

Paul Richard Blum: Nachbahr Award Address

Fr. President,
Dear Students and Families,
Dear Colleagues and Friends:

This is an enormous honor, and it is an incredible joy to join the ranks of the previous Nachbahr Awardees from Robert Miola, via Rick Boothby to Fr. John Conley. Thank you so much!

It is customary that the recipient of the Nachbahr Award delivers a talk on The Life of the Mind, and usually the speakers combined some autobiographic notes with general observations on the meaning of being a scholar and professor at Loyola. And I will do so, too. I will tell you a few stories that illustrate the way I think and the way I came to think that way.

I grew up as a foster child in a cozy, conservative, Catholic family. I was the youngest of three. Of our parents Mother was much brighter than Father. [Our daughters say: it's the same in our family.] Our father had no formal education to speak of. He was a blacksmith and starting a career as a firefighter. The firefighters had to be skilled in some craft, and they all helped each other building and repairing their homes. One day I watched my father doing some plumbing work. I remember exactly: I was almost 10 and that day I had passed the entrance examination for High school. [To the surprise of some people.]

So watching him wielding tools and pipes I asked him: How come, you know all these trades, plumbing, roofing, carpeting – you name it? His answer was:

"You must steal with your eyes!" Du mußt mit den Augen stehlen!

Stealing with your eyes, dear students, that is not an invitation to plagiarism. To steal with one's eyes that means to observe what you see and make it your own. To turn what you learn into a skill; to observe and share with others.

After all, that's what we philosophers are doing all the time: we read philosophers and philosophize. So, in a way that was my first philosophy lecture.

Many years later, when I was researching the history of Jesuit education and Jesuit philosophy I found it was a Jesuit adage. Giulio Clemente Scotti in the 17th century advised his students: *Learn as though you had to teach!*

Steal from your professors all they know, make it your own, and share it with others!

In the 1990s -- I had obtained my PhD and had published -- I left the academic world because of the political situation in West Berlin where we lived at that time. I worked for a Catholic charity, ACN, that specialized in the former communist countries. In that capacity I travelled with a colleague to Croatia, in the middle of the Yugoslav war (the war of Serbia on Croatia in 1992). We inspected refugee camps, burned-down villages, damaged churches. And we had an appointment with Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, the archbishop of Zagreb. (Zagreb is the capital of Croatia.) So we arrived at the Archbishop's residence; a young priest lead us upstairs, opened a huge door, and there we entered the assembly hall of the Conference of the Croatian Bishops.

20 bishops smiling at us expectantly! The Cardinal invited me to the top of the horseshoe table, next to the Nuncio, saying: "Dr. Blum, you certainly want to say a few words to my fellow bishops." But luckily he added: "But before we start our business, let us pray." The bishops prayed the Hail Mary, and under the canopy of their prayer I closed my eyes, and hammered out a speech. I have never appreciated prayer that much. So when they said Amen! I was ready: "Your Eminence, Your Excellencies ..."

To the atheists in this audience I may say: you see, prayer works! For the rest: it fits an advice of Ignatius of Loyola, who says: *Pray, as though everything depended on God. And work, as though everything depends on you.* So the bishops and I prayed and worked.

It is a tradition and appropriate that the recipient of the Nachbahr Award says a few words about Bernhard Nachbahr, who is remembered for his leading role at Loyola. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to meet him in person. All I know about Bernhard Nachbahr, I know from previous awardees. So I decided to speak about another person by the same name. 'Nachbar', to my German ears sounds like 'neighbor'; the person I want to speak about is the Czech philosopher Stanislav Sousedík. Soused in Czech means 'neighbor'.

Stanislav Sousedík had an enormous influence on my thought, academic and otherwise. Acquaintance with him was the origin of my visiting professorship this spring in Czech Republic. He is now professor emeritus in Prague; I met him first in the early 1980s as the most outstanding specialist in early modern Catholic philosophy. His career in communist Czechoslovakia was at times interrupted, because he was a Catholic. For some years he was forced to be a road worker. One day, while working at a construction site, he whistled a Marian Hymn. Maybe the Salve Regina. Another worker looked up and asked: Hey, do you know what kind of tune you are singing? And Sousedík: Yes, I do. And the other worker whispered: "Pleased to meet you; I am Jan Opasek, the abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Prague!"

As I said: prayer works.

Later, Sousedík was assigned a job in an editing project at the Academy of Sciences in communist Prague. He published paper after paper and some books on: philosophy among the Jesuits, philosophy of the Dominicans, the Franciscans and so on. He argued that he had to do that in order to prepare the background to this editorial work. Thus he became the best-known specialist of early modern Catholic thought. I not only learned from his work how to deal with early Jesuit philosophy; I also learned:

Resistance is possible. And resistance does not have to be violent. At times it can be achieved singing or tongue-in-cheek. I saw that Aristotle's theory of *antiperistasis* works in the human sphere: oppression of the mind strengthens those intellectual and moral forces that are, indeed, strong.

And hence oppression hatches its own defeat.

On my visits to Prague during the communist times I witnessed the mechanism of communist government. So I can assure you: even the most activist or leftist professor at Loyola is a guarantor and defender of freedom and democracy.

Sousedík was also active in the underground university: local or foreign teachers gave philosophy classes in private homes – a complicated conspirative organization that managed to trick secret services, for the most times. I was honored to lecture in his home in the living room. When one asked who are the students

in the audience? The answer was: it is better for them and for you not to know. I do know that many Dominican friars used to attend the underground university. So, who knows?, maybe Dominik Duka was there, who is now Archbishop of Prague. Or even his friend, the playwright Vaclav Havel, who was to become President of Czech Republic. Who knows? But then, it is not much different from here at Loyola. Maybe in this audience here there is the future Cardinal of Baltimore, or the future President of the United States?

That happened to my wife: as a graduate student, she taught Russian language to Italian students in Northern Italy. One of her former students was Paolo Pezzi who is now the archbishop of Moscow.

In other words: we teachers teach as though everything depended on us; and you students, please study as though everything depended on you. Steal with your eyes and ears all your professors know and share it with others!

Thank you!