

College Feast Day 2015 and Cultural Day

Are we flying; and are we together? (Since “birds of the same feather fly together”): Challenges of defining ‘unity’ in a multicultural college.

Readings: Daniel 7: 2 – 14; Daniel 3: 53-59 (R. 53b); Lk 21: 29 – 33.



Story: “A monk was walking in the monastery grounds one day when he heard a bird sing. He listened, spellbound. It seemed to him that never before had he heard, really heard, the song of a bird. When the singing stopped he returned to the monastery and discovered, to his dismay, that he was a stranger to his fellow monks, and they to him. It was only gradually that they and he discovered that he was returning after centuries. Because his **listening was total**, time had stopped and he had slipped into eternity. [Prayer is made perfect when the timeless is discovered. The timeless is discovered through clarity of perception. Perception is made clear when it is disengaged from preconceptions and from all consideration of personal loss or gain. Then the miraculous is seen and the heart is filled with wonder.]” - Tony De Mello. This story summarizes the **call to dedicate that is love-filled living**, which makes for eternity in the present: dedication (at least to good academic results) as our point of **unity**.

In the world of science, *group cohesion* depends on various factors including group dynamics, uniformity of action, goal-attainment capacities, personal relations and leadership operations. Unity hangs on the basic bond among members and the strength of members’ identification with the group. It is a big task to assess truthfully how Hekima is doing on self-disclosure and sharing, quality of interpersonal and inter-departmental communication, satisfaction, overall achievement of purpose, emotional attachment to the college as source of identity. The analysis of alumni involvement would indicate low cohesion, while academic performance could prove the reality of high cohesion. Our structural cohesion still needs much work, most particularly towards greater integration of HIPSIR and the JST. Our team-building strategies are embryonic: we have corporate culture seminars, sports, tea breaks, liturgies and conferences that bring us together besides the formal meetings of various task-forces and activities within communities of life. We could simply draw on the Catholic Social Teaching and use the concept of solidarity to talk about unity. On what is our solidarity based? What fills each one’s sense of belonging? What does ‘Hekima University College’ evoke in you as I speak? What would be for instance your personal list of what constitutes the “WE” of Hekima University College – besides our persons? Most eventually the answer will vary in kinds and in grades of the same kind. Allow me therefore to build this reflection on our common identity as a Catholic Institution, to elaborate on the factors of our *collective cohesion*.

Unity is one among the signs of redemption. Using the perspective of the Church as *sign and instrument of salvation* in the world, we can add the three other ‘marks of the Church’: *holiness*, *universality* and *apostolicity*. In spatial categories, I like to refer to apostolicity as *depth*, holiness as

height, catholicity as *breadth* and unity as the *length* or extent or even the *reach* of our faith in reference to Ephesians 3: 18. Let me invite us therefore to ground our 'unity out of diversity' in the three pillars of our (1) purity of intention in everything, our (2) openness and welcoming spirit to others and our (3) passionate desire and commitment (alongside our studies that constitute our primary apostolate) to engage others through meaningful encounters that include sharing in intellectual or academic resources. If we were to do a quick examination of conscience, how much have I personally done my work, discharged my duties, occupied positions within the college with pure motivation for God's glory and the betterment of this college that momentarily stands as "my world?" How open am I to the 27 other nationalities within the college? How much have I learned so far of another culture? How active am I in sharing myself with these other cultures? What are some of the key values of my own culture that I am happy about and willing to communicate to others (verbally if need be), but transpiring in my actions and life? Above all, how seriously have I been dedicated to my studies since the beginning this academic year? It goes without saying that these questions equally apply to support and teaching staff: *what has been my unique contribution to the college since the beginning of this semester? How intentional am I about it?* These are the permanent cement of our unity that we wish to celebrate today ritually by the display of material items and cultural performances. We are thus sharing our lives with others in order to celebrate and further foster our *oneness* in Christ and in our world.

What lessons can we learn from the readings of the day?

Both the gospel and the section from the book of Daniel stand in the context of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. Daniel writes about the visions of the night, the visions of faith in times of great cultural hostility. Jesus teaches about the inner attitude to develop when reality becomes thick; in other words, to rejoice in the midst of adversity as if singing praises to God. To sing praises to God and to highly exalt him in all circumstances amounts to maintaining unity with God under any condition. Applied to our theme of unity among us, political and other forms of conflict will occasionally constitute the night through which we need this vision of faith. On a daily basis, the opacity of the other person as mystery to be respected and loved challenges our shallow perceptions of life towards the apostolic depth without which no real sharing of oneself is possible. The authenticity of our unity depends on the one apostolic preaching that brought about the foundation of the historical Church. The summary of that apostolic message is: "Jesus-Christ is risen," or "Jesus-Christ is Lord!" Nothing else short of creaturehood and sinfulness binds us as deeply as this apostolic faith. We also remember that nothing done without faith is pleasing to God (Heb 11:6). The purity of our intention and holiness of our work and life should take us back to our today's responsorial psalm found in the song of Daniel's friends, the humble servants of the Living God in foreign land. For the pure of heart, everything is really a new opportunity to see God. Indeed for them "*It is cool in the furnace o Lord!*" If I can celebrate as a privilege my opportunity to serve God as I study or work at Hekima University College, my intention is likely as pure as that of these Judean young men at the service of king Nebuchadnezzar. The furnace spares only those whose heart is pure. Am I a pond of negativities or a source of encouragement to others? The last of the three bases of our unity, the *catholicity* or universal scope of our togetherness finds genuine expression in the gentleness of our encounters: "*One like a son of man*" appears before the ancient of days to receive universal dominion. He is not violent like the four beasts that respectively represent: (1) Babylon (Lion), (2) Media (Bear), (3) Persia (Leopard), Greece (He-Goat). He does not come from the chaotic underworld of oceans and seas, but from the heights of holiness and the rationality of the universe. He does not need to grab what is so graciously given him by the Ancient of Days. He does not exclude any nation or people. In that peaceful rationality lies the universal scope of his kingdom. And this unity makes eternal the kingdom brought about: it indeed lasts without end. Our enduring strength lies in our

unity as well. The words of our Savior are enduring for they are words of peace and unity of all creatures within the loving presence of their God, always near – yet even nearer under challenging conditions. In such contexts, fig trees and cultures give signs of the coming of a more acceptable season inviting us to make new life plans following the deadly cold of the winter season.

This reflection brings us into the unity of the *nearness of God* or the unity of the “eternal now.” “This generation will not pass away till all has taken place,” says the eternal Word, the unity of all that exists (cf. Jn 1: 3 & Col 1: 17: “*in him all things hold together.*”) More than our sharing of space (a space that will pass away), the Lord is inviting us to consider our *sharing in the time* which may be sanctified and made eternal. How do we then sanctify these two or three or more years here at Hekima University College? Our length of stay is the span of opportunity to make the eternal happen; and this happens by our meekness, by our capacity to make ourselves approachable to others just as the lamb is in its general characteristics. In the same manner as the lamb becomes even meeker when sacrificed to God, let our time at Hekima be a time of meekness, a time of eternity, a time that we may call “kingdom of God.” Most of us become harder or more rigid when opportunity to sing praises is offered in the ‘furnace;’ we create shelters or bunkers against others and against God. Let us pray that we find a way of building eternity through our oneness: of two schools, of both genders, of many races and age groups, of areas of expertise and interests, of national origins and destination, of states of life and status, of language and cultures, and even of faith traditions and religious congregations. The genuine faith that discerns a positive change of seasons in the sign of the fig tree perceives in these apparent life contradictions the increasing nearness of God’s kingdom. Ideological faith on the contrary produces what we see happening in the world of terror. If the lower levels of other forms of terror spare physical lives, they nonetheless induce death at equally lower root-levels of visibility. These many fragmenting forces (like exclusivism and selfishness) invalidate the moments of our life together by sinking them into oblivion rather than favoring their entry into eternity that is to bear ‘*eternal validity*’ as would predicate Karl Rahner of any human act done with freedom and grace. One symbolic sign of this unity that validates time is academic excellence, which is part of our common and general satisfaction with our College performance. Fifteen of our members will be recognized in their validation of time in that particular area of Academia. This excellence is indeed what we are all about, according to the specific graces received from the Lord. With them and to all of us, I wish a happy celebration of College feast Day; and may our Lady Seat of Wisdom watch over us and bless us with deep faith and with fidelity to our call. May she obtain from God success for the work that we do here at Hekima as individuals and as a community.

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