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Professor Profile: Sociology professor instructs: "Do what you are doing"

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"Where is my gum, woman?" says Professor Paul Schervish as soon as he steps into the Fulton Debate Room in Gasson. He eagerly searches for a piece of a gum. Then, he quickly moves toward a student with a chocolate croissant and takes a big bite, leaving crumbs all over himself. This scene causes all the students to laugh. Schervish stands completely still and then bursts into laughter with them. Apparently, Professor Schervish has a mischievous side. Yet his focus on the philanthropic and spiritual perspectives in life is even more apparent inside and outside the classroom.

Schervish has various titles - a sociologist, a director of the Center on Wealth and Philanthropy at Boston College, and a former Jesuit priest. Along with these, his academic background proves that he has deep and diverse layers not only in the area of sociology, but also in theology. He initially got a bachelor's degree in literature at the University of Detroit, a master in sociology from Northwestern University, a master of divinity degree from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, and a Ph.D in sociology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

"The most rewarding part of being a professor at BC is to be able to teach disciplinary contents and bring in other aspects of my training in philosophy, sociology, and spirituality into my teaching," Schervish says, expressing his love for teaching,

Schervish recalls that once he was able to distinguish social work from sociology, his debut in the world of sociology launched. Then, two professors he met at the University of Detroit inspired him with their teaching styles and how they interacted with their students. So, in his classroom he attempts to create an atmosphere in which his students gain insight through a joyful learning experience.

He says that he was aware that his mind tends to be synthetic and integrated, which is compatible with sociology, whose disciplines can be combined with philosophy, economics, psychology, and theology.

To Schervish, another positive aspect of being a professor at BC is that he is able to teach courses that are directly related to his own research. For instance, his Sociology of Inner Life class enabled him to utilize the spirituality of Christmas research done in the metropolitan Boston area.

Professor Schervish chose the right path to follow, as his works require and reflect not only an analytical, but also a philanthropic mind. His publications cover a wide range of subjects, including money and wealth, religion, philanthropy, and biographical narrative. The New York Times referred

to him as a leading authority on the philanthropic proclivity demonstrated by the wealth in the U.S. In discussing the connection between sociology and money, Schervish stresses that behavior is meaningful. To him, the main role of sociologists today is to examine the intersection of practices and meanings, and he states that your peers greatly affect the way you spend and present your wealth. Schervish emphasizes that in the 21st century, money is ultimately about preference. He then states that while a lot of people get stuck on the amount they have, they should concentrate more on the choice that has a deeper purpose, rather than fleeting anxiety and fear. "But, when I say 'deeper,' it does not necessarily require the large philanthropic connotation, paying for your children's college tuition can be deep enough," Schervish says.

He practices philanthropic sociology in his classroom, as well as at his house. Professor Schervish talks about his family's unique custom of buying presents. "We all draw a name and buy one present for that person. Everyone gets one present and you talk to your person about what he or she wants. The point of this custom is that you get to spend time with that person while shopping. I already did that with my wife. We found a sweater!" He smiles harmlessly, saying the hard part of picking a present is done.

During his career at BC, Schervish says that teaching the introductory class, which he has not done for 10 years, was one of his best experiences. "I have found students truly thirsty for sophisticated knowledge that breaks through the boundaries of disciplinary categories," he says. Schervish constantly finds encouragement from his students to expand his understanding of sociology.

Schervish has advice for every BC student: "Age quod agis (Do what you are doing)." He says that students should take advantage of this time that is dedicated to learning and focus on seeking their calling. He believes students' ultimate calling is to meet God in learning - all kinds of learning. To Schervish, no student's pursuits are better than another's. The theology major is no more sacred than the business major, and student volunteers are no better than students who spend more time on academics.

With a playful grin, Schervish is without a doubt a humanistic sociologist with notable accomplishments and a great attachment to God.

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