Year In Review: First Year

 I must preface this essay with an account of my beginnings at the University of Cincinnati. I came in with a youthful innocence and a love and fascination for thought and learning. I was admitted into the Kolodzik Business Scholars program and so I cowardly decided to accept admission into the Lindner College of Business because I did not have a strong idea of myself – so I thought, I realize now that I loved Philosophy and other areas – and because I felt that it would give me a safe college career and job. That was my first mistake when entering college. I entered and disliked a majority of my classes because they were only interesting, not fascinating. Sure, the economic and common interactions of individuals and organizations within the light of business is complex, multi-faceted, and somewhat interesting, but to me, it could never compare to the caliber and profoundness of thought housed within Philosophy and the other social sciences. But I did not know this for sure yet. Second, I entered into college and joined organizations that exacted and required a lot out of me, so much so that I felt they had a certain control over me and that was my second mistake, to let those who were with me in certain circles dictate who I would be because of irrational conceptions of the person I must be in those situations. Also, as a first year, one is shaken by the upper classmen when he or she shows confidence in certain situations because upper classmen may feel as if the first years do not know about their organizations or what it is like to be a college student and are thus off-put by the freshmen. Well the horror of this is the wasted opportunity that is a result of freshmen entering into a shell and reserving themselves because upperclassmen take the reigns and take the spotlight without genuine concern for the input and though of the new students. Granted, there are exceptions to this, but our culture is predominantly based on the assumption that continued spotlight is power and to be able to talk and have others listen to your ideas is to have influence and power, which is almost cruel because it cripples those who do not talk in a vicious cycle of silence and even dependency. But there is an escape, as will be depicted later. My first year was thus marked with a lot of development in my own independency and basing my thoughts on reason rather than letting my ideas shine forth. Again, there are benefits to thinking in terms of reason, but to think solely in terms of reason removes individuality and life. I did turn out on the other sided stronger than before and with more confidence and less consideration for the overpowering nature and the competing want for influence and power – which I had thought to be wrought with attacks upon myself at every occurrence because in order to take power in this society, one typically removes another from it through proving wrong or shouting louder – and came to realize that true power is commanding respect because of the care that you show for the betterment of others, not demanding it because one can reason and produce logical directives. It was also a formational period of habits and new thoughts: I came to realize that this time is what I will use to optimize my life and maximize my fulfillment and happiness and I also realized that through hard work and dedication I can achieve success no matter what. I came to realize that I wanted to study abroad for a semester to expand my mind, view the world, and come to fully know myself through thought and independency. I also came to realize that I really, thoroughly enjoy thought and Philosophy and all that it entails because it fascinates me and sparks my mind. I came to realize that I am a 4.0 student and that I demand nothing less of myself than A’s. I am capable of such work and should do it and understand my material so as to make me the best person I may be.

Acclimation has been one of the most difficult challenges for me first year with regards to immersing myself into the University of Cincinnati. When one enters into a new culture, he or she inevitably is influenced by that culture and will naturally adjust their habits to become socially congruous. A main concern of all incoming first years is to acclimate themselves and to maintain their identity against the pounding waves of conformity. For myself, the major challenge came with the competing desires to become part of the UC community – and all stipulations thereafter such as social acceptance and respect – while still trying to hold myself to standards that were not accepted by this culture. My background and composition is one of adherence to and living out Catholic principle and teaching and is based in a great respect for theology and the meanings discoverable within it and this person came into conflict with the norms of university life. Disillusionment was the first obstacle to overcome and the recognition that there is evil within this world and that others do not have certain respects for themselves and others. It was frightening to say the least because my outgoing and giving nature wasn’t parallel with the main figures on campus that I came into contact with. Those who were notable students were very strong individuals who sought success in a different manner than I would aspire for: whereas I would gain respect and leadership status through giving and caring for others, current leaders would seek power or influence through merit and strength alone. The competitiveness was first combated with song and optimism and a desire to inspire others, yet that was still rejected and out of place in certain circles. Then a trust in God and devotion to the Word was my rock upon which to fight back the torrents, but it was not enough to overcome the waves because the disillusionment had taken with it my eyes that saw the glory of the light in this world. My rock remains my Father and I have yet to fully overcome my fears and my weakness but my efforts currently are to regain my unity with my spirit and the joy for life that I once had. The essence of the challenge was a loss of innocence and the struggle to overcome the forces of the world that strove to remove the light within me. It has been one of the most significant challenges to overcome because not only must I battle exterior influences but I must also battle my innate nature. I have decided to further understand myself and the purpose of my being and creation itself through studying of the bible as well as Catholic teaching so as to gain a fuller recognition of what the meaning and significance of life and all of its aspects and natural purposes. This parallels with the next major challenge of authenticity. I desired to lead inauthentic life, but my personality and thought was not common and thus not commonly accepted. I felt as if I had to hide myself because my thought was not wanted and would be attacked as a bacteria would for being recognized as out of order. Thus, my fervent involvement and attachment to the organizations in which I was in was also the crux of my problem because I had desired acclimation and recognition so much that I was willing to sacrifice myself in the process of “getting ahead.” Furthermore, this lead to the disillusionment with the benefits and rewards of networking, “getting involved,” and moving up the social ladder to gain influence: I recognized this not only as silly but destructive. To have this ideas of getting positions or associates so as to acquire stepping stones for success is stupid because one is not giving full consideration to the significant impact that he or she can have as an authentic person. The profound impact and influence that one has on another person, simply by being himself or herself and offering their ideas or beliefs out of true concern and love is far greater and more meaningful than to be a successful leader than acquires a position and makes the process or institution more noteworthy; it is far greater to change one life forever than to make theoretical change or change on paper that has no affect. And this is the plight of the college student that wants leadership. Too often does the student merely search for ways to influence or enhance a process or structure than for ways to significantly influence and serve people. Granted, the opposing viewpoint that the change in the institution will eventually lead to change in the individuals does have merit, but it only has merit so far as the change is instituted with passion and purpose and meaning, which is incapable of being inherent in the workings of one who is focused on personal success because that which drives him or her will not move him or her to strive and sacrifice for the benefit or good of the others. Thus, I was incapable of being authentic – part of me has the desire to profoundly impact and help/influence others – because I was self-centered and because I was withholding myself from the world. I plan to combat this by slowly reintroducing myself to the world via social media so that they will be somewhat prepared to meet me when I reenter in the fall and so that their conceptions of me will not be so far to the extreme that they reject my new - or rather true – person. Then I will sustain myself and my passion and thoughts with engagement in that which is truly meaningful to me: friendship, studies and thought, prayer, reflection, love, the building of brotherhood and community, inspiration of others, self-betterment and growth, and bringing about the good.

 Why is this important? Why did I not speak about what I had learned in the classroom? Because what one learns about himself or herself can dramatically influence the world once he or she recognizes their purpose and devotes his or her life to a cause. It is equally important for one to understand himself or herself and to strive for growth and betterment as it is to study because the significance of our lives is measured in the significant impact that one has upon others and their lives. The effects and profoundness of this impact is directly correlated to one’s flourishing and fulfillment which comes about through recognition of self and who each person strives to become and the passions to which each dedicate their life as well as the application of the knowledge and information that one acquires. I have detailed these thoughts because they can be then used to help guide others and the ideas can be given for consideration so that good may come.

 Now What? From hereon I will only involve myself in that which is supportive of my authentic self and of that man I want to be. Furthermore, I shall brazen my true spirit and release it upon the world, guided by love, with the intention of bringing good to the world and bettering those around me. I want to reconnect myself to love so that I may be a positive influence in this world and truly make a difference each day in the lives of others by working for the betterment and life of their soul. I also now recognize that control of input and domination is not leadership; therefore, I shall seek out the input of others and allow them to give a full contribution to the group and vision while I only encourage and guide so as to empower others and give them fulfillment in the work they do. I also want to dispel any notion of leadership within my paradigm that does not align with service because through service, not only is one being a charismatic leader by giving a model to exemplify and character to trust in, but, more importantly, one is leading by bringing others to great heights and significantly impacting their lives. I have come to recognize that I am called to servant leadership because the only way to inspire others and introduce them to new ideas that can change their lives is through a true care for their wellbeing and a want to bring about the good for them. I also want to take advantage of all the opportunities UC has presented to me, such as SOL and study abroad, so that I can learn the most about myself, the world I live in, and people. Along these same lines, I want to utilize my status and position within Sigma Phi Epsilon to bring change to the Greek community and help the brothers within my fraternity reach and principles for which we strive. But above all, I have reconnected myself with the man I want to be – a man of friendship, love, care, intelligence, a foundation of community and brotherhood, and a man who strives to bring about that which is good.