

The Catholic University as a Priority in Developing Countries

As every other living organism, the Catholic university is subject to the stresses and challenges posed by its environment. These it must confront and relate to its *raison d'être*, if it is to survive and at the same time maintain its Catholic identity. I wish to present here some observations on the challenges that must be met by the Catholic university in developing countries.

These challenges are all connected with the needs of the developing country — the “felt” as well as the “real” needs. On the individual level the peoples of developing countries consciously seek the life-style of the developed countries as depicted by the movies, TV and other communications media. Thus they want better paying jobs in the city, better food and housing, stylish clothes, cars, refrigerators, stereo and TV sets and all the sundry amenities of modern living.

The satisfaction of these felt individual needs — a great many of them artificially induced — depends on the country's natural resources. Hence, on the national level the thrust is mainly aimed at the exploitation of the country's geo-physical wealth. The term *development* is thus slanted to mean economic development, economic progress.

Thus, the first challenge is posed by the increasing numbers of people going to the university in order to qualify themselves for better paying jobs whereby they may move up the social scale

and satisfy their taste for more commodious living quarters and the conveniences and luxuries heretofore enjoyed by the upper classes. The university must fit more and more people with the skills necessary for the jobs available, must produce more and better professionals, technical men, managers, etc., capable of doing a good professional job.

But this merely compounds unemployment if new jobs are not created at the same time. The creation of new jobs fundamentally depends on a program of development of the natural resources; the program, on technology; technology, on advanced science.

Thus, the second big challenge to the university is to teach advanced science and push its frontiers forwards. Without advanced science no country is able to develop on its own its natural resources. Only advanced science enables it to do its own basic research, plan appropriate projects and devise the technology to put up heavy and light industries to meet its requirements. This will enable it not only to exploit but, more significantly, to control the exploitation and development of its natural wealth. With such scientific and technological capacity it should find no great difficulty in securing and, more importantly, repaying foreign borrowings. Developing countries need advanced science in order to break their economic dependence on the developed countries. Otherwise, they must need borrow not only foreign financing but also foreign science and technology and might as well resign themselves to economic thralldom as mere packagers, or assemblers, or "licensees" of foreign corporations.

It might be objected that these challenges are directed generally to all universities, and not addressed specifically to Catholic universities. True enough. But the point is that the Catholic university must first command credibility as a university before it can begin to be credible as a Catholic university. If we suppose that the graduates of a Catholic university were by and large professionally and technically deficient, it would come to be held in so low esteem that no one would take any heed of it.

Thus, Vat. II declares: "...considerable importance is to be attached to... so-called *professional* and *technical* schools..." And, "Since the *sciences* progress chiefly through special inves-

tigations of advanced scientific significance. Catholic colleges and universities and their faculties should give the *maximum support* to institutes which *primarily serve the progress of scientific research*".¹

An incident in the Gospel serves to illustrate this concern. Eager crowds had followed the Lord into the desert. They had carried no provisions with them. When lunch time came around, they naturally began to worry about their meals. But where was food to be found for the multitude? With lunch uppermost in their minds, the people weren't apt to be listening to Christ's message. Physical needs have a way of crowding out all other concerns. Satan, wise and experienced in the ways of ordinary humans, chose for his first temptation "Turn these stones into bread!" And so, Christ filled the bellies of the crowds before continuing with the task of filling their souls.

Peoples deprived for years of the goods of this earth have their hunger whetted and will brook no denial of their craving. They will lionize and follow the lead of anyone who can appease that hunger. After the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the crowds sought Jesus out to make Him their king. And that gave the Lord the opportunity to broach the subject of the Bread of Life.

For, of course, the greatest and specific challenge to the Catholic university is to contribute decisively to the building upon the ruins of colonial regimes and societies of not just any kind of prosperous earthly city, but of an earthly city as planned by God, the Universal Father, for his pilgrim children.

Developing peoples want better paying jobs; better food, housing and clothes; better chances of improving their lot; more social mobility. To a great extent these are legitimate and real needs. But is it all they really need and want? Or is it only tip of the iceberg hiding a profounder human need, which they can only thus inadequately articulate?

No doubt science and technology are very important. Yet it remains that both science and technology are means. To what end? National development. Very true. But development itself

¹ *Gravissimum Educationis*, nn. 9 & 10; ed. W. M. Abbott, pp. 648 & 649. Underscoring supplied.

is a process of becoming. And the question remains: development for what? Or, development into what? What does a man really want when he wants a better house, a better education for his children? Only bigger and more comfortable quarters? Simply better chances for his children to make more money and get more things? Or are these material things merely symbols of something invisible, intangible, which he cannot describe with words, but feels in the very marrow of his bones? Something but pallidly conveyed by such terms as "a better quality of human life", or the Aristotelian "a good life", which has nothing to do with the high and fun-filled living commonly associated today with it.

Then, the fundamental question inevitably arises: What is meant by a good human life?

Questions about ends are supremely practical. If in the eyes of developing peoples they appear as idle, ivory tower speculations, it is because they are mesmerized by the glittering facade of the developed countries and do not see through the skyscrapers, the steelglass-and-chrome apartments crammed with gadgetry, the shiny cars on well-paved highways, to the asphalt jungle of the modern city teeming with deadlier beasts of prey than ever roamed the lush jungles of the tropics. Developed countries are saddled with more numerous, more serious, and more complex problems than their developing counterparts; problems spawned precisely out of the misconception of what constitutes the good human life. No more convincing proof of it can be offered than the aggressive ideology whose avowed aim is the violent elimination of the imbalance, exploitation and injustice bred and perpetuated by the industrial revolution and mercantilism which fueled the development of today's developed countries.

The Catholic university is a top priority in developing countries; it is the best — not to say the only one — equipped adequately to answer the questions about ends. In the first place, the Catholic university possesses the correct view of the nature of man: a natural and substantial composite of body and soul. Not body alone, which would lead to a definition of the good life in terms of material and temporal goods and comforts. Not soul or spirit alone, which either neglects the natural and legitimate interests of the body, and consequently leads to apathy towards the development of the natural resources; or, paradoxically, to as

greedy a pursuit of material well-being on the premise that nothing that happens to the body can have any significance for the spirit. But body and soul together: a position which neither neglects material development nor idolizes it, but puts it in proper perspective by the simultaneous recognition of two fundamental truths: (1) that material development alone does not make for a truly good human life; (2) that without a sufficient degree of material development there is no truly good human life.

In the second place, the Catholic university possesses the principles needed for the construction of a just human society. This is exactly the more permanent aspect and task of national development. The territory and its resources is something occupied by the nation, but not the nation itself. The nation itself is the people, not as an amorphous mass, but as structured into a community. The development of the territory and its resources without the corresponding development of the society and its structures in a manner befitting human persons would be meaningless and solve no problems, but be instead a festering cancer and source of compounded difficulties, as the history of the past two centuries testifies.

Allow me to quote here from the Preamble of the present Philippine Constitution, that part where it speaks of assuring to ourselves and our posterity the blessings of democracy "under a regime of justice, peace, liberty, and equality". In that precise order. For justice is prerequisite to peace; peace, the condition *sine qua non* of liberty; liberty the soul of equality, for equality without liberty is serfdom, and liberty without equality is tyranny and abuse.

That is, indeed, a fine picture of a democratic society, except that one thing is missing — love, or better, Christian charity. Love lies at the roots of justice. Recall the Decalogue, those verily fundamental laws from which every other human statute is derived. The Ten Commandments are explicitly commandments of justice. But their very essence and spirit is distilled in the Ten commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Love is what makes different and disconnected individuals into a community. For it is love that welds together affections, desires, and wills; and it is this union of intentions and wills that effects a community. And yet not any kind of love suffices for that community which is the civil society or the nation. There is a love by which we love our relations and kinsmen. There is a love by which we love our benefactors. These are legitimate loves, but particular and restricted in scope. Love of family excludes those not of my family. Love of benefactors excludes those who have done me no favour. The civil community requires a love universal in scope, and therefore premised on the appreciation of men as men.

But this type of love is hard to come by. In all its history mankind has not had much experience in it. Consult your own selves. You and I are always turned on by some special quality or reason in the person we love. The stranger we meet is a man, but we do not find that appealing, it leaves us turned off. One needs a powerful motivation to appreciate and love men simply as men. That motivation is a religious one: the fact that each and every man is the image of God — faded, blurred, tarnished, and mutilated though the image may be. Which is why the second Commandment of Love sinks its roots and thrives in the soil of the first Commandment of Love. Without God's love it will be possible to love this or that man for particular reasons; it might even be possible to love humanity — an abstraction or ideal free from the blemishes of the individuals —; but it will be impossible to love every man singly, for not a few of them are simply hateful, and the vast majority petty, mean, selfish, unlovable creatures. The brotherhood of man is a beautiful but ineffectual truth in philosophy — its ineffectualness pointedly underscored by the bloodbath of the French Revolution in the name of *Fraternité*, and the mass purges undertaken by the present totalitarian regimes in the name of love for the masses. "The one thing that can bring love... fully alive", a noted writer observes, "is the realization that God loved all men enough to become man and die for them on Calvary."²

² SHEED F.J., *Society and Sanity*, ch. 7 (i); Image Paperbacks (Doubleday & Co., Inc.) 1965, p. 85.

A grasp of human nature and of the principles of social living provides understanding, and understanding is essential for doing anything correctly, but it will not get anything done if there is no push to action. That push comes from a vision. The Catholic university, then, is further challenged to construct out of its understanding of man and human society a powerful vision capable of firing the imaginations of the people and of inflaming their hearts. Moreover, if the push is to be translated into actual action, the vision needs to be cast into a program, to take concrete shape in a blueprint or plan of operations. The vision can generate enthusiasm, but it becomes at once imperative to provide definite channels for the enthusiasm generated, if it is not to splurge aimlessly and eventually fizzle out.

But by far the greatest challenge to the Catholic university is to form lay men and women committed to the rebuilding of the earthly city in accordance with the Gospel. "The laity", says Vatican II, "by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. . . . It is therefore his [the layman's] special task to illumine and organize these affairs. . . . according to Christ's mind."³ "The laity must take on the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, and motivated by Christian love, let them act directly and definitely in the temporal sphere."⁴

The layman's action includes the changing of the structures of society. "Let the laity also by their combined efforts remedy any institutions and conditions of the world which are customarily an inducement to sin, so that all such things may be conformed to the norms of justice."⁵ How are Christian laymen to do this? The Council replies: "By their competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them labour vigorously so that by human labor, technical skill, and civic culture created goods may be perfected for the benefit of every last man, according to the design of the Creator and the light of His word. Let them work to see that created goods are more fittingly distributed among men, and that such

³ *Lumen Gentium*, 31; *ed. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

⁴ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7; *ed. cit.*, p. 598.

⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 36; *ed. cit.*, p. 63.

goods in their own way lead to general progress in human and Christian liberty."⁶

The Christian layman acquires competence, civil culture, technical skill, and the deep knowledge of the faith that illumines and relates all human culture, civilization, needs, aspirations and life to God's salvific plan nowhere but in the Catholic university. What does the Church expect of the Catholic university? In the words of Vat. II, "The hoped — for result is that the Christian mind may achieve, as it were, a public, persistent, and universal presence in the whole enterprise of advancing higher culture, and that the students of these institutions may become men truly outstanding in learning, *ready to shoulder society's heavier burdens and to witness the faith to the world.*"⁷

Have these challenges been met by Catholic universities?

It is obvious that the first challenge — that of proving individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure and hold better jobs — has been more than successfully answered. Our Catholic universities have produced, and keep producing, top men in all the professions and occupations: physicians, lawyers, engineers, men of letters, teachers, businessmen, industrialists, administrators, and other technocrats.

But I am not so sure that our success here has not blunted out response to the other challenges. Catholic Education, has it succeeded in engendering correct priorities in our graduates? For instance, what significant contribution has been made by Catholic universities to the advancement of science? To use a rough rule of thumb: has any graduate of a Catholic university won, in recent decades, the Nobel prize in mathematics or the natural sciences? Has there been any major scientific discovery by researchers in Catholic universities? Sad to say, none comes readily to mind.

A similar barrenness seems to mark the area of the social disciplines. Opportunity knocked and passed by ungrasped in the latter half of the past century. The injustices and oppression stemming from the industrial revolution and *laissez faire* liberalism were there for all to see. But nobody conjured the vision,

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10; ed. cit., p. 648. Underscoring supplied.

nobody drew up the blueprints — nobody, that is, except one Karl Marx. Today an alternative vision, alternative blueprints are still wanting. None seem to be forthcoming from the faculties and departments of social studies of our Catholic universities. To cite a couple of related instances. Divorce and abortion seem to be gaining ground everywhere, even in supposedly Catholic countries. And there seems to be an inability to mount and sustain a campaign of information and persuasion equal to that put up by the opposite camp. And, sad to remark, Catholic universities seem afflicted by a want of initiative, of leadership, certainly by a marked laryngitis in this regard. Why? Are we uncertain of our Catholic Education priorities?

And what of our graduates? Do they bring to their professions and occupations the light, the convictions, and the renewing force of their faith? We graduate, for instance, men of business, managers, administrators, and the like. They are competent businessmen, bankers, managers, no doubt. They go on to become business moguls, captains of industry, bank and corporation presidents, boardmembers of various companies. In other words, they are in the best position to determine the course and shape the quality of industry and business with the spirit of Christ. That would be the inevitable result if they were good Catholic industrialists, good Catholic managers. But are they? Have we succeeded in planting and creating genuine Christ-like priorities in the mentalities of our graduates? There is one simple test to determine the answer. What ethics do they bring to business, to industry, to company policies, to decisions of the board? The ethics of profits. What about the ethics of justice, of service, of Christian love and compassion? Come now, you must be kidding, we're running a business, not a charitable institution!

The Catholic university might be supposed to be giving out correct doctrine in the classes of religion, theology, and philosophy — although even this could be questioned now-a-days. But information is not formation. Filling the mind with items of doctrine is not the same as moulding the convictions, shaping the attitudes, instilling values. It would seem that the Catholic university has neglected the *formation* of the Catholic professional or the Catholic formation of the professional.

It might be interposed that the Catholic university is concerned with the professional or technical formation of the individual, not with his Catholic formation. That is but a lame excuse. If the lay Catholic professional is to exercise his secular profession in terms of renewing the temporal order in the light of faith, it follows that the secular activity is indivisibly an apostolic activity. This fusion of technical secular activity and apostolic activity cannot be achieved properly unless the formation of the professional is simultaneously a technical and a Catholic formation. Which is to say that the agency that imparts the technical formation must at the same time permeate it with a Catholic formation. That is why the university is not simply a secular university, but a Catholic university.

Such is the mind of the Church. Vatican II, acutely aware that the future of both the civil society and the Church is inextricably bound up with the young, admonishes the Pastors of the Church not to limit their concern to the spiritual life — note the term “spiritual life” — of the youth in Catholic institutions, but to extend this concern also to the spiritual life of youth in colleges and universities that are not Catholic.⁸

We need to remind ourselves more frequently and with apologies to no one, least of all to ourselves, that the Catholic university is no mere arena of intellectual inquiry and debate, not even simply an agency for the development of the Catholic mind. It is much more than all that — it is the agency for the formation of the whole man: the Catholic professional, i.e. the technical man whose technical occupation is at the same time an apostolate.⁹ In an address to the General Assembly of the Office International de l'Enseignement Catholique, on 8th June 1974, in Rome, the Holy Father Pope Paul VI cried out: “...this is what I want to say to you, to the Catholic schools, to you in the trenches, in the most exposed battle lines under the fire of the present world: Il faut tenir bon! Il faut tenir bon! Il faut tenir bon! Know that you are truly posted on the apostolic battle line, on the

⁸ *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10; *ed. cit.*, p. 649.

⁹ We could learn from the competition. Marxists never train a scientist, but a Marxist scientist; an engineer, but a Marxist engineer; an artist, but a Marxist artist.

evangelic battle line, on the battle line for Christian witness and the needs of the whole Church.”¹⁰

To renounce this character of being an agency of formation of the lay Catholic professional and apostle is to renounce the sublime purpose of the Catholic school described in these terms by Vatican II: “... while the Catholic school fittingly adjusts itself to the circumstances of advancing times, it is educating its students to promote effectively the welfare of the earthly city, and preparing them to serve the advancement of the reign of God. The purpose in view is that by living an exemplary and apostolic life, the Catholic *graduate* can become, as it were, the saving leaven of the human family.”¹¹ The whole purpose of the Catholic school system climaxes in *Catholic graduates* who are the saving leaven of this world by transforming their professional and technical occupations and activities into effective vehicles of the power of Christ crucified and risen again. The Catholic university is, thus, intimately and indissolubly linked to the whole concept and practice of the lay apostolate of the social milieu. That is both our greatest challenge and our crowning glory. This, I would say, is the crucial achievement to be accomplished by the Catholic university.

In the developing countries we do have an alert competitor who has already once — roughly one hundred years ago — seized the opportunity and the initiative in the West precisely by developing committed apostles of a sort. Let it not be said to our shame that we have not learned from history, and have therefore been condemned to relive it in the East!

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¹⁰ Quoted by Sr. CYRILDA FERRIOLS, S.Sp.S., *The Place of Religion in the Catholic School*. (The Catholic Teacher, Jan. 1977, p. 3)

¹¹ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8; *ed. cit.*, p. 646. Underscoring supplied.