

The Catholic University as a Priority in Developing Countries: Some Practical Considerations with Reference to Japan

1. *Priority for Whom?*

If we consider the Catholic university within the context of priorities for the Catholic Church in her efforts of evangelization, we must weigh the admittedly high costs in terms of finances and qualified personnel which are required to maintain and expand Catholic universities, against the other urgent needs. With priestly and religious vocations decreasing and the needs for direct missionary efforts as well as social engagements, demanding more personnel and financial help, can the Church afford such high-cost projects which seem to require ever growing subsidies and personnel yet have a hard time to compete in terms of quality and social impact with the state institutions?

The hierarchy of the Church, as well as those religious superiors ultimately responsible for the individual Catholic universities, must be thoroughly convinced that Catholic universities are of vital importance for the long term success of evangelization. For the Catholic universities it is a question on which their very survival hinges: They will be able to fulfill their function only when fully backed by the hierarchy, by the religious societies, and by the people willing to subsidize their work. And the role and task of the Catholic universities as a missionary endeavor of supreme importance must be sufficiently grasped by those who

eventually will carry on this work. For them the priority of work done at such a Catholic university must appear sufficiently great so as to motivate them for the long years of preparation and studies.

It is from this vantage point that the paper is written. It does not touch upon theoretical questions nor endeavors to develop theological aspects. Apart from indicating the importance of Catholic higher education, with Japan as practical example, the emphasis is on specific difficulties and priorities within the Catholic university.

2. The Role of Catholic Higher Education in Developing Countries

In the context of developing countries, a Catholic university ought to be understood primarily as an institution of higher education, as has been stressed by Greenburg. Although research is important for the faculty, and graduate divisions will in most cases be established, the main thrust lies in college education. Developing countries are in need of growing numbers of college graduates: Late developers cannot repeat the history of the developed countries where, at the respective development stages, a grade school education was sufficient to become a manager or assume some other important positions. Ever more complex technologies and organizational forms demand, from the start, relative high levels of theoretical understanding for things and processes which originated in another culture. Certainly, there can be too much of a good thing, and in some cases there might be a danger of creating an 'academic proletariat'. Higher education, costly as it is, acquires for poorer countries more the aspect of investment rather than being the personal right of the individual. From this point of view, state guidance and selection by social criteria may be justified. Higher education, thus directly related to the socio-economic process of development with a dominating state influence, runs the danger of neglecting the development of the human personality, and of slighting values and ultimate meaning. It is here where the Catholic university has an important mission to fulfill.

Although direct missionary work can and should be carried out on campus the university as such has a different function

from a parish. Its main task is, in the words of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, to 'evangelio perfundere culturas atque etiam culturam hominis.' The Catholic university must endeavor, through teaching and research, to spread the basic Christian ideas of the dignity of the human person, of social justice, and of the priority of spiritual values over purely economic benefits. This kind of witness by Catholic universities acquires special importance during the quest for rapid economic development under which traditional values tend to lose their meaning and society tends to rush headlong into materialist attitudes. The university must squarely face the problems posed in this transition period; it must address itself to the questions of man in the light of modern technology and science, as well as speak out against the inequalities and disruptions caused during the process of modernization. In this context it is highly important that a Catholic university, in spite of sometimes forbiddingly high costs, become actively engaged in education and research within the area of natural sciences and technology. Science needs to be taken into the totality of a Christian world view. Educating science teachers who are going to impart such understanding to their pupils in the grade and high schools is clearly of vital importance for the future of evangelization, as well as for the culture of the country. Living within a constantly changing social matrix, any Catholic university, notably one in a developing country, must constantly review its practice and policies in the light of its ideals, and the expectations which both the Church and the youth of its country place into its work.

The following considerations center on the Japanese conditions. Japan is not a developing country any more, as far as its economy is concerned. But with respect to the Church, Japan is a missionary country sharing many difficulties with developing countries where the Church holds a minority position. Moreover, Japan could well be called the 'first developer country' which purposely and effectively accepted Western technology, and Western ideas as means of modernization. Therefore, the Japanese conditions may not be without significance for Catholic universities operating in developing countries.

3. *The Catholic Universities in Japan*

3.1. *Historical Development.* When Japan began her drive of modernization, after 1868, Western technology, science and ideas were spread effectively through the educational system. High schools, colleges and universities played a decisive role in shaping the leadership in the various fields. Making use of the newly gained freedom of religion, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries began their work. But while Catholic missionaries worked mainly on the level of parishes and charitable institutions, American Protestant missionaries established a number of colleges which gained considerable influence. The statistics of 1930 shows 11 Protestant and only one Catholic university. The fact that Japanese textbooks, and consequently also public opinion, saw the Catholic Church chiefly through Protestant colouring, is largely attributable to the impact of Protestant work in higher education and research. After 1945 the conditions changed considerably, and presently there are 11 Catholic Universities and 30 Protestant ones in Japan; together they educate close to 10 percent of all Japanese students. The 11 Catholic universities form, since 1975, the Association of Catholic Universities. Of the 11 universities three are coeducational, one is a music academy, and the other seven are for girls only. Research is stressed for the faculty, and graduate divisions are established in three of them. But the main thrust is in college education of students who are to enter some kind of salaried employment, or plan to become high school teachers. Japanese universities are primarily institutions of higher education; graduate students make up only three percent of the total student population.

3.2. *Christian Inspired Education.* Catholic universities, as well as junior colleges and high schools, enjoy a high degree of prestige and public confidence on account of their educational philosophy and practice. They are trusted to impart to the students a solid moral consciousness and sense of social responsibility. Among the faculty, which in the majority is usually non-Christian, there is a consensus that the Catholic universities should live up to their basic educational philosophy through practical programs. Each university has its own way of implementing its Christian inspired program: there are courses on Christianity as such, courses concerning man and society, courses on ethics, philosophy,

history and problem-centered interdisciplinary courses with the intent of helping the student to form his coherent Weltanschauung based on or inspired by Christian values. Catholic clubs, religious groups, occasional liturgical services under the guidance of student chaplains activate the missionary potential in direct ways. Relatively low student/teacher ratios permit individual care and guidance of students.

As a rule Catholic universities in Japan are strongly committed toward intercultural and international dialogue. Most of them have been established by foreign priests or sisters, and foreign nationals keep working in the universities side by side with Japanese faculty members, enjoying full equality of status. This international composition of faculty and administration is conducive to the forming of an international community which makes the campus and the classes a living experience of 'catholicism' and a healthy antidote against excessive nationalism. On account of the excellent relations, by the foreign community, to Western countries, Catholic universities tend to have excellent programs of teacher and student exchange or study programs of international scope. Sophia and Nanzan universities both have programs for foreign students on campus which adds considerably to the specific Catholic character of the schools and their task to further intercultural communication.

The influence of the Catholic universities in Japan extends far beyond the four years of college life. Many students graduate with attitudes favorable toward the Church or Christianity in general, having accepted some basic Christian thinking and values into their personal lives. A relatively high percentage of graduates from Catholic universities become high school teachers and reflect, hopefully, some of the Christian-inspired world view they have been able to form during their college years. Japanese graduates tend to identify strongly with their former Alma Mater and this includes largely the specific colors (spirit) of the University. Opinion polls show clearly that, largely through the efforts of Catholic schools, the public image of the Church is not only favorable, but that the number of those who 'identify' with Christianity by far exceeds the number of actual Christians. The Catholic schools, and eminently so the Catholic universities, thus prepare the ground for the direct missionary work of the Church.

They help to shape her public image, prepare fundamental attitudes, and act as public spokesmen of the Church.

Apart from the educational efforts, the Catholic universities tend to be surrounded by clusters of religious communities and help to carry on a variety of institutes and programs directly related to missionary efforts of the Church. The city parishes in Japan are, in comparison to parishes in settled Catholic areas, handicapped by high mobility as well as lack of family rootedness. Many parishioners are the only Catholics in the family, having been baptized as adults. Therefore, parishes are weaker in terms of extra-liturgical activities than comparable ones in Catholic countries. Catholic schools, notably universities, with their religious communities and action centers tend to attract the more interested faithful, notably for advanced levels of religious formation.

3.3. Three Constraints. The first constraint within which the Catholic universities in Japan have to operate is the system of higher education itself, and the measures of central direction and legal controls imposed upon their operations. The Japanese Basic Law on Education guarantees the freedom of private education. The founding person or community has the right to lay down some basic principles according to which education is to be pursued. For all Japanese private universities, the law guarantees the right to maintain the basic educational philosophy and praxis as laid down in the Foundation Charter, to the Board of Directors; this Board is, in the case of the Catholic universities, composed in the majority by members of the founding body, i.e. the religious community. Therefore, although a religious community cannot 'own' a school in the legal sense, it is able to maintain the overall authority and thus also keep the university Catholic.

In Japan, three fourths of all universities are private. The danger of the state taking them over seems, at least at present, far removed. But the Ministry of Education exercises minute controls, and issues directives which limit the freedom of experimenting and of introduction of some programs which might seem desirable. Catholic universities cannot escape the general problems of Japanese education; they must operate within the complex hierarchy of rank-order and, if they do not want to lose

prestige and with it effectiveness, have to struggle to constantly improve their academic standing and public prestige. But with respect to the positive Christian programs as far as they fit into the thus constituted framework, the Ministry of Education actively encourages them as part of the very *raison d'être* of private universities.

Working within the centrally controlled system of laws, regulations and financial accountability makes the boards of directors and presidents more dependent on state law than on canon law.

The second constraint for the Catholic universities in Japan arises from the composition of their faculties. Only rarely does the percentage of Catholics — religious and lay — exceed 50 percent of the total. The average is about forty percent. Discrimination on the basis of religion is therefore of course ruled out. Freedom of research and of faith is guaranteed to all, as long as this freedom does not militate, openly, against the basic educational philosophy to which all have to subscribe, as a self-understood condition of employment. The experience of the Japanese Catholic universities is that non-Christians cooperate quite well with the overall Christian educational programs though, of course, they themselves cannot contribute directly. The positive aspect of such minority position of Catholic professors in a Catholic university is that the campus and the various faculties and department become in themselves places of dialogue. The Catholic viewpoints and programs must be constantly aware of, and take into account, the positive criticism of the colleagues.

The third constraint is given by the student body. Only between one and three percent of the students of Catholic universities are Christians. The overwhelming majority enters the university not because it is Catholic, but because it has a specific ranking in the hierarchy of the Japanese university system, in terms of difficulty of entry and correspondingly prestige. Therefore, even if not hostile, most are initially rather apathetic toward Christian programs. It is the task of the university to change this attitude from disinterest toward positive valuation, and if possible toward accepting a good deal of Christian values. Baptisms on campus are achieved through the efforts of the chaplain

and priests and religious who gather those interested in deeper understanding of faith, and give them much of their time with personal guidance. But the main achievement of the Catholic universities is to change, over the four year period, through many general and special lecture courses, this initial attitude of disinterest to high esteem or even general identification with Catholicism or Christianity in general.

4. Three Specific Priorities for Japanese Catholic Universities

4.1. Maintaining the Inspirational Role of the Religious Community. All Catholic universities in Japan were founded by religious communities except one which has been established by a diocese. The founding community keeps being ultimately responsible for the university remaining Catholic in both name and reality. Top administrative positions are usually occupied by members of the founding society. The initiative and inspiration for the Christian programs both academic and extra-curricular comes chiefly from members of the religious community. Laymen are important but left to themselves they could hardly maintain the same effectiveness of the Catholic universities in terms of evangelization. They need still, for some time to come, the vision and inspiration which comes from those who dedicate their lives to the service of God in this field of higher education.

With respect to finances, the burden of the religious societies for maintaining the schools is on the decline. The state takes up increasingly the burden of subsidizing private higher education. It has become accepted practice that the religious personnel may receive the same, or at least a good deal of the salaries as given to lay people in similar positions. With the change of financial dependence on direct subsidies coming from the founding community, comes a change in basic attitudes which is needed. The religious community which initially regarded the school very much like its own, has become more conscious of operating under the same rules and the same secular discipline as any other employee or faculty member. The religious whose confrere may be president or chairman of the board, is subject to the same procedures, the same conditions of employment and promotion as any layman, Catholic or non-Catholic. The difficulty lies in combining this functional relationship based on normal academic

procedures and standards with missionary efforts, and religious inspiration. Often this will involve extra burdens on the individual. But only if both the secular discipline and the religious and missionary efforts can be somehow combined is the full effectiveness of the religious person, and the community, realized. It is this combination of secular discipline, dedication toward educational work, and religious as faculty members, office personnel and administrators absolutely essential for the Catholic universities.

It seems that, for a long time to come, Japanese Catholic universities will have to rely strongly on foreign religious to help the Japanese communities within the Catholic universities. Happily, Japanese law permits foreign nationals to receive equal treatment along with Japanese, including top administrative positions. It is of critical importance that in future sufficient foreign dedicated religious can be recruited to work on the campuses of the Catholic universities. With religious vocations diminishing, this is a matter of greatest concern. As communities with an international composition, such religious groups can most effectively be living witnesses for the catholicity of the Church.

4.2. Promoting Future Catholic Scholars and Educators. Catholics in Japan make up only 0.3 percent of the total population. It must therefore appear as rather surprising that the Catholic universities can maintain a ratio of Catholics vs. non-Catholics of about 40 percent. This fact can partly be explained from the initial conditions when the founders in the post-War years could rather freely select the staff members, and thereby give considerable attention to the faith of the Prospective candidates. Unfortunately, conditions have changed since then: in many cases the initiative for proposing employment of new faculty members comes from the individual faculties, not from the top administration. With the faculties themselves being composed, in the majority, of non-Christians, with the deans themselves often being non-Christian, the choice is increasingly based on purely academic considerations. Of course, there is full agreement that no militant anti-Christians or other ideologically identifiable people should be employed. But still, the natural outcome of such procedures, if nothing is done, will eventually mean a lowering of the percentage of Catholic laymen on the staff.

Although non-Catholics are usually quite willing to go along with the overall Christian orientation, not much positive help can be expected from them, not as much as from dedicated Catholic laymen. It is therefore of highest importance that young Catholics who may eventually become faculty members, be promoted and encouraged.

The Association of Catholic Universities of Japan has made a start with the establishment of a fund for the promotion of promising young scholars. This program needs still further care and needs to be carried out under long term aspects, irrespective of the benefits accruing to an individual university. Scholarships for graduate studies, preferably including studies also at some first rate Western Catholic universities, may go far in encouraging capable young Catholics to enter the academic career.

On the level of South East Asian Catholic universities an exchange program of faculty members as well as Catholic students might also be of considerable long run benefit. In Japan, Sophia and Nanzan Universities' programs of Japanese Studies for foreign students may be good places where faculty members or students from Catholic universities in South East Asia could study under such a scholarship program. Funds for such a program appear to be forthcoming. This program, if successful, could provide a realistic base further closer cooperation between the Catholic universities in South East Asia.

4.3. *Establishing Catholic Institutes and Centers.* Catholic universities in Japan work not only under the constraints imposed by government regulations. They operate also within the Japanese system of life-long employment for faculty members and office personnel, and have to follow accepted procedures and norms as well as standard budgetary controls. Thus, a university is very much a closed society; this makes it difficult to establish institutes and centers aimed at intensive interaction with the outside, within the framework of the university as such. Student dormitories, religious centers, and institutes with missionary orientation are functioning easier if set up as independent units, only marginally related to the organizational structure of the university.

Most Catholic universities have established some centers or programs which function independently from the university, and are carried mainly by the members of the religious community. It may be advisable in the future to strengthen such centers and institutes, by channeling more funds into them. Sophia University's Institute of Oriental Religions and Nanzan University's Institute for Religion and Culture can thus, in future, become growing points of an intensified dialogue of the Church with other religions. Because the two Institutes are given an independent status directly under the board of directors, but outside the university as such, they easily transcend the confines of the university as closed community, and can be made more intensively Catholic than could be done otherwise. Such institutes and centers may also permit members of the religious community to keep being actively engaged as missionaries beyond their mandatory retirement from the school.

5. *Conclusion*

Catholic universities carry out highly important tasks within the overall efforts of the Church to preach the Gospel and to permeate countries and cultures with the Christian spirit. Working within the contexts of developing countries and/or within societies of which only a small percentage is Christian, these universities are faced with special difficulties and constraints. In the case of Japan the constraints result mainly from the composition of the student body and the faculty; in developing countries the constraints may be even more serious: Financial needs, political and sociological limitations and increasing difficulties in recruiting sufficient as well as qualified personnel for the growing needs. The leadership of these universities can only hope, and make pleas, that both financial subsidies and more personnel will come to their help.

Working within a non-Christian social setting, and cooperating with faculty members who are not Christian, is by no means only a negative condition for the Catholic universities from the vantage point of evangelization. The university can and should be the place of close dialogue and cooperation with all non-Christians of good will who join in the effort toward Christian inspired

education. This education must clearly emphasize "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever, things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise..." (Phil. 4,8) within the country's traditions and culture. It can only strengthen the credibility of the Church when such cooperation can be carried out with harmony and good will toward the non-Christian values. Specifically, there appear to be three major areas where such cooperation with non-Christians should be obtained and which should also become the very characteristics of a Catholic university:

The first area of cooperation and joint concern should center on the dignity of the human person. This may mean to stress by teaching and example that material goods and economic pursuits, though high on the priority list of developing as well as developed countries, are not ultimate ends. The university must voice its criticism of economic practices and policies which degrade man making him only a means toward business or national economic goals. The university must be teaching, and publications, be an advocate of the neglected groups, the poor, the old, the minorities.

The second area of cooperation is given by the very catholicity of the Catholic university. It must work toward a balance between cultural nationalism on the one hand, and destruction of national culture by a wrongly conceived internationalism or Westernization. The Catholic university's mission is precisely to find ways of bringing to life the best that there is in the country's culture to make it fruitful within the Church. Within this area dialogue with the country's religions is only one aspect. The other aspects include the fostering of a healthy national evaluation of history, traditions and moral norms. But simultaneously, the Catholic university is and should be the door toward an intimate incorporation into the family of mankind with the existential experience of an international community.

The third area of cooperation with all of good will lies in the social field. More than in developed countries, a university in developing countries is likely to be called upon to help solve local problems and needs. Adult education may be only one such

area. Others may include fields like health service, agricultural experimentation and guidance, and counselling of the local population on many problems. But while a Catholic university thus must remain aware of its responsibility to the local community, it must strongly resist becoming directly involved in radical, ideologically coloured revolutionary activities. To voice criticism of social evils is its duty, to start radical movements or even permit it for faculty members is quite another thing. To avoid becoming involved in direct political activity is not only a council of political prudence but arises from the very essence of being a university.

Society in general and individual people in all walks of life feel caught up in many contradictions resulting from the efforts at modernization. "Buffeted between hope and anxiety and pressing one another with questions about the present course of events, people are burdened down with uneasiness. This same course of events leads men to look for answers. Indeed, it forces them to do so" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4). In these cross currents the Catholic university is called upon to provide the beacon leading societies and individuals into a future illuminated by the Gospel of Christ.

Johannes Hirschmeier, S.V.D.
President, Nanzan University
Nagoya, Japan