecting the rights of the minister. It is even a matter of record, that in localities far removed from Wisconsin, however, lawyers have kept ministers out of jail.

I have chosen for my subject “the ethical aspect of professional education” as best suited to the occasion, a theme that should especially commend itself to you, pledged as you are to do battle in the cause of righteousness, to raise aloft the standard of purity in your personal lives, to keep inviolate the sanctity of the home and to protect the God-given authority of the state by restricting its exercise to its proper sphere.

At the present time, when the wave of materialism has reached such proportions as to jeopardize the things of the spirit; when the din and confusion of factories and the hum of industrial activity threatens to drown out the feeble voice of conscience; when keen competition turns its back on the decalogue, the
better to achieve success—it is well for us to emphasize and bring to the fore claims of ethics, the duties of the professional man, calling attention to the neglect and violations of its teachings that masquerade under the guise of progress.

The purpose of a university is to develop men of pronounced intellectual culture and sound moral character. That mental development is not lost sight of in the curriculum of a modern university is evident from the fact that in most schools, a college of arts and sciences is to be found whose object is not to impart instruction but to afford a liberal education. Sound pedagogics and experience alike recognize in this the best preparation for a professional career.

It is a matter of regret that in the United States, owing to the feverish struggle for quick results, many a gifted student rears the superstructure of his educational edifice without putting down a deep, broad, and lasting foundation. As time wears on the folly of such undue haste becomes apparent and not a few professional men make heroic endeavors to supply what is wanting. Many a lawyer has in later life expressed his regret that he did not complete an A.B. course before taking up the study of law. A lawyer, a physician, a dentist, a journalist, and in fact every professional man should be a man of broad culture. Even a professional engineer, who, it would seem could dispense with a training in the liberal arts most easily, is, at the present time, deemed poorly equipped if a general education has not paved the way for his specialty. It stands to reason, that if a man is to be a highly useful member of society and to enjoy the higher pleasures of life, specialization should be deferred until a broad general foundation has been laid. At times this will be impracticable but it should, at least, be the ideal that all have in view, who are solicitous about the common welfare, and particularly those who shape the policy of a university. Although the professional schools do not generally require a complete liberal education as a necessary preparation for law, medicine and the other professions, still there is strong tendency in that direction.

But there is need of moral as well as mental development in the professional schools. Over two thousand three hundred years ago the keen philosophical mind of Plato gave expression to the truth that to give a person an education without making a good man of him was like putting a sword into the hands of a maniac. To give the professional man a high regard for the moral law, to
make him a man of sound moral character as well as a gentleman of high culture, is the true purpose of a university. Too frequently do we see the successful lawyer or physician of the egoistic type refuse to attend stricken humanity because no fee is in sight. The duties of professional men should not be ignored in the mad race for success. That success which is measured solely by dollars and cents, which is egoistic and not altruistic, is not worthy of the calling of a professional man. A professional man without ethics forgets that he is a created being. He refuses to bow to the will of a divine law giver. His ethics are of the dust for he fails to grasp the true significance of the moral law, so beautifully and correctly expressed by Balfour: "Ethics is rooted in the divine and in the divine finds its consummation." A university graduate who leaves the halls of his Alma Mater without the firm conviction that law is divine and that all law, human as well as divine, ultimately derives its binding power from the Divine Legislator is a menace to the family and to the state. Let us make our professional men cease to be self-centered but to be on the other hand constantly on the look-out for occasions to serve his fellow-man. This altruism of course must have a divine motive, if it is to be more than ephemeral and transitory. If it rests upon the moral law viewed as a mere human code, it is a disguised form of egoism. An altruist of this type will soon sink back into the mire of egoism.

Our country is still protected, in a great measure, by the traditional morality of our fathers and forefathers that has guided man's steps down the centuries; but what will become of it when the people as a nation begin to act as if man is all for himself, when God's will, the source of obligation of the natural law, is ignored and set aside? We are sowing the wind in our schools and we shall certainly reap the whirlwind.

Marquette University is nondenominational in its professional schools—no religious test is required for its teachers or its students—no religious observances called for by revealed religion are insisted upon—on Holy Days of obligation Catholic students are not excused from attendance at classes in the professional schools. In the Academy and the department of arts and sciences the school is denominational, but Protestant students are not required to attend chapel.

In the professional schools of Marquette University, however, a course in professional ethics is deemed an essential part of the
curriculum. This course can be given without doing violence to the religious conviction of any student. The Catholic, the Methodist, the Presbyterian and other denominations can agree upon the conclusion of natural law. These ethical truths, though not contrary to any truth of revealed religion, are deduced through the aid of natural reason alone, and all can agree on the conclusions which the human intellect is forced to deduce.

We often hear it said that religion cannot be separated from ethics—that morality cannot be taught without religion—that ethics cannot be separated from religion. If this be so, how can a course of ethics be taught in a professional school which is nondenominational without doing violence to the conscience and religious conviction of the student?

This difficulty is only an apparent one. For natural religion cannot be separated from ethics but supernatural or revealed religion can be separated. Ethics treats of the threefold relations of man; his relation to himself, to his neighbor, and to his God. In treating of his relation to his God, religion necessarily enters, but this is natural religion and is an essential part of ethics or morality, but supernatural religion is not included in morality; for example, the doctrine of incarnation or the truth of the blessed Trinity do not come within the scope of our course in ethics.

In a professional school which is therefore nondenominational ethics necessarily includes natural religion but not supernatural or revealed religion, consequently the religious conviction of the Catholic, the Baptist, the Methodist, and other denominations, is not tampered with but the course makes the student of such denominations more conscientious and if anything, makes him more respectful to the claims of supernatural religion. The laws of supernatural religion or its doctrines do not come up for treatment in these professional schools.

Under what environment are greater opportunities afforded for the development of character and fixing of high ideals than that of the undergraduate in the professional schools? Let us then turn our attention to the moulding of professional men into well-rounded personalities, intellectual, esthetic, and religious.