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Cover Page Footnote

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A Response to Jeremy W. Labosier



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In addition to thanking the individuals who attended this keynote address in June 2019 and, in particular, the individuals who posed questions at that time, I would like to open by thanking Jeremy Labosier for his charitable and thoughtful response. He rightfully pointed out that I lack the experience needed to strongly connect the ideas I proposed to the practical operations of libraries. Such a lack of experience was part of the reason I was eager to think through what is theologically at-stake in libraries and then learn from individuals who think through such matters on a daily basis.

Neither curricular nor co-curricular educators could do our jobs well unless we own our dependence on our fellow educators who serve in the libraries on our campuses. In order to optimize the learning environments we afford our students and the knowledge we afford our communities, we must recognize that dependence, think through where those relationships are serving us well, and where those relationships can be improved. While I have always thought of myself as someone who appreciated the efforts my librarian-colleagues made, that appreciation now also includes a deeper awareness of the practical realities my colleagues face.

Labosier's most gracious comment was that my work offered him and his fellow librarians the gift of perspective. We've been called to serve in times that are not only intellectually fragmented but also cash-strapped. Those pressures unfortunately often drive us back into organizational bunkers that are ultimately the creation of our own desire for professional comfort and security. Even when seemingly found, such security is more often an allusion than a reality.

Over the course of a day, our students participate in any number of curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities and thus inhabit spaces such as residence halls, classrooms, recital halls, dining halls, laboratories, and, of course, libraries. Hopefully, such a perspective helps us realize that regardless of the times in which we live and the circumstances we face, we are far more dependent upon one another than we otherwise think when it comes to providing our students with a holistic education.

Another point Labosier was right to raise involves virtual spaces. I am just old enough that my default is to think of education as students and educators inhabiting a common physical space. While I am optimistic that well-constructed forms of assessment point to such a configuration as being more ideal, such a configuration is not always realistic. Despite the gains we have made, access to higher education is not equally available to all. Along with continuing to re-think how students are afforded access to traditional forms of higher education, virtual forms may just be part of the solution.

The challenge that then comes for virtual forms of access to libraries is that such forms may make the temptation to think one has access to all that can, is, and/or needs to be known more real. In essence, is everything that exists readily available at our fingertips? The cultivation of intellectual humility and the roles libraries play in that process are perhaps more important for individuals who virtually access higher education than for individuals who access higher education via more traditional means.

Finally, I was drawn to Labosier's reference to librarians as "informal chaplains" who help "students navigate the hurdles encountered during the formation process." Perhaps more than anything, I wanted to stress that librarians are educators and, in turn, encourage them to assume their rightful place along their curricular and co-curricular colleagues versus thinking of themselves as mere service providers. I believe Labosier's reference at this point takes what I was trying to argue to another level and, in particular, more tangibly connects it to how many of his colleagues think about their vocation than the way I connected it.

In the end, I was pleased to read that Jeremy Labosier also chose to conclude by offering his response as but one response and, in turn, more responses were needed. If librarians are going to assume their rightful place alongside their curricular and co-curricular colleagues and that the cultivation of intellectual humility may be a common thread that guides all of them, more responses will indeed prove needed. Such responses must test the limits of both theory and practice in ways that eliminate the distinctions often perceived as separating the two. Such efforts ultimately serve our students, academe, and the Church well. †

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